The High Maintenance Black Girl: Black Female College Students’ Experiences with Intraracial Stereotypes

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The High Maintenance Black Girl:
Black Female College Students’ Experiences with Intraracial Stereotypes

By
Alexis Thrower

Claremont Graduate University
2024
Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Alexis Thrower as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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Abstract

The High Maintenance Black Girl: Black Female College Students’ Experiences with Intraracial Stereotypes
By Alexis Thrower
Claremont Graduate University: 2024

While existing literature has extensively documented interracial stereotypes faced by Black individuals, this study delved into the lesser-explored realm of stereotypes emanating from within the Black community itself. This dissertation explored the experiences of Black female college students in predominantly white educational environments, focusing on the pervasive influence of intraracial stereotypes. Grounded in phenomenological inquiry and guided by Black Feminist Critique, the research investigated the impact of these intraracial stereotypes on relationships, sense of belonging, and coping strategies among Black female college students. Four research questions guided this dissertation: What are the intraracial stereotypes experienced by Black female college students? How have these intraracial stereotypes shaped their experiences and relationships with Black faculty, Black peers, family members, and the Black community? How do intraracial stereotypes about Black female college students shape their sense of belonging? Lastly, how do Black female college students manage tensions arising from intraracial stereotypes? In-depth semi-structured focus groups were held with 31 Black female college students in Southern California. This study also found that Black female college students experience stereotypes (or microaggressions) from within their racial group across Black family members, Black peers, Black faculty members, and the broader Black community that paralleled their academic intellect or pursuits to whiteness. In addition, this study revealed that even if participants were met with stereotypes from within the family unit, familial support for education was the most prevalent across all eight focus groups, while academia placed a heightened sense
of dissonance on friendships (five focus groups), particularly when the participants’ friends did not attend college. On the college campus, participants expressed equally in six focus groups how they experienced both supportiveness and dissonance in their Black academic relationships. Participants also shared how they experienced dissonance in their academic relationships with non-Black peers (five focus groups), often implying that they were made to feel academically inferior, solidifying the overarching conceptual framework of this study in which same-race stereotypes of Black female college students often parallel broader interracial stereotypes that undermine Black academic intellect. These stereotypes may or may not affect and shape their sense of belonging, but when they do, the result is what most focus groups (five) described as isolation and questioning how their behaviors may not align with what their Black counterparts identify as “Black.” When participants’ sense of belonging is not affected by these stereotypes, it may also contribute to their academic resilience to continue to thrive and remain ambitious in the wake of adversity. This is important to note as all focus groups explored where they felt the greatest and weakest sense of belonging. Across all focus groups, participants expressed feeling unwelcome in academic spaces from their non-Black counterparts and some of their Black peers. By contrast, participants understood their need to belong and find affirming Black peer spaces in academic and non-academic settings (the most cited coping strategy across seven focus groups) to combat the negative messaging of intraracial stereotypes. While these stereotypes may undermine the validation of Black excellence, participants exhibited unwavering commitment to their Black identity and academic resilience. To that end, the results of this study call for increased awareness to address these stereotypes, the creation of safe spaces within higher education institutions, and further research into similar stereotypes across diverse racial and gender groups. By shedding light on the experiences of Black female college students navigating
intraracial stereotypes, this research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face in predominantly white academic spaces and often in lesser researched predominantly Black spaces both on and off campus.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Black women. You are valued. Continue to lift as you climb, while actively remembering the importance of your rest. It is okay to let go of burdens that are not yours to carry. You are deserving of a peaceful life, filled with love, restoration, support, and encouragement from those who look like you.

Your resilience in the midst of constantly being reminded that you are different in spaces that weren’t designed for you is noted. Yet, you continue unapologetically to carve out a space that is uniquely your own. Your determination to persist even when faced with internalized anguish in spaces you thought were safe is acknowledged. This dissertation is one way I’ve tried to do that.

Continue to keep God at the center and work diligently to manifest the life your heart desires, regardless of what anyone has to say about it—high maintenance and all. This does not mean you are acting white, especially in a world that actively reminds us that our very Blackness is a flaw in professional and academic spaces (both said and unsaid).

Your Blackness is the furthest thing from whiteness. Your Blackness is powerful, sophisticated, elegant, formal, freeing, and a beautiful absorption of all the things in life that were meant to negatively depict and minimize you, that you then cultivated for your good and the good of others. Shine—not like positively connoted white beams of light, but like unmatched golden hues that emanate from your very pores a light that cannot be replicated or duplicated.

If you have not had another Black woman recently tell you, I’m here to let you know, “I see you, girl!”
To my guardian angel, Auntie Chonie, although not here in the flesh, thank you for affirming in so many spiritual ways that I have made you proud.
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To my Heavenly Father, thank you. I did not always understand why you wanted me to do certain things and sit uncomfortably in certain spaces. Nonetheless, I thank you for loving me so much that you found me worthy enough to be put on assignment to fulfill your purpose for my life—to serve others while using education as the means to do it.

To my amazing committee who embraced my mission of expeditiously developing this dissertation simultaneously with coursework, I appreciate your partnership and commitment to my journey, making me the youngest Black woman to obtain my PhD in urban leadership from Claremont Graduate University as of 2024.

To every professor throughout my urban leadership PhD program, I appreciate you for cultivating a safe space where, for the first time in my academic and professional career, I felt I belonged and my Black voice was valued. Thank you for giving me the confidence to enter spaces and unapologetically speak truth to power, especially for matters related to diversity, equity, and inclusion that are not always reflective of everyone in them. Thank you for equipping, developing, and sharpening necessary tools within me to not tiptoe around the challenging conversations, particularly in systems that have used race to weaponize and marginalize. Thank you for the consistent reminders that this work is not for the weak, but that I have everything I need to be a change agent.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Black people in America not only face the prejudices of the predominately white society, but also internalize negative stigmas against their own racial group that can have negative effects on their social and emotional well-being (Molina & James, 2016; Whaley, 2022). Black female college students experience stereotypes, which invalidate their sense of belonging in predominantly white spaces such as higher education and some Black spaces (Leath et al., 2022). Across the literature, common stereotypes are often nestled in remarks that target someone’s differing racial or ethnic identity (Gaertner & McLaughlin, 1983; Katz & Braly, 1933; Way et al., 2013). A few interracial or outgroup stereotypes related to Black intelligence specifically include being in poverty, ignorant, shiftless, immoral, inferior, an overall general nuisance (McGee & Martin, 2011), and lazy (Reyna, 2000). The negative impact of interracial stereotypes is that they often exclude and marginalize People of Color (Udah & Singh, 2019) and, in some cases, cause stereotype threat in which the stigmatized group internalizes the misconceptions made against them, fearing they will confirm the stereotype—leading to reduced performance and focus that may result in behaving the initially stated stereotypes (Spencer et al., 2016).

