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Stereotype threat theory has been profoundly influential in examining how racial stereotypes undermine the academic performance of highly capable Black students. Overwhelmingly, researchers have examined stereotype threat using experimental methods; few have examined how it manifests in real-world collegiate classrooms where students are not subject to controlled manipulation. Additionally, few scholars have leveraged an intersectional perspective to examine the manifestation of stereotype threat specifically in the educational experiences of Black women. Based on 30 semistructured interviews, I examined how stereotype threat emerged in collaborative academic spaces for Black undergraduate women. Analysis revealed that the manifestation of stereotype threat in these spaces allowed Black women to have conscious and agentic responses that weakened some of the negative influences of stereotype threat.

During an interview Anita, a Black woman attending Brennan University (BU; a pseudonym), a prestigious predominantly White institution (PWI), shared a story about how shocked her White peers often were by her "bubbly personality." At one point, she leaned forward in her seat, rested her elbows on the table between us, and ever so slightly turned up the corners of her mouth. In a lowered voice she stated: "They wanna know, like, 'Oh my god, 'Why are you this great person?'" She paused and leaned closer: "I'm like, 'Well, what did you expect?'" Later in the interview, I learned she believed her peers' shock was rooted in expectations that she would be unapproachable, angry, and needlessly loud—essentially, that she would personify the stereotypical Black woman. Anita's interactions with White peers and faculty who held expectations of her behavior based on existing racial narratives and tropes are not uncommon. Scholars examining undergraduate Black women's experiences on college campuses report they frequently encounter negative perceptions about them from members of the campus community (James, Marrero, & Underwood, 2010; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Huntt, 2013; Patton & Croom, 2017) which leads to feelings of marginalization and isolation (Porter, 2017; Stewart, 2017), hostile learning environments and situations (Kelly, Segoshi, Adams, & Raines, 2017; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), and few support networks upon which to rely (Winkle-Wagner, 2009). Given these documented challenges that negative perceptions cause for undergraduate Black women, the purpose of this article was to examine the manifestation of stereotype threat among Black women in a PWI.

Stereotyping as a Tool of Oppression

Racial stereotypes are not simply innocuous imaginings. They have long been used by the dominant group in society, White Americans, as means of categorizing and making sense of non-White people in a manner that justifies their continued oppression and subjugation (Tuitt & Carter, 2008). Simply defined, racial

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stereotypes are the "projected thoughts and beliefs that members of one racial group hold about another racial group" (Torres & Charles, 2004, p. 116). They are "gross generalizations" (Johnson-Ahorlu, 2012, p. 637) that do not accurately capture the lived realities of the group being described, but rather, propagate narratives that distort truths and vilify their culture, identities, and capacities in a manner that positions them as innately inferior to White Americans. The narratives stereotypes create are extremely dangerous because when taken as truth they function as a pseudo guide for how White Americans are to treat members of the minoritized racial group to which they are attributed (Solorzano et al., 2000). Importantly, stereotypes position a White American identity as completely antithetical and superior to the minority behaviors outlined in the stereotype. This deepens social boundaries between Whites and non-Whites that have devastating material consequences for minority groups (Fox & Gugliegmo, 2012). Though not all stereotypes are negative, the majority are. Even seemingly positive stereotypes can have a negative impact on the population they attempt to describe (Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000). Thus, stereotypes should be understood as powerful ideological tools that work to support racism and other forms of oppression of minoritized groups (Collins, 2009).

Stereotypes: Black Students on White Campuses

In the early 1990s, Steele began to explore exactly how societal stereotypes impacted Black college students. He hypothesized that the underperformance of academically talented Black students (and women in traditionally male dominated fields) could in part be explained by their awareness of stereotypical perceptions that they would be inadequate in a particular domain because of their social identities. Through experimental studies he, along with colleagues, found that when Black students were aware of stereotypes that positioned Blacks as intellectually inferior to Whites, they were more likely than their White peers to ineffectively process information (Steele & Aronson, 1995), to express anxiety when taking assessments, and to expect less success (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999). Steele labeled this phenomena *stereotype threat* and defined it as the sociopsychological threat felt by an individual during a situation or activity for which a negative stereotype applies to a group which they belong to and identify with meaningfully. Although Steele considered that stereotype threat could be introduced into the academic context through explicit actions from others, he maintained that more often than not individuals were unaware of the source of the threat and were triggered by situational cues that were simply "threats in the air" (Steele, 1997, p. 614).

Since the introduction of stereotype threat theory (STT), there has been no shortage of studies seeking to confirm, extend, or refute Steele's initial findings about the academic (under)performance of Black students. Primarily using experimental designs where students were placed in a stereotype threat or no threat condition, scholars have found that stereotype threat causes a form of double jeopardy whereby both Black students' learning and performance are impacted (Taylor & Walton, 2011) resulting in negative thinking (Cadinu, Maass, Rosabianca, & Kiesner, 2005), compromised working memory (Schmader, 2010), and increased pressure associated with proving their intelligence (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). This ultimately contributes to Black students' consistent underperformance relative to their White peers (Brown & Day, 2006; Walton & Spencer, 2009).