The racial academic achievement gap has long been perpetuated by whites, who have attempted inaccurately to prove intellectual superiority, arguing biological determinism as the primary notion in which “people at the bottom are constructed of intrinsically inferior material (poor brains, bad genes, or whatever)” (Gould, 1981, p. 63). This notion of Black academic inferiority also has roots to slavery, as keeping African Americans uneducated was an oppressive ploy to make them respect the slavemasters’ authority as gatekeepers who knew what was best for them (Albanese, 1976) and that their primary use was to be property and fixed capital for labor (Anderson & Gallman, 1977). Given this historical context, there is an underlying
expectation for Black students to underperform academically (Taylor et al., 2019) in predominantly white spaces as “Black students are placed in a cycle of failure that deprives them of opportunities to develop good social habits and educational success” (Hassan & Carter, 2021, p. 28), which is the recurring message perpetuated by stereotypes.

However, Black female college students also experience stereotypes and oppression intraculturally (or intraracially) or from the in-group, which explicitly state or implicitly insinuate that because Black students are academically high-achieving, they view themselves as better than or above their Black peers (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Some accusations faced by Black female college students include acting or speaking white (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009), acting bougie (Smith, 2016), “pretending to (or think they are) high class but they’re really not” (Urban Dictionary, 2018), being high maintenance or “interchangeable with materialistic or financial desires” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), and a slew of other stereotypes centralizing Black academic excellence around Eurocentric values. This is a unique paradox, given that “even poor black Americans value education highly, often more than whites” (Steele, 1992, p. 3). Historically, the value of education has been a primary factor and a source of resiliency for Black families, “despite having their learning impacted by racism and stereotyping” (Sims-Schouten & Gilbert, 2022, p. 91). Although present-day laws and policies decree against discrimination of People of Color in schools and workplaces, stereotypes persist within the Black community, specifically toward Black female college students, which may have an impact on how they manage tensions within their Black relationships, their sense of belonging, and their Black identity.

The present literature focused on intergroup stereotypes, discriminatory remarks perpetuated by whites and non-Blacks towards Black individuals. To that end, there is limited research to support the experience of stereotypes faced by Black female college students from
within the Black community. Existing literature has painted an incomplete picture by failing to account for the impact intraracial stereotypes have on the educational experiences of Black women in higher education. While a developed body of research has examined stereotype threats present when individuals perceive their social group to be devalued by others (e.g., Pennington et al., 2016), less is known about how stereotypes are experienced by Black female college students from the in-group (other Blacks). These intragroup stereotypes may fuel an oppressive status quo situated in systemic racism, potentially contributing to a low sense of belonging while pursuing higher education and leaving Black female college students to defend their Black identity.

Indeed, Coates (2004) recommended that additional research is needed to understand intraracial prejudice and its effects on African Americans, as this learned internalized oppression can impact Black women’s identity in the higher education setting (Joseph & Williams, 2008).

**Purpose Statement, Research Questions, and Key Terms**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore Black female college students’ experiences with intraracial stereotypes and to understand the impact these stereotypes have on Black female college students’ relationships (Doss & Gross, 1992), sense of belonging (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2019), and ability to cope (Wilkężyńska et al., 2015). I conducted in-depth semi-structured focus groups with Black female college students enrolled in a 4-year institution in Southern California, drawing on Black Feminist Critique as the underlying theoretical lens for understanding the lived experience of Black female college students.

To investigate this phenomenon, I addressed the following research questions:

1. What intraracial stereotypes are experienced by Black female college students?
2. How have these intraracial stereotypes shaped their experiences and relationships with Black faculty, Black peers, family members, and the Black community?
3. How do intraracial stereotypes about Black female college students shape their sense of belonging?

4. How do Black female college students manage tensions arising from intraracial stereotypes?

To examine these topics, I utilized a phenomenological research design, drawing on eight focus groups of 31 Black female college students. These focus groups generated robust discussions, and coding and thematic analysis unearthed important findings on the experience and effects of intraracial stereotypes for Black female college students and the ways in which they managed these tensions.

Specifically, this study identified two main categories of intraracial stereotypes: stereotypes centered around perceived white superiority and stereotypes centered around mimicking or embodying whiteness. First, respondents described these stereotypes as “thinking you’re better than us” and being “bougie,” “stuck up,” or “high maintenance.” The second category of mimicking or embodying whiteness included stereotypes of being “whitewashed,” a “white girl,” or “speaking or acting white.” Across these intraracial stereotypes, Black academic intellect was often compared to whiteness or other Eurocentric values that had an underpinning that being white is “better.” The merits of Black students’ intelligence are minimized through stereotypes that conceptualize that their pursuit of education is inherently white.

Intraracial stereotypes were commonly present in Black family relationships and friendships, but their effect on these relationships was mixed. Although family support appeared to be the most prevalent across all eight focus groups, participants also cited a range of negative and neutral feelings by family relating to their academic pursuits. However, Black female college students in this study did not let these stereotypes act as a deterrent to thrive academically. This
study also found that friendships were primarily negatively impacted across the majority of focus
groups who identified how pursuing an education caused dissonance in some of their friendships.

With mixed effects on the participants’ relationships, respondents’ sense of self and
sense of belonging often varied in their family, friendships, and academic and non-academic
relationships. For example, participants across five focus groups expressed how stereotypes
caused feelings of isolation that invalidated their sense of belonging. Nonetheless, participants
still valued their Black relationships and did not let stereotypes generalize their experience with
peers from the broader Black community. To cope with these stereotypes, participants most
prevalently across seven focus groups sought out Black peer spaces or solidarity with the broader
Black community, and an array of other strategies to manage tensions associated with intraracial
stereotypes.

Ultimately, this study found that although stereotypes shaped students’ experiences,
participants pinpointed how intraracial stereotypes had inherently racist undertones that forced
Black intellect to mirror whiteness and invalidate their sense of belonging with family, friends,
and academic and non-academic counterparts. However, at no point did the participants feel less
Black in their identity, nor did it impact their academic resilience. However, participants often
managed these tensions in a way that ran counter to the “acting white” narrative, by most
prevalently seeking Black peer spaces and community to affirm their sense in belonging, despite
being met with stereotypes that imply otherwise.

This study also generated important implications to raise awareness and mitigate the
effects of the insidious embodiment of internalized racism in intraracial stereotypes. For
example, I identified opportunities for students’ supporters and higher education institutions to
hold safe spaces, such as that of Black resource centers and a few other considerations for policy and practice.

Overall, this study addressed a gap in literature by further defining some of the intraracial stereotype terms that are experienced by Black female college students, the impact these stereotypes have on their relationships with their Black counterparts and sense of belonging, and how they manage these tensions. It also makes important contributions to the existing research by exploring the Black female college experience as students navigate intraracial stereotypes that reinforce society’s value of whiteness in academic and non-academic spaces among Black peers. Developing a deeper understanding and consciousness of how stereotypes have created division, not only interracially (from outside of the Black community) but also intraracially, may lead to improved support and commitment to better validate belonging for Black female college students so they are not consistently forced to manage these tensions in academic and non-academic spaces.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

To understand the key concepts involved in my research questions, I conducted an extensive literature review on stereotypes, sense of belonging, and the importance of relationships to academic success. First, I describe the extant literature on interracial stereotypes and their effects on students of color, specifically Black students. I then review the limited research on intraracial stereotypes and provide examples of their presentation in contemporary media. Next, I review the literature on sense of belonging in higher education, specifically for Black students. Then, I describe the literature on same-race relationships and academic experience. I conclude by presenting my conceptual framework, which integrates Black Feminist Critique with a theory of action describing how intraracial stereotypes influence students’ relationships and sense of belonging, and how they cope with these tensions.

Stereotypes

Gordon Allport (1979) defined stereotype as “an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category” (p. 191). To better understand the racial implications of stereotypes, Michael Pickering (2004) said, “racial stereotyping cannot be understood without reference to whiteness, the racially unmarked, normative centre from which it stems” (p. 91). This can impact our ethnic and cultural beliefs of a specific racial group while skewing our positive beliefs with characteristics that most resemble our own.

Some racial groups are often stereotyped more than others as a result of one’s skewed beliefs; as Banaji et al. (2021) said, “individuals are agentic entities, the primary actors within all systems of life and living. Their attitudes (preferences, prejudices), beliefs (stereotypes), and behaviors (discrimination) are inbuilt or intrinsically enmeshed into the foundation of the mental
systems that feed systemic racism” (p. 2). Nonetheless, all of these stereotypes have been linked to negative experiences and outcomes. Krueger (1996) hypothesized that “people (over)project from their own personal beliefs about group characteristics to what they believe to be the cultural stereotype about that group” (p. 539). To that end, many People of Color are left having to navigate experiences of overt and covert stereotypes and beliefs held by parties of different racial groups.

Stereotypes often show up in everyday life for People of Color in the form of language and communication via slang and racial microaggressions (Allen et al., 2013; Ong et al., 2013; Solórzano & Huber, 2020; Sue et al., 2007); media representation (Ash et al., 2021; Dixon, 2019; Graber, 2003; Ramasubramanian, 2007); education (Allen & Webber, 2019; Calvanese, 2007; Master et al., 2016; Sheldon, 2004; Wood et al., 2010), workplace (Heilman, 2012; Toomy & Rudolph, 2017); and institutional policies and practices (Brussino & McBrien, 2022; Burn et al., 2022; Krishnamurthy & Edlin, 2014). Arnold S. Katz’s and Donald Braly (1933) highly cited study investigated the prevalence of racial stereotypes among college students in the United States. Their research found that certain negative stereotypes were widely shared among participants toward specific groups.

The impact of stereotypes is often harmful and, as Wheeler et al. (2001) stated, “the target does not enjoy the cognitive efficiency afforded by stereotype application but must pay the costs associated with stereotype inaccuracy” (p. 174). Even if the stereotype target works diligently to refute said stereotypes with their behaviors, they may subconsciously inherit these beliefs which can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies that result in “stereotype-confirming behaviors in members of the stereotype group” (Wheeler et al., 2001, p. 174). Similarly, Fiske
(1993) examined how stereotypes and control were linked, stating “the easiest course for a stereotypical person is to stay within the bounds of those expectations” (p. 623).

In other cases, people who are stereotyped may try to contradict the expectations. For example, in Griffin’s (2006) qualitative exploration of Black college students, students may be motivated to disprove stereotypes that minimize intellect, which may act as a driving force that fuels high academic achievement. Even with that, the prevalence of stereotypes and everyday microaggressions leaves an impact which forces People of Color to navigate these systems in a manner that often is not equitable to them (Liu et al., 2022; Sacks, 2018), while also internalizing their oppression in a way that actively reminds them that their racial identity is inferior to their white counterparts (Bullock et al., 2020; Nadal et al., 2021).

**Impact of Stereotypes on Students of Color**

A broad literature has shown that stereotypes have negative impacts on school performance (Madden, 2011; Neal-Jackson, 2020; Steele, 1998), exacerbated stereotype threat (Mosley & Rosenberg, 2007; Smith & Hung, 2008; Spencer et al., 2016), and sense of belonging (Chavous et al., 2008). Stereotypes have been extensively studied over the years across various groups that include but are not limited to socioeconomic, racial, and gender stereotypes.

Solórzano et al. (2000) used critical race theory as the lens to explore racial microaggressions in campus climates, specifically for Black students, identifying the three categories of stereotypes toward students of color: intelligence and educational stereotypes, personality or character types, and physical appearance stereotypes. All of these stereotype categories have been extensively researched across a broad array of literature that continues to pose harm to People of Color and/or affirm the superiority of the white race. African Americans have been deemed as unintelligent or dumb, lazy, living off welfare, sexually promiscuous, and
entertainers (Aronson et al., 2002; Chang & Kleiner, 2003; Gilman, 2013; Reyna, 2000; Sigelman & Tuch, 1997). Eberhardt et al. (2004) also studied how stereotypic associations impact the visual processing of Blacks, often depicting them as “violent and criminals” (p. 876). Collectively, these depictions imply that the use of the Black mind and body is limited and lacks productivity and an ethic to advance by one’s own will.