With growing evidence of stereotype threat vulnerability, an increasing number of scholars have turned their attention to exploring ways

to mitigate the threat stereotypes pose to Black students' academic pursuits (Nadler & Clark, 2011). Using a simulated high stakes ability testing situation, Aronson, Fried, and Good (2002) argued that when Black students were encouraged to view intelligence—the object of the stereotype—as malleable rather than fixed, they were more likely to report greater enjoyment of the academic process, increased engagement, and higher academic performance. Also using a simulated testing situation, Alter, Aronson, Darley, Rodriguez, and Ruble (2010) revealed that when the test was framed as a challenge, stereotype threat had no impact on their performance. Other scholars evidence how a strong Black racial identity can be leveraged to mitigate underperformance in potential stereotype threat situations (Davis, Aronson, & Salinas, 2006; Scott & Rodriguez, 2015).

Shortcomings of Research to Date

With over 7,000 citations, according to Google Scholar Metrics, the pioneering manuscripts from Steele and his colleagues have made STT a profoundly influential sociopsychological theory in the academic underperformance of talented and highly capable Black students. Despite its prominence, there are limitations in how scholars have leveraged it to explain the experiences of Black students.

First, despite the theoretical imperative of STT to understand the behavior of students within the social context of learning, much of the "social" in which they actually interact within the collegiate learning environment has not been adequately considered. This is because, under Steele's influence, stereotype threat is often examined using experimental methods that do not completely capture the social dynamics of collegiate classrooms. While in these experiments students work in a controlled environment that is strategically polluted with stereotypes and where they have minimal peer interaction, outside of the experimental domain they are more often in more unpredictable learning environments where they do not work independently and are tasked with collaboration of some sort. This interactive dynamic is likely to complicate what we understand about how stereotype threat is experienced and its broad implications. This results in the need to study the everyday manifestations of stereotype threat within real-world interactions.

Second, many examinations of stereotype threat overlook the heterogeneity within the Black student population. Analysis of stereotype threats among Black students often occurs at the aggregate level and does not consider the meaningful differences in experiences that result from the intersections of race and gender. Chavous, Harris, Rivas, Helaire, and Green (2004) argued that racial stereotypes may function in different ways for Black men and Black women depending on the institutional and academic contexts. Though many stereotypes about Blackness cut across intragroup differences, the works of feminist scholars have made it evident that Black women are subjected to a particular set of disparaging stereotypes that exist to marginalize and disenfranchise them specifically. To date, while stereotypes have emerged in discussions about Black women's experiences in higher education at the graduate and professional level (Robinson-Wood et al., 2015), few studies have addressed stereotypes in discussions of Black women at the undergraduate level (S. J. Robinson, Esquibel, & Rich, 2013; Winkle-Wagner, 2015). As such, there is a dearth of literature in which the substantive focus of analysis is on delineating how stereotypes specific to a Black feminine identity emerge within PWI undergraduate settings, how they threaten academic performance, and how they are negotiated. Stereotype threat and its impact on

Black women in PWIs are particularly worthy of exploration given a recent report which indicated that incidents of White supremacist propaganda (fliers, stickers, banners, and posters) on US college campuses were up 258% in Fall 2017 compared to the previous year ("White supremacist propaganda," n.d.).

METHOD

To understand how Black women experience stereotype threat in predominantly White settings, I employed an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1997). Intersectionality posits that to truly understand the structural oppression Black women face, scholars must acknowledge that they are both raced and gendered and thus navigate racism and sexism simultaneously (Settles, 2006). An intersectional approach asserts that the perspectives and narratives of Black women are legitimate sources of knowledge about the complex social and political contexts in which they exist. As such, for this project I conducted semistructured interviews with undergraduate Black women. An intersectional analysis of their narratives allowed me to examine the intracategorical complexity within Black women's experiences of oppression (McCall, 2005).

Researcher Positionality

As I was the sole investigator and data collector on this project, my positionality warrants discussion. I am a Black woman who, at the time of the study, was in my mid 20s and only a few years removed from my own experiences as an undergraduate student at a prestigious PWI. Like many of the women I interviewed, I grew up in a working-class home and attended a predominantly Black, working-class high school. I was drawn to conduct this study because of my larger research interests in the educational opportunities available to Black girls and women, and in part because of my own experiences in a PWI. As a critical Black feminist, I always intend my research to be *for* the Black women with whom I interact and not just *about* them. I utilize tools of inquiry that unearth issues of power, injustice, and social reproduction in their lives in an effort to resist the systems of oppression that aim to push them to the margins of society. This consciousness undergirded the decision to capture narratives detailing these inequities in this study.