While stereotypes differ in qualities across all racial and ethnic groups, they similarly and negatively affect how we perceive other people, behave toward them, and burden those affected. Latinos carry many of the same stereotypes as African Americans, while also being cast as illegal immigrants (Chang & Kleiner, 2003; Reny & Manzano, 2016). Asians are stereotyped as nerds or the “model minority” and being good in math and science (Khosam, 2017; Suh et al., 2023; Wong & Halgin 2006). Asians are met with a greater degree of pressure to perform academically, speaking to their intellectual capacity compared to their African American and Latino counterparts who are expected to underperform. Nonetheless, all of these stereotypes have been linked to negative experiences and outcomes, especially in connection to academic ability (Owens & Lynch, 2012) or a misperception of being absolved from problems experienced by other minoritized groups (Witkow et al., 2024).

**Stereotypes That Undermine Black Academic Intellect**

Undercutting Black academic intellect while highlighting pervasive stereotypes to discount the humanity of African Americans has historically been a strategy situated in systemic racism. The concept of *intelligence* has long been studied and is a significant aspect that fuels stereotypes. Some of the most racist images of African Americans that often distract from their intellectual abilities include the *mammy* or an “African American woman housekeeper or nanny who appeared to be obedient, faithful, and nurturing to a White mother and daughter” (Brown
Givens & Monahan, 2005)—a prime example of which is the infamous *Aunt Jemima* syrup bottle (Athnasios, 2021). Another is *Uncle Tom*, a blissfully ignorant slave character from Harriet Beecher Stowe’s 1852 novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Freisinger, 2018), and many other pervasive figures and caricatures that depict Black servitude during the Jim Crow era as a means to grossly justify the mistreatment of African Americans and their need for oversight from white people to protect themselves and others from their own incompetence.

Further, intellectual inferiority was extensively reviewed in Stephen Jay Gould’s (1981) book *The Mismeasure of Man*, in which he outlined the historical underpinnings of scientific racism. European scientists would intentionally skew research results while arguing biological determinism to misrepresent whites as being intellectually superior to Blacks and other People of Color, assuming that “intelligence (or at least a dominant part of it) is a single, innate, heritable, and measurable thing” (Gould, 1981, p. 57). An example of this is the development of the intelligence quotient (IQ) tests, which has since been argued as a biased standardized test that discriminates in race and/or social class (Jensen, 1976; Shuttleworth-Edwards, 2016; Wade, 1979; Wincherts et al., 2010).

Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995) explored the intellectual test performance of African American students on standardized tests. They theorized that Black students may underachieve, in part due to stereotype threat which is defined as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 797). Smith and Hung (2008) found that stereotype threat may further increase when exploring the intersection of a student’s gender and minority group and may affect math scores specifically. This speaks to the compounding patterns of discrimination that students not only experience but also perceive as happening when they internalize their experiences in connection to their race. Collectively, these
stereotypes impede a racial group’s ability to be embraced intellectually, especially in higher education spaces built on the systemically racist foundation to cater to white men.

Solórzano et al. (2000) said “it is important to note that these outward or public stereotypes are usually not socially condoned and their use in the public discourse is rare. However, it is in the private discourse that they manifest themselves in more subtle ways” (p. 10) and in major ways that include school performance (Mosley & Rosenberg, 2007; Salehi et al., 2021; Smith & Hopkins, 2004; Van Herpen et al., 2020); stereotype threat (Chavous et al., 2008; Lewis & Sekaquaptewa, 2016); sense of belonging (Dortch & Patel, 2017; Hussain & Jones, 2021; Johnson et al., 2007); and one’s ability to cope (Shahid et al., 2018).

**Intraracial Stereotypes**

While there is a well-developed literature on *interracial* stereotypes and their effects on Black scholars, few studies have examined how *intraracial* stereotypes affect Black students. Solórzano and Huber (2020) used a similar term, “intragroup,” to speak to racial microaggressions that People of Color experience when combating everyday racism. They made it clear that “when racism is reproduced within Communities of Color…it is because of the historical legacies of racism and perceived white superiority that have shaped our society” (p. 68). This results in internalized racism within the racial group that causes intragroup conflict.

The minimal literature found did not list an array of specific stereotype terms; rather, it defined how People of Color’s intellect is undervalued compared to their white counterparts. This stereotype and source of internalized racism and oppression, although not limited only to Black females, help identify the impact these types of stereotypes have on them when pursuing higher education. As a result, when looking at definitions of what it means to be a Black female scholar, I also read literature that looked at stereotypes experienced by Black females outside of
academia, young Black girls, Black female faculty, and stereotypical depictions in Black films that reinforce these negatively portrayed stereotypes undercutting Black females for desiring and seeking intellectual and/or academic advancement.

Stereotypes of race and gender are still perpetuated from within the Black diaspora that often slant Black excellence by comparing academic achievement to whiteness—fueling racist undertones (Akom, 2008). Further speaking to the intracultural stereotypes of Black female scholars, Tindall et al. (2011) conducted in-depth interviews that pointed to the racial divisiveness within the in-group that are even perpetuated by other Black female college students. From the context of Black sororities, one sorority described another group of sorority women as being “prissy,” “snobby,” and “siddity,” even though all prioritized education as Black females (Tindall et al., 2011). This is an example of how those from within the Black community may subconsciously perpetuate oppressive norms that force Black academic excellence to lean against white status values.

This makes it more difficult for Black scholars, even at a young age, to adjust and feel a sense of belonging among a group of peers who look like her (Leath et al., 2022). These stereotypes that take place from within can be referred to as intragroup or intraracial stereotypes, occurring within a single racial group (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). This is not to be confused with intergroup dynamics, the primary focal point for other studies that focus on stereotype threat existing or occurring between two or more social and/or racial groups (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

As part of their research, Leath et al. (2022) interviewed a third-year African American engineering student who shared a compelling perspective that spoke to the intraracial conflict they experience as a result of stereotypes. She said:
I think I deal with isolation in my own race sometimes. Not to stereotype, but most of my life, I’ve always had strife with other Black girls—just for like, “Oh you think you’re stuck up, and you talk a certain way,” and things like that. (Leath et al., 2022, p. 775)

An example of how a similar in-group stereotype shows up in contemporary media is from Stylist UK (Joshi, 2020), a site which explored the term “Oreo”—perpetuated from within the Black diaspora to visually represent the “too white” narrative, speaking to a Black woman’s outer appearance and implying her inside mirrors whiteness. The harmful effects of these stereotypes speak to Black female college students’ sense of belonging and Black identity constantly being called into question.