Data Collection

Data was drawn from a larger study focused on the challenges and opportunities Black women encounter in their academic and social transitions as they move between their secondary institution and Brennan University (BU), the pseudonym for a prestigious, PWI. BU consistently ranks among the top public universities in the nation with an acceptance rate of only 26% of its applicant pool in the 2015–16 academic year.

Participants were initially recruited through an e-mail sent to several undergraduate Black student groups across the campus and to Black women in the administrative unit on campus I was affiliated with. This process yielded 3 participants. To recruit a greater number, I used snowball sampling—drawing upon the social networks of these initial participants (O. C. Robinson, 2014). The final sample included 30 self-identified Black women enrolled as undergraduate students at BU during the Winter 2014 and Winter 2015 semesters. I stopped recruiting following the 30th interview because similar themes were surfacing and data had reached saturation. There is no agreed-upon standard for sample sizes within qualitative research, and data saturation varies across studies (Rogers & Way, 2016). The distribution of participants from different personal and educational backgrounds allowed me to analyze whether

these differences mattered to how the women interpreted challenges and opportunities during their transition to BU and whether they distinctly drew upon resources given shared valuations of challenges and opportunities.

In semistructured, in-depth interviews, participants were asked questions such as: What was it like when you first stepped foot on BU's campus? Do you feel that you were prepared to be on a campus like BU? and What has been most challenging (and rewarding) about attending BU? The women were routinely prompted to speak to the differences they imagined of their experiences and those of Black men and White women, and they were asked to distinguish between their personal and shared experiences.

Findings related to stereotype threat were fortuitous in that they spontaneously emerged when participants were asked about the major constraints they faced as Black women on BU's campus. Given the semistructured interview format and the flexibility it affords, when this occurred I probed the women to elaborate on the initiation of the stereotype, its nature, their response (if any), and its impact on them. I initially engaged in this probing around stereotypes because it was good qualitative research practice to do so. After a number of the early participants named it as significant, I revised the interview protocol to include a priori questions and probes about stereotypes.

Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes but the average interview was 90 minutes. By the end of most interviews, I had developed a rapport such that participants desired to engage in intimate personal conversations about our experiences as Black women. This confirmed for me that I had reached the necessary level of depth in the interviews. As an act of reflexivity, I completed field notes following every interview to catalog initial reactions and questions (Merriam, 2009). All interviews were transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

My analysis was initially guided by the analytical question: What challenges and affordances do Black women experience in their transition to BU? Beginning with the creation of a mini data set consisting of 5 transcripts from women with different backgrounds, I engaged in a conversation with this data, through a process of structured and open coding (Merriam, 2009). I created structured codes by translating the questions from the interview protocol into larger categories (Maxwell, 2012). For example, responses to the question, "Have you experienced any challenges as a Black woman during your time at BU?" became Black Women Challenges or BW-CHALL. I used structured codes to create a codebook that could be uniformly applied to the entire mini data set. I also engaged in open coding whenever information could not be captured by any preexisting structured code. Given the frequency with which stereotypes were discussed in the interviews, I created codes related to specific stereotypes. These codes were applied any time participants talked about stereotypes related to their identities as Black students (BS-STEREO) or specifically as Black women (BW-STEREO). The codebook was applied and revised over many iterations until no new codes could be developed within or across categories.

Next, I engaged in targeted analysis of the subset of data that was related to stereotypes and stereotype threat (Maxwell, 2012). I pulled all data that had been coded BS-STEREO and BW-STEREO. I also pulled the participants' narratives around the question, "What challenges did you experience when you came to BU?" because this question most often elicited discussion of stereotypes. As a final step, I excerpted any data where the terms *stereotypes*, *negative images*, and *preconceived notions* were uttered to ensure

that I had captured all pertinent data related to stereotype threat. I engaged in another round of open coding of the excerpted data, driven by the analytical question, "What are Black women's experiences with stereotypes on BU's campus?" This resulted in codes relating to the kinds of stereotypes the women encountered, when and where they encountered them, their responses, and the perceived impact. Next, I engaged in axial coding to examine the relationships among the codes, grouping them into larger, thematic categories, and returning often to individual transcripts to ensure clarity of the larger contexts the participants were speaking in.

Trustworthiness

To create robust assertions about the relationships I observed, I searched through the entirety of the data set for affirmative instances and disconfirming cases. When warranted, interpretations were nuanced to better capture the breadth of the data. I also revisited the memos I had written at the conclusion of each interview to check for unintentional bias or evidence that my personal experiences as a Black woman and an undergraduate student at a PWI had been influential. As a final means of trustworthiness, I shared my raw data and preliminary analysis with a colleague who had conducted a longitudinal study focused on the generational experiences of Black women across the educational pipeline. Our meetings provided me with an alternative perspective to consider in refining my interpretations.