Black women consistently face negative stereotypes that speak to racist tropes around their intelligence, particularly their lack thereof, making the journey of pursuing higher education more difficult than for their white counterparts (Porter & Byrd, 2021). Additional stereotypes and burdens toward Black scholars are not as commonly addressed in research because they are perpetuated by the in-group such as “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). African Americans are often scrutinized for “acting white” beginning in adolescence by their close same-race peers and may also be deemed a “teacher’s pet,” a “nerd,” or “weird” (Neal-Barnett et al, 2009). This concept has been extensively reviewed by Bolton and Moniz (1993), Steele (1992), Kunjufu (1988), and others.

Bolton and Moniz (1993) explored how some teens would deliberately fail school for fear of self-fulfilling the “acting white” stereotype pressed upon them by their Black peers. Kunjufu (1988) examined the psychology of young Black boys in academia and even stated, “There are schools that only African-American students attend, there are no White students, and they still say to be smart is to be white” (p. vii). Further, he argued that Black students, contrary to popular depiction and expectation, offer more than their physical and charismatic abilities, but also
possess a great degree of intellect, and with a healthy balance of supportive teachers and parents, coupled with high academic expectations instead of an assumption of failure, scholarly achievements can be widely accepted within the Black peer group (Kunjufu, 1988).

Collectively, Black students are facing scrutiny in both Black and non-Black spaces—a challenging paradox to navigate as their academic pursuits are connected to the acting or speaking white notion as “exclusively associated with favorable conventional behaviors; therefore, ‘acting Black’ is associated with unfavorable behavior” (Michelson & Velasco, 2006, as cited in Webb & Linn, 2016, p. 135; Toldson & Owens, 2010). This ultimately invalidates Black academic intellect in many aspects of their lives in which they share space.

**Historical Underpinnings of Common Stereotypes**

These intraracial stereotypes are embedded within broader historical and social contexts, particularly influencing intraracial stratification that is situated in notions of white supremacy and related interracial stereotypes. An example of how these stereotypes have influenced the Black experience traces back to slavery as mulattoes, fair-skinned persons of mixed white and Black ancestry, were afforded greater status than darker field slaves after having daily contact with whites, forcing stratification in the Black community through systemic design. Even after the Emancipation Proclamation, Keith and Herring (1991) wrote:

Once emancipated, former house servants were better prepared than former field hands to negotiate with whites and to lessen attempts at exploitation by them…. Along with color differences in occupational status, the similarities between whites and mulattoes in physical appearance, speech, dress, and customary behavior reinforced this attitude in the slave population as a whole. Mulattoes, therefore, enjoyed prestige among the darker slaves. Because of this structure of privilege, the slaves viewed the light skin color as a desirable asset and as symbolic of more humane treatment. Black skin and black physical characteristics, on the other hand, were viewed as undesirable and as signs of inferiority. For these reasons, the negative stereotypes associated with “blackness” and the value placed on “lightness” of skin by whites became widely accepted by the slaves. (pp. 762-763)
These racist viewpoints that have stratified the Black community even showed up in Hall’s (1992) study to examine bias among African American skin color, where he found that “apparently, light-skinned African-American college students value lighter skin tones more highly, relative to dark-skin students” (p.484). This theme of colorism and the relationship between gender and racism (Greer et al., 2009) to create in-group divisiveness may be another element of why some Black female college students are stereotyped more from their same-race peers.

**Examples of Intraracial Stereotypes in Contemporary Media**

Limited scholarly research has explored *intraracial* stereotypes in media representation. However, across some of the literature found, stereotyping and discrimination not only are practices from outside of one’s own racial or ethnic group, but they may also be experienced within it (Burke, 2015; Gordon, 2016; Hwang, 2021; Malone, 2018). One study explored intraracial stereotypes of Black women using Black feminist critique to review Tyler Perry films, in which a few of the Black women characters were depicted as some of the stereotypes outlined in this research study. Bvuma’s (2018) case study review of Tyler Perry films included *Madea’s Family Reunion*. Using narrative and thematic analysis, Bvuma cited the depiction of one of Tyler Perry’s characters, Victoria. Victoria was heavily depicted as the self-absorbed, condescending mulatta of the family who arrived at the family reunion by chauffeur in a form-fitting dress, heels, and sunhat, not necessarily dressed for outdoor family barbeque festivities. Upon Victoria’s arrival, Madea, the outspoken matriarch, began to chuckle with other family members, referring to Victoria as *bougee*. Her depiction illustrated “that she was no ‘ordinary’ Black person. She afforded clothes from overseas, and is therefore associated with wealth, perhaps even Whiteness” (p. 53). Undoubtedly, Victoria was a well-off woman who desired the
finer things in life, even expressing the value of education to her grown daughters. Although Victoria clearly made her desire to want a life of status and prestige known, at the core, she also yearned for a life better than what she was exposed to as a child and wanted her adult daughters to be well-educated and marry successful, well-educated men. With that, Bvuma (2018) made the argument that it is necessary to analyze Black films through the lens of Black Feminist Critique, reiterating that feminism is not exclusive to Eurocentric concepts.

While minimal research has addressed how intraracial stereotypes show up in our everyday life, less is known about the impacts of these stereotypes. Based on the general literature on stereotypes, these stereotypes may be expected to have substantive impacts on relationships within the Black community and with Black peers, family members, and faculty, as well as a sense of belonging in academic and non-academic spaces.

**Sense of Belonging**

The need to belong is a fundamental principle of one’s psychological wellness, as this concept has been extensively studied by an array of psychologists including Gregory Walton (2012), Mark Leary (2021), and Roy Baumeister (2016). Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs chart places love and belonging central to the triangular diagram that speaks to a person’s needs for connection. Although people yearn for belonging, it does not guarantee they will be well-received from their counterparts, including some of their same-race peers. Erik Erikson (2017) explored social connections stating, “the individual belonging to an oppressed and exploited minority, which is aware of the dominant cultural ideals but prevented from emulating them, is apt to fuse the negative images held up to him by the dominant majority with his own negative identity” (p. 155). Within the context of this study, marginalized persons may often conform their behavior or language to better fit the ideals of the dominant (white) group.
However, if they are met with messages that invalidate their sense of belonging, such as in the form of stereotypes, the minoritized group may internalize these negative depictions of themselves and perpetuate them within their own racial group.

Baumeister et al. (2016) found that groups have shown to have better and worse conditions than sets of individuals who work alone, validating that meeting the criteria of identity for group membership alone does not mean every exchange will yield positive results or experiences. Nonetheless, as stated by Leary (2021), when a person feels connected to a particular group and both parties mutually desire connectedness, the relational value increases, leading to feelings of acceptance or belonging. Conversely, if a person perceives the relational value as lower than desired, feelings of rejection ensue. Leary further explored relational value, stating:

In most instances, people are excluded when others perceive that they possess a socially undesirable characteristic or behave in an undesired way that lowers their relational value. Yet, occasions also arise in which people are excluded because they possess desirable characteristics. For example, people who are exceptionally attractive, talented, intelligent, or wealthy may be ignored, avoided, or ostracized, either because they pose a threat to the status, acceptance, or self-esteem of other, less impressive individuals or because people assume that people with exemplary characteristics do not wish to associate with commoners and will not be good relational partners. (p. 128)

This may also be applicable to the notion of stereotypes in which people, even within the same racial group, may feel ostracized for having differentiating characteristics that create feelings of divisiveness or rejection within their own racial or ethnic group.

The benefits and detriments of intragroup conflict were examined by Jehn (1995) in a multi-method approach that looked at workgroups and management teams to see how conflict could be helpful to the organization. While several hypotheses were developed, however, two that spoke to intragroup conflict without persons revoking their own membership (specifically in the context of this study in which participants cannot change their race) include: perceived
relationship conflict in groups will be negatively associated with individual performance, and perceived relationship conflict will be negatively associated with group performance.

These two hypotheses may be a good baseline to understand why people experience conflict in the form of stereotypes, as generalizations are cast on them as individuals and as a subgroup within the bigger intragroup (e.g., Black female college students within the broader Black diaspora). While another one of Jehn’s (1995) hypotheses indicates that participants may want to leave their group when they feel dissatisfaction, in other regards, members may still feel motivated to engage with peers from their in-group to enhance their sense of belonging and social connections (Walton et al., 2012). This may lend reason to why individuals will still maintain relationships with people who stereotyped them because, to Maslow’s point, belonging and social connectedness are basic human needs. To that end, even if constantly stereotyped within one’s own racial group, sharing ethnic ties is one of the most immediate characteristics to qualify one’s sense of belonging.

Sense of Belonging in Higher Education

Over time, sense of belonging was further developed in academic settings to explore a students’ “perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers” (Strayhorn, 2018, p. 4). This concept is especially important as a contribution for this study, as stereotypes threaten and often invalidate one’s sense of belonging and identity in select groups (Miles et al., 2020). However, much of the research done on this topic in the higher education setting focuses on sense of belonging primarily from one of two instances—either from a Eurocentric perspective, as much of the research was based out of Europe or in areas where the demographic is primarily
white (e.g., Ahn & Davis, 2020; Crawford et al., 2023; Dias, 2022; Humphrey & Lowe, 2017; Pedler et al., 2022; Van Herpen et al., 2020), or the research examined sense of belonging based on relationships (e.g., faculty, staff, peers) within the college setting specifically (Meeuwisse et al., 2010; Museus et al., 2018; Wilczyńska et al., 2015), disregarding other external relationships that may also fuel students’ sense of belonging while they are enrolled. Nonetheless, a sense of belonging remains a value for students to maintain connectedness in their shared experiences, interests, and racial/ethnic groups (Strayhorn, 2018).

The landscape of much of the literature affirms the reality that the values of higher education institutions are rooted in white supremacy and systemic racism since education was primarily accessible for white, Christian men, intentionally excluding People of Color, especially African American students (Harper et al., 2009). On the other hand, while there is a great degree of literature to explain how sense of belonging affects retention and degree completion rates (Ahn & Davis, 2020; Hoffman et al., 2002, Pedler et al., 2022) and even studies sense of belonging by examining the experiences of minority students (Chen et al., 2021; Cureton & Gravestock, 2019; Duran et al., 2020; Strayhorn, 2018), there is limited research that speaks to the importance of same-race relationships outside of academia that may impact students’ sense of belonging while they are enrolled.

Johnson et al. (2007) found that environmental factors influenced different racial and ethnic groups’ sense of belonging in various ways. This was somewhat addressed by Tinto (1993) as students’ need to integrate in formal academic spaces and informal social systems as a predictive tool to assess their departure from higher education. One of the systems Tinto explored in connection to college persistence was external communities to that of college students:
Individuals who seek to retain past friendships while attending college may find the transition to college especially problematic. In the same sense that external peer groups may hinder social integration in the college, so too may family pressures influence college persistence. The conflict between the expectations of external communities and those of the college may be greater for disadvantaged students. (pp. 62-63)

These external communities are not necessarily limited to friendships and family—a common critique from researchers examining Tinto’s (1993) work in which he stated that the concept of integration is not well defined and suggested that a “subjective sense of integration may be useful for assessing the range of social interactions on campus and their value to particular racial-ethnic groups” (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 326). Given that, more research needs to be conducted to explore the various external communities that may impact college students’ sense of belonging from the broader ethnic and/or racial background that students are part of and the perpetuated stereotypes that may surface from those broader ethnic relationships that invalidate one’s sense of belonging, specifically in academia.

To further clarify Tinto’s (1993) theoretical model of students’ departure, Hurtado and Carter (1997) angled their study to examine the extent to which Latino students’ background characteristics and college experiences contributed to their sense of belonging. Their results suggested that students’ membership outside of class, within religion and social-community organizations, were strongly associated with students’ sense of belonging. However, more research is needed to understand the experiences of minority students and how they adjust to college. Hurtado and Carter (1997) posed numerous considerations for future research. The first was to encourage researchers to develop theories and models to better understand the range of difficulties students face in college. They also recommended providing programs and services to address transitional issues and understand how students resolve transitional dilemmas and their strategies for success, specifically in relation to their communities that are comprised of racially-
ethnically diverse environments. In addition, they emphasized the importance of understanding how students’ memberships in various communities may relate to conformity, cohesion (or marginalization), and successful negotiation of the social and academic interactions in college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). As a primary focus of this study was to explore intraracial stereotypes and how it may impact sense of belonging, it was important to take heed of Hurtado and Carter’s (1997) considerations for future research as related to understanding the experiences of students of color in academia and the challenges they face within their complex racially ethnic communities. This also points to the fact that sharing the same race is only one aspect of connecting with a group and does not necessarily affirm one’s belonging. This leads to another important and less studied aspect of belonging, *sense of exclusion* in which “racial and ethnic identity development, particularly for individuals who fit less well to the group boundaries” (Kim et al., 2010, pp.180-181) is further understood as a perspective of why there is in-group dissonance through stereotypes.