LIMITATIONS

As with all research studies, this study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the majority of the participants were recruited via snowball sampling, which meant I was speaking to a limited network of individuals. This is likely why the participants were primarily upper-level students. Given their length of tenure at BU, these women were likely to talk about and experience stereotype threat situations differently than first-year and second-year students. Second, findings related to stereotype threat were serendipitous as the larger study was focused on Black women's transitions between secondary and postsecondary educational institutions. All data regarding stereotype threat emerged spontaneously and was not the result of specifically designed questions aimed at the particular experience of stereotype threat. I may have gotten different data had I initially been focused on stereotype threat. Third, I acknowledge that there is potential misalignment between the traditional methodologies I drew upon for the data collection and analysis and my epistemological stance grounded in critical Black feminism.

FINDINGS

The findings indicate the Black women encountered gendered racial stereotyping that compromised their membership in the academic community and threatened to impact their prospects for success.

Stereotypes About Black Women

Throughout the interviews Black women expressed feeling that they were automatically assigned a slew of distinct, but related, negative images that reinforced one another. I first provide what was shared as an uninterrupted, uninterpreted list to illustrate the multitude and magnitude of stereotypes the women encountered. Rochelle stated, that as a Black woman she felt seen as "loud, angry, bitter, and the whole nine." Chastity felt viewed as the, "angry Black woman. . . . I'm loud. I'm obnoxious. Uneducated." Jamie stated that her peers perceived her to have "an attitude and really, really dominating and really,

really mean." Farah similarly encountered perceptions that she had "an attitude, bad temper" and was "ratchet"—a slang term meaning uncouth. Autumn stated: "I think [my White peers] assume that I'm just going to be loud, like very combative and really standoffish." Casey articulated feeling as though her peers imagined her to be "crazy, loud, very opinionated, sassy—you know all those stereotypes," while Janelle stated simply and straight to the point that she was "pretty sure" she was viewed as a "bitch." Tracy felt that her White peers assumed "she probably has an attitude, she's not friendly" and that "she's not that bright so she probably doesn't know much about anything." Bianca recounted feeling that when compared to White women who were viewed as "dainty and more feminine," she was perceived as "harsh in a way," "loud," and "ghetto." Randy felt seen as "ignorant and uneducated" based on assumptions that she would be a woman who had "a lot of children out of wedlock and you know, just wants to live off the government." Terrie similarly spoke about being perceived as "the loud type of uneducated person" and was expected to be "lazy or something."

Taken together, these narratives present a harrowing image of attitudes towards Black women on BU's campus. The women felt they were seen as the angry Black woman who is aggressive, unapproachable, unfriendly, and bitter (Collins, 2009). They were imagined to express their immutable anger "loudly." In their narratives, "loud" referred to more than a volume of speaking—it characterized a form of interacting and relating to other people in an hypervisible, inappropriate, and exaggerated manner. This loud persona, coupled with a perceived lack of intelligence and an abundance of ignorance, ultimately conveyed that anything they communicated should be taken as irrational, nonsensical ramblings and unworthy of recognition. As is evident, the compounding of the images only intensified the negative impact of their depictions. These Black women's awareness of and struggle with how they were seen by their White peers highlighted their *double consciousness*—Black people's experience of having to contend with how they see themselves and how they understand the world to see them (Du Bois, 1903).

Encountering Stereotype Threat in Collaborative Academic Spaces

These stereotypes were primarily encountered in two academic contexts: classroom discussions and group project meetings. These spaces, different from the learning environments typically modeled in experimental settings, necessitated high levels of interaction and collaboration with peers.

Stereotype Threat: Classroom Discussions. In the context of classroom discussions, the women experienced stereotype threat when their peers were extremely judgmental of their commentary and made them feel hypervisible in the group space (Tuitt & Carter, 2008). As a teaching tool, discussions involving the whole class provide a way for members of the learning community to jointly process course materials in ways that challenge and extend their own thinking as well as their peers'; however, the Black women I interviewed felt unable to freely share their perspectives and fully participate in the exchange of ideas because of the way their peers overanalyzed their commentary. For example, Danielle recalled being in a class where she was the only Black woman: "I raise my hand and say something, people are really listening to . . . make sure that I make sense, . . . whereas somebody else may speak and they automatically know what they are saying, understand, or believe what they are saying." Danielle believed her peers' desire to ruminate on her commentary was rooted in assumptions that she was not able to speak

coherently and make a valuable contribution to the discussion. The fact that other students who spoke were automatically presumed to be articulate and credible in their thinking confirmed to Danielle that this treatment emerged out of stereotyping her as a Black woman. While this behavior *could* have been viewed as evidence of genuine interest in the women's thoughts, they did not perceive it in this manner; rather, they perceived the exaggerated attention on their comments in discussions as attempts to undermine their participation and ultimately exclude them. Casey shared her experience: "I feel like sometimes in class if I say something that's smart, sometimes people are just kind of like, you know, like, 'Oh—[she physically portrays a side-eye look]—okay, I guess that sounds smart.'" She expressed feeling that everyone "really listens and really waits to see what I have to say," but not because they expected her to have well formulated opinions. Much like Danielle, Casey felt that her White peers had a deficit framing of Black women and assumed she was not capable of being smart enough to make quality contributions to class discussions. This deficit expectation was evidenced by the fact that many times they seemed "taken off guard" by what she had to say.