**Sense of Belonging of African American Students in Higher Education**

Existing literature on how Black students’ sense of belonging may be affected was explored in a number of ways which included but were not limited to college persistence (Booker, 2016; Hoffman et al., 2002); retention (Hausmann et al., 2007; Parkes, 1759); and how they cope (Wilczyńska et al., 2015). By contrast, less is known about students’ sense of belonging within their own racial group and within their same-raced academic and non-academic Black relationships, which may impact the ways in which they cope. Therefore, I drew on related research on Black women in higher education and workplace settings as well as among Black peers to identify certain stereotypes or common depictions of Black women, how they managed these tensions, and how intraracial stereotypes impacted their sense of belonging.
Historically, African American women specifically have had to grapple with being viewed as inadequate, intellectually incapable, or feeling out of place in predominantly white higher education spaces, while participating in the unique balancing act of not being Black enough in spaces with People of Color if they express high academic intellect (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009). West et al. (2016) described this parallel: “Black women are hyper visible in terms of the misrecognition of their identities (i.e.: stereotypes) as perceived by higher status racial groups, while also being invisible for any recognition that affirms their identities as hardworking, ambitious, and self-assured” (p. 405). These stereotypes then consistently remind Black female scholars of their Blackness in a primarily negative way.

Maseti’s (2018) autoethnographic research identified the same paradox that stereotypes had on the relationships of Black women in academia. She gave the example of being talked over and interrupted by her white faculty peers in front of her students (Maseti, 2018). She reflected on the challenges of navigating the university space, as she is always conscious of her Blackness since Black intelligence and competence are often undercut by the outgroup as a means of maintaining white privilege. When Black scholars identify this paradox as student affairs educators and professionals, it leads to what Okello’s (2021) narrative inquiry research explored and described as organized anxiety, speaking to anxiety when faced with adversity in white spaces. Black scholars are often navigating white-imposed respectability politics and Henryism (Okello, 2021), coping strategies when exposed to prolonged stress related to social discrimination that results in increased bodily health risks. These racist communicative tools are used to justify systems like slavery and second-class citizenship by citing a few notable Blacks as a means to validate that if they overcame such obstacles and made something of themselves, then all Blacks can do so. Okello (2021) further listened to participants explain how their
experience still resulted in a great deal of racial battle fatigue, despite their academic and professional advancements, and speaking specifically to the exhaustion Black female college students may face as a result of stereotypes.

Black female college students are often left to their own devices in trying to navigate conversations that implicitly and explicitly point out their Black identity, or lack thereof, because of the intersection of their race and gender, while not always being afforded the necessary breathing room to decompress in a safe space from the in-group (greater Black community). Dickens and Chavez (2018) addressed this experience using semi-structured and audiotaped interviews of early-career and college-educated Black women in the United States, who described the need to identity-shift in the workplace to conform in a way that keeps their white counterparts comfortable while defending why they do not fit prevailing stereotypes that include “being a loud and angry Black woman; oversexualization—the Jezebel stereotype; welfare queen; ghetto; and bougie. In each of these stereotypes, race, gender, and class identities intersected, forging a triple identity shifting that these women undergo daily” (p. 768). In the same study, Black women described how altering their language proved to be an empowering and assimilatory act, but still came with “internal conflict associated with being professional, ‘acting White,’ and retaining their true and authentic identities” (Dickens & Chavez, 2018, p. 768). This parallel was also addressed by Haynes (2019) who used Black feminist geography to inform a grounded research methodology, citing Linda Brent’s story idea that academically achieving Black women “find themselves situated in a way that their academic dreams run in juxtaposition to their raced and gendered realities” (p. 1002).

When Black students, specifically women, are not working to conform in predominantly white spaces, they then may feel excluded in Black spaces on- and off-campus. Mwangi (2016)
examined Black international students’ sense of belonging at a historically Black college and university (HBCU) and found that many of the participants still experienced challenges and improvements to their sense of belonging relative to their own perceptions and self-identity as well as their campus environment and interaction. Over time these students often felt a greater sense of belonging as a result of positive campus experiences, but still appeared to see themselves on the periphery of mainstream campus culture. (p. 1028)

With that, Black students can still face in-group divisiveness that can come in the form of stereotypes that invalidate their belonging among their same-race peers. Nonetheless, “more specific to the acting White assumption concerning achievement and racial attitudes and values, findings suggest that self-esteem is a significant and positive predictor of low Eurocentrism” (Spencer et al., 2001, p. 28). Hunter et al. (2019) shared an example of Lexi who described how a sense of responsibility to her community played a role in how she coped with stereotypes from her non-Black counterparts. She said:

I’m the only Black person in my class and I don’t want to fall into the lazy stereotype where we just try to get by just by being in class. You would expect that we would be the party types than the ones who show up for class drunk, but it’s not that way. And I think it’s not that way because we have to prove that we are better than what they expect us to be so I think that’s how race plays into how we achieve in college and how hard we work because we have to work extra hard to get away from those stereotypes. (p. 9)

Essentially, Black students felt a stronger connection and sense of empowerment to their Blackness by pursuing education because of their consistent encounters with white supremacist attitudes that invalidated their intellect. Despite facing in-group stereotypes that would invalidate their racial identity because of their academic pursuits, stereotypes did not have a negative impact on their college experience, but it did lead to the initial distancing from their peers (Mwangi, 2016).

There are a number of ways African Americans may identify and distance themselves within the racial group, as sharing the same race alone does not constitute unity and belonging
within their social relationships. Some in-group identity markers that point to differences instead of commonalities include being monoracial and mixed-raced Blacks, making the distinction from immigrant and native Blacks (Charles et al., 2015), or having or not having a college education. These identifiers may show up within the racial group that result in in-group stereotyping or what Marques et al. (1998) refer to the black sheep effect, which means “if people derogate in-group deviates because these members threaten in-group norms, they should, concomitantly, upgrade out-group deviant members who adhere to in-group norms, because these members legitimize in-group norms” (p. 977). Essentially, if in-group members feel that someone’s behaviors do not best reflect the group, that person is then treated like an outlier and excluded in some way. This is the argument of the present study, in which Black females pursuing a higher education may be cast out from some of their broader Black relationships.