Anita also talked about her peers struggling to accept her commentary during discussions:

> I feel like what I have to say someone else is gonna say it, and a teacher [will give] credit to them, . . . but I'm like, "Didn't I just say that?" I don't know if the other person said it more intellectually than I did, but I just sit there and think, "You just added and edited some words into it! [It was a] good comment!"

In Anita's experience, stereotypes were evident when her White peers were allowed to steal her contributions within discussions and recapitulate them as their own—indicating perceptions that, unlike her peers, she was not capable of conceiving of or expressing a "good comment." Though Anita considered the possibility that there may have been other ways to express her commentary "more intellectually," she quickly reinstated the merit of her contributions by concluding that her comments were in fact good; they were simply not given the legitimacy they deserved, because they were not ushered in from a White body. She reasoned that her peers' inclination to hijack her remarks and edit her words had more to do with who she was rather than what she said.

Shayna spoke on her experience during a classroom discussion about Black female writers:

> When we as Black women speak on something, whether it be racism, sexism, whatever, . . . it's like, "Oh, she mad. Huh? Why she getting upset? Why she loud? Why she this?" . . . If a White woman speaks on it, it's like, "Oh, please share more." If it was like the Black male in the class, it's fine for them to say something, but if I say it, it's a problem.

In this situation, Shayna felt marginalized in a classroom discussion that ironically took place within a course on Black female authors. She perceived her professor and peers to problematically characterize Black women's comments as loud and emanating from a place of anger, even when that was not the case. Stereotyping them as "mad," "upset," and "loud" reduced their comments to emotional responses and justified excluding them in favor of greater inclusion of nonemotional White women and Black men. As with the other women, this diminished Shayna's opportunities to enjoy the benefits of group discussions.

Stereotype Threat: Group Projects. While in classroom discussions the women felt stereotype threat through hypervisibility, in the context of group projects they felt most threatened when peers and faculty ignored, dismissed, and minimized their presence and

commentary—effectively rendering them invisible. In some instances, the invisibility occurred when the women were not included in group work at all. Janelle shared: "You find yourself—like when group projects or group work—I remember in history [the professor would] be like, 'Turn to your group.' And then the group would go like, 'Yes, dah, dah, dah.'" Janelle mimicked how the group would convene such that their backs were turned away from her, leaving her unable to participate. Fatima shared that her White peers would "purposely not pay you any attention, and you right next [to them]—literally act like you're not there. You literally feel invisible sometimes." Similarly, Tracy shared: "If I worked with a group of all White people, and especially if there was dudes, . . . they would act like they didn't hear anything I was saying." Janelle, Fatima, and Tracy were literally overlooked by their peers and prevented from participating during group work.

Chastity shared how she was excluded from group work even outside of the physical classroom: "I try to e-mail them to try to schedule a group meeting: no responses. Someone else e-mails a day later: everyone responds. What? Are you kidding me? Does your e-mail not work for me?" Based on how her e-mail was ignored, it was obvious to Chastity that her White peers subscribed to negative stereotypes about Black women. Even if this exclusion was not what her peers intended, ignoring and ultimately rejecting her requests for scheduling limited her ability to adopt a central role in the collaborative work that was going to take place. She felt, as the only Black woman in the group, her presence at the meetings was being hindered. From the periphery, the only opportunities available would be to follow up on plans rather than contribute to making them.

In other cases, this invisibility was mixed with a refusal to respect the intelligence of Black women. Shanelle described how in her chemistry lab, they would "exclude [her] from projects" and "try to mix things up before [she] was able to do it," like when it came time to write the corresponding lab report: "I would say something, and they wouldn't take it. Then somebody would say it, and that's when they would entertain whatever it was that I had just said. . . . I felt that the whole semester." Shanelle believed her peers' refusal to include her in the group work and acknowledge the merit of her suggestions, much like in classroom discussions, were because they held to the stereotypes that Black women were not able to possess or articulate intelligent thought. Bianca would suggest ideas for a group that would get rejected without consideration. It was not until a White peer would say, "You know, I actually think that's a good idea," that her ideas were taken up. "It would be like somebody would have to . . . verify basically what I was saying, or agree with me, for it to go into action." Amy shared that in group settings, "sometimes I don't feel like my voice is being heard, like they're not listening to what I'm saying. . . . Somebody else will bring up the same thing, and they're like, 'Oh my god, yes. Let's do that.' I'm like, 'Didn't I just say that?'"

Navigating Stereotype Threat in Real-World Collaborative Academic Spaces

In the face of stereotypes, Black women navigated stereotype threat in three primary ways: (a) implicit peer education, (b) explicit peer education, and (c) faculty and administrative leadership engagement. These were not necessarily enacted in isolation of one another and were often utilized simultaneously in reaction to the presence of a stereotype.

Implicit Peer Education. One strategy the women used to navigate stereotype threat was implicit peer education, which refers to a decision to rely on their personal behavior to indirectly disprove stereotypes. Elsewhere

referred to as the "proving you wrong" strategy (Tuitt & Carter, 2008), the goal of implicit peer education is to correct stereotypical assumptions by providing a counterexample to the behavior the stereotype describes. Some women engaged this strategy by altering their identity performance in an attempt to avoid suggesting pejorative stereotypes about Black women. Scholars have argued that this form of resistance—acting in ways to intentionally create distance from stereotypes—represents a sort of conformity to the prevailing White dominant standards (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Lerraye shared: "I didn't want to be the typical stereotype. . . . And so I think that's what pushed me. I wanted to prove them wrong—not just the people in the classroom, but just that whole idea." When I asked how she went about doing this she explained: "I definitely believe I break the stereotype every day—just how I carry myself, how I talk. I mean, you know, we have a different talk when we're around our friends than when we're around [White people]." Anita discussed implicit peer education through the lens of *code switching*—altering her presentation and expression of self based on her audience. "My mother [a professional in a PWI] definitely taught me at an early age: 'This is how you have to talk, this is how you gotta poise, this is how you . . .'—everything." Bianca admitted, "I change the way I talk or enunciate my words more," so as not to be perceived as "ghetto" and "ratchet," while Casey said that she made it a habit to "clear the air and make sure [not to be] stereotypical." Referring to decisions around how to speak in class, Danielle stated: "I don't want to further portray their stereotypes, so I feel like I have to be a positive representation." She recounted going to such great lengths as writing down what she wanted to say during a group discussion to ensure her comments were rigorous and articulate. Terrie stated that she was "extra cautious" to avoid acting in a way that would lead to perceptions of her as ratchet. This included not sitting next to other Black peers who, by proximity, might cause her to be associated negatively (though she understood that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with their actions).

While for some women, implicit education was about intentionally presenting an image of themselves that was the least reminiscent of negative stereotypes, other women chose to implicitly educate by enacting their identities in a manner that felt authentic to them, regardless of whether their behaviors could be associated with a stereotype. The purpose of this variant of implicit education was to demonstrate that all behaviors associated with stereotypes were not inherently problematic and anti-intellectual. Shayna engaged in implicit education this way and reported that in situations under stereotype threat, she would "continue to assert" herself, no matter "what anyone else [would] think" about her behavior. Autumn elaborated on the educative function of an unaltered performance of her identity in academic spaces. She declared that she would "not change anything about [her]self in the process" to "get what [the group needs] to get done." It was evident that she believed changing anything about herself would have been counterproductive to accomplishing group tasks. Alisha also taught her peers in a way that allowed her to stay true to herself: "You can't think about how other people are thinking. So I learned to just really be who I am and not [think,] 'Oh, don't say this, because you don't want people to say— ' No, I have to be me."

Explicit Peer Education. This is a strategy whereby the women used direct, verbal communication to educate their peers about the problematic nature of their assumptions. Randy shared: "In a class setting you have to be, you know, respectful. [Something] upsets you, and you just try to respond back and

maybe try to make somebody see something from your way." While Randy spoke in general terms, Chastity talked specifically about using analogies as a teaching tool: "I'm a big analogy person. It's like, 'You thought I was like this? You know, there was a White man who killed a whole bunch of people in the movie theater, but I didn't think you were gonna do that.'" In this situation, Chastity pointed out the problematic nature of assuming that every White man was a terrorist based solely on the actions of one terroristic White man. The analogy astutely demonstrated the ignorance that results when a person uses past or imagined actions of one person as a guide for determining how all members of that race will act. While Chastity used analogies, Leslie leveraged history as a teaching tool. She recounted an incident in which a White woman in her class told her that she was only admitted into BU due to affirmative action. Leslie responded by enlightening her peer to the fact that "affirmative action was also for White women," and that if she had indeed been admitted to BU due to affirmative action, then White women "must have gotten [into BU] off of genocide, savagery, slavery, everything!"

Janelle similarly guided peers through a process of unpacking their assumptions. She explained the danger of being considered a Sapphire or Jezebel to her white peers who argued these identities were liberating:

> You're still not looked at as a person. You're like a sexual object. They was like, "No, but she's empowering herself." I'm like, "But you see her as a bitch. So you don't see her as a woman." They were like, "No, it's okay." And I'm like, "No, it's never actually been okay at all, and here's why." So we sat there and we talked about it, and you have to explain things like that to people, 'cuz people think certain things are okay.

In this instance, Janelle educated by consistently pushing back against her White peers' rendering of the Sapphire and Jezebel images of Black women as empowering. She found it critically important to help her White peers understand the complexities of stereotypes that on the surface may seem liberating and okay. Lastly, Autumn shared her use of explicit education during a group meeting where a White peer attempted to "control [her] speech and control how [she was] feeling," as if she were incapable of doing so herself. She educated her peer by telling her: "You know, I would just appreciate if you just did not try to correct my speech. . . . There are differences in experiences, there are differences in culture right now. I don't think you really understand what that really means."

The women in this study discussed the efforts to provide both implicit education and explicit education as "draining," "exhausting," and sometimes "too heavy of a burden to bear." Rather than institutional agents stepping in to address the disparaging stereotypes that create hostile learning contexts, the women were forced to implement cross-racial education with their peers and educators. This unpaid labor undoubtedly took valuable energy that could have been spent in other areas of their academic and social lives (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Solorzano et al., 2000). Yet, many women suggested that in the midst of this exhausting labor, engaging in peer education functioned as a source of empowerment to advance the well-being of Black women on and off BU's campus. The possibility of empowerment in the midst of stereotype threat has rarely been discussed within the literature (Ben-Zeev, Fein, & Inzlicht, 2005). When asked how she felt about doing educative work, Autumn said she felt empowered and felt like she was "heard in that moment, like, 'Don't mess with me.'" Chastity shared: "For me, [correcting stereotypes is] more motivating than discouraging. I really want to break the stereotypes . . . It's actually really

empowering to me." Of the educating work she did, Shanelle stated: "I welcome [this] responsibility, because there are so many other people that are just not built to do that, and I am." Alisha poignantly stated that her efforts to educate were her "right as a person, as a human, as a citizen to say how I feel, and if you are offending me or you are saying something that's not politically correct, then that's my right to let you know that."

Faculty and Administrative Leadership Engagement. This strategy is the act of bringing in faculty or administrative leadership to address the presence of stereotypes in the academic space, given their responsibility to promote an equitable learning environment. Anita talked about how she would sometimes "not speak up" during the discussion and would "just address it in office hours." By choosing to address it this way, Anita communicated that she did not expect to have to bear the burden of dealing with problematic stereotypes on her own and that faculty could be called on to assist. Shanelle recalled an instance when she used this strategy by scheduling a meeting to talk to the dean of students about dealing with stereotype threat in her classes, because it "was not okay. . . . I'm taking action with this, because if this happens with another student, I'm going to feel bad that I didn't take action when I know that I'm equipped to do that." She also recounted a situation where a White male faculty member suggested she was "not putting effort into her work" and was "lazy," because she had "access to special resources." In response Shanelle pointed out to him that the assumption she was lazy was racialized and in fact a microaggression against her. She hoped that helping him to unpack his assumption would "plant seeds in him" that he could draw upon in the future. Shayna also engaged faculty as a strategy by talking to her professor about her experiences in the group discussions in the hopes that she would address the problems. It must be noted that faculty engagement was the strategy least used. Leslie provided some insight into why this may have been the case: "Teachers try to say, like, 'You know, don't feel like you have to be the voice for your entire community.'" Yet, when I asked Leslie if these same teachers offered up any support that would enable her to feel like she did not have to be the voice, she indicated that they did not. This suggests that in some cases faculty support may occur more in word than in deed.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study elucidate how Black women experienced stereotype threat as they engaged in collaborative learning with their peers in both small group and classroom settings. The women's narratives revealed that they most often encountered gendered, racial stereotypes that mirrored dominant tropes about Black womanhood (Collins, 2009). When these stereotypes were introduced into the collaborative learning context, these women could clearly identify the individual peers and faculty who ushered them in. While most times there was no explicit verbalization of the stereotype being invoked, the women felt the actions of their peers and faculty constituted solid evidence that they were relying on these misguided tropes to make judgments about who Black women were and how they were to be treated. Trina succinctly stated: "They may not say it, [but] body language says a lot. And actions speak louder than words." Such actions circumscribed their membership in the larger academic community by subjecting these women to hypervisibility in some cases and invisibility in others—both of which prevented their peers from recognizing and respecting them on their terms.

Despite being stereotype threatened, all participants maintained at least the minimum level of academic success required to graduate

from BU with many excelling. These findings suggest that the strategies they employed to negotiate stereotype threat were key in offsetting the negative academic implications of those situations. Implicit education occurred when the women used their personal behaviors to disprove stereotypes; this strategy was most often utilized when the women sensed more subtle stereotype threat in their peers' looks and impressions. On the other hand, explicit peer education involved face-to-face verbal communication in which the women created in-the-moment opportunities to expose peers to a different way of conceiving of Black womanhood; this strategy was often employed when stereotype threat surfaced explicitly during interactions with their White peers. Some women also engaged in faculty and administration engagement, drawing upon their institutional resources and authority to address pejorative stereotypes.

What accounts for the different impact of stereotype threat on performance in the women's real-world interactions than what has typically occurred within controlled experimental settings? Key to all of the navigational strategies was the opportunity to respond and push back against the stereotyping. Experimental settings where scholars are measuring the semiconscious responses to stereotypes do not provide such opportunity for the fully conscious responses that the women were able to make during their interactions in collaborative spaces. Stereotype threat is presented in experimental settings as static entities; in the real world where students were engaged in collaborative learning, the stereotype threat was more likely to be ushered into the learning space via actual bodies. This contributed to a wholly different dynamic than what is typically explored in the literature. The ushering bodies presented the women with an in-the-moment opportunity to respond to and alter the power of the stereotype threat they were encountering. Because assessment within these collaborative spaces is based on a group's ability to complete a shared task rather than on individual merit alone, it is imperative to address negative stereotypes to ensure successful collaboration. The human element of the interactions, particularly while collaborating, contributes to the sense that stereotypes are amenable to intervention even though (as the women were well aware) they are rooted in larger systems of institutionalized racism. Ultimately, the chance for these women to consciously react to stereotype threat provided a critical opportunity to mitigate the damage stereotypes cause to their academic success.

Admittedly, the peer education processes described in this analysis closely align with what Steele and colleagues argued is the predominant response of individuals who are facing stereotype threat. They maintained that the effort it takes to constantly distance themselves from stereotypical images, in part, explains why highly capable Black students underperform. The findings from this study contribute to the STT literature by revealing ways stereotyping can be experienced with positive outcomes: the Black women interviewed overwhelmingly described the process of dispelling stereotypes through these education processes as motivating and, in some cases, empowering. Though the women's narratives revealed that situations involving stereotype threat were powerful enough to engender negative feelings, they believed in their *own* power to overtake that threat using peer education strategies. This should not be surprising as throughout history Black women have consistently leveraged their personal agency to resist continued efforts to oppress them (Collins, 2009). It was abundantly clear that the Black women in this study had not only the ability, but the desire, to engage with this legacy of agency.

IMPLICATIONS

The use of a critical Black feminist lens to investigate the manifestation and impact of stereotype threat in a collegiate setting advances the breadth and depth of the field's understanding of how this oppression relates to Black students' experiences. It pushes scholars to think meaningfully about the relationship between Black students' race and gender and what that relationship means for how stereotyping surfaces, the response to it, and importantly how it structures inequity. Though this study is a start, more scholarly research is warranted to better understand stereotype threat through an intersectional frame.

In detailing how Black women in one collegiate setting productively navigated stereotype threat by using their own empowerment, I do not suggest that all Black women will respond this way. Nor am I implying that the frustration they felt and immense mental and physical work they were doing to navigate stereotype threat are negligible. On the contrary, I argue that it is unjust that Black women are consistently positioned to feel hypervisible and invisible within learning contexts where they have fully earned the right to be. Furthermore, they should not have to engage in burdensome peer education processes in order to survive these spaces. Findings from this study suggest that scholars must examine how institutions can support Black women in navigating stereotype threat on campus. The only strategy that involved Black women drawing on external resources was the least utilized. Scholars should explore the circumstances under which faculty and administrators take on responsibility for ensuring equity in learning spaces as well as the conditions under which Black women feel they can appeal to them when they encounter challenges related to stereotypes in and out of the classroom.

In order to lessen the burden on Black women within these predominantly White spaces, we must center interventions that call upon the institution to act on behalf of Black women. Formal opportunities should be made available to White peers, faculty, and administrators to learn about stereotypes and their role in perpetuating inequality. This might include offering cross-listed courses to students that address these issues and simultaneously fulfill university graduation requirements. Likewise, continuing education courses that are tied to the promotion and tenure process could be designed for faculty and administrators. Opportunities for greater exposure to non-White culture across campus must also be made available. Institutions should be consistently evaluating the extent to which Black culture is meaningfully integrated into all aspects of campus life. These evaluations should focus on (a) the extent to which Black students and faculty are numerically represented on campus; (b) acknowledgment of the current and past contributions of Black individuals to the institution; (c) courses outside of the African American studies, Black studies, or ethnic studies departments that cover the history and culture of Black Americans from nondeficit perspectives; and (d) campus social life that is inclusive of and respectful to Black students. Institutions might also consider various innovative ways to encourage conversations about race and stereotypes—documentary screenings coupled with discussion, town hall sessions where testimonials of students' experiences on campus with stereotypes are shared and discussed, and journal clubs and book clubs with texts that highlight themes of race, racism, and social justice.

Importantly, faculty members must be held accountable for actions that marginalize Black women, whether intentional or not. They must be required to learn how to create

learning contexts that are equitable for all students. This training should include how to check for bias in their own practice as well as how to guide the learning of a student who invokes a pejorative stereotype. In addition to formal training, institutions might provide informal opportunities for faculty to build a community of colleagues who are similarly working toward creating more equitable classroom contexts for marginalized students. Ultimately, educational justice for Black women will come through sustained systemic institutional action.

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