Collectively, the literature shows that intraracial stereotypes have reinforced Black students not feeling a sense of belonging in higher education spaces and, at times, reinforced that Black intellect makes them unlike their same-race peers—neither of which positively affirms Black scholars’ sense of belonging (Newman et al., 2015). To build on this literature and further explore this phenomenon, my research questions identified intraracial stereotypes associated with Black female college students, how these stereotypes have shaped their experiences and relationships and their sense of belonging, and how they cope or manage tensions arising from these stereotypes.

**Impact of Intraracial Stereotypes on Relationships**

An abundance of literature has explored how racial identity gives students a sense of belonging and greater meaning within social relationships (Boston & Warren, 2017; Hunter et al., 2019; Sarsar et al., 2023). In fact, “researchers who are primarily interested in this
phenomenon [intergroup relations] may then, either consciously or inadvertently, see intragroup processes as of limited importance” (Dovidio, 2013, p. 2). However, the general literature on stereotypes may be expected to have substantive impacts on relationships within the Black community and with Black peers, family members, and faculty, as well as a sense of belonging in Black spaces, similar to that in non-Black spaces. If dissonance is not explicitly shown from another Black peer, in some cases, African Americans on the receiving end of stereotypes may internalize the stereotype depictions forced upon them (Steele, 1997). However, internalizing stereotypes does not necessarily address what happens with the relationships between the stereotype accuser and the person being stereotyped.

Although not directly focused on stereotypes perpetuated from within the same racial group, Cortland et al. (2017) argued that disadvantaged racial groups who experience similar forms of oppression and stereotypes may actually find solidarity from shared experiences through intergroup relations. Shelton and Richeson (2006) used a daily report methodology to assess minority groups’ attitudes and shared experiences based on their interactions with white people, which often implicated harm on ethnic minorities. They found that the more negative ethnic groups’ racial attitudes were toward white people, the less positive their interactions would be with white friends and roommates. This may lend a reason for why People of Color have a preference in maintaining relationships with those of their same racial group (Levy, 2000) or other People of Color, even when faced with stereotypes, as doing so still promotes a more affirmed sense of belonging in their ethnic group or classification than outside of it. Myers and Williamson (2001) explored the concept of race talk and how it can show up within the same racial group when someone from the group was deemed not ethnic enough:
[B]oundary maintenance, like racial characterization, reinforced an ideal-type person of color. However, this type was appealing rather than demeaning. To fit, people had to conform to a standard of behavior and appearance. Those who did not ‘measure up’ were told they were not being true to their culture. (p. 20)

Myers and Williamson’s (2001) study cited the highest incident of this self-righteous racism among Latino/as. Similarly, Blacks were seen as “selling out to the Whites” (Myers & Williamson, 2001, p. 20) if their behaviors spanned outside the expected boundaries of their racial group—both instances which affirm that intragroup dissonance is rooted in systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes. Since no racial group is a monolith, differentiation of needs within the hierarchy may cause dissonance in same-race ethnic relationships. As Dovidio (2013) said:

Members of the different subgroups will tend to have different needs and motivations depending on their position in the hierarchy. Members of groups higher in the hierarchy tend to be motivated to support the status quo; those lower in the hierarchy (i.e., with disadvantaged status) are typically more motivated for change in the social structure. Therefore, the interplay between these two opposing forces, preservation versus change of the status quo, will be evident in most hierarchical social structures. (p. 9)

This may pose a challenge in same-race relationships if anyone in the racial group is aspiring to be regarded in other ways, such as obtaining their education. This balancing act was explored by Tatum (1997) who pinpointed why all the Black kids sat together in the cafeteria; as she found, “resisting the stereotypes and affirming other definitions of themselves is part of the task facing young Black women in both White and Black communities” (p. 216). However, “Black students turn to each other for the much needed support they are not likely to find anywhere else” (p. 217), which speaks to the importance that Blacks maintain relationships with their same-race peers for an affirmed sense of belonging and as a means of coping.

Although the literature was minimal on intraracial stereotypes and the impact they may have on same-race relationships, what was available revealed that race was often the primary
aspect that grounded people in their relationships and was a motivator for why these relationships were maintained to affirm one’s belonging in stronger ways than in spaces with peers of a different race.

**Impact of Same-Race Relationships on Academic Experience**

There is an abundance of literature on cross-race and same-race relationships, especially related to students’ academic experience. Across the literature, there is an assumption that same-race relationships are automatically more positive and affirming (Connell et al., 1994; Glass, 2018; Ma, 2003; McGee & Spencer, 2015; Tatum, 1997) in academic settings. However, this study interrogated this assumption by seeking a nuanced understanding of how Black college students experience same-race relationships.

Literature that was not specific to females was explored to speak to the Black experience and the impact that learned racist stereotypes have on Black language and intellect in academic settings, based on their relationships with non-Black and Black peers. These negatively depicted stereotypes prompt internalized oppression that ultimately shuns Black academic identity and reinforces how Black students do not feel a sense of belonging in academic places—a sense that is often learned at a young age and later impacts their relationships in adulthood in various settings, including higher education (Bailey et al., 2011).

Doss and Gross (1992) conducted a study in which African American college students listened to audiotapes of Black males discussing various situations. The audio model was instructed to speak standard English (SE), commonly associated with white standard English, and Black English (BE), often associated with ghetto and improper usage. Using the Interpersonal Evaluation Inventory questionnaire, a survey designed to measure interpersonal attraction and likability in social relationships, Black student participants rated the SE model as
“more likable and more competent than the BE model” (p. 52). Although this study was not specific to Black females, it validated that even from within the Black diaspora, language and education have been used to create dissonance in Black relationships.

Thus, intracultural disconnect is learned at a very young age. Williams and Davidson (2009) conducted a study with seven 1-year-old African American children. The findings showed that even young Black children had more negative stereotypes and adjectives to describe other darker-toned African American children, compared to images of European American children. These issues undoubtedly carry into adulthood, as intraracial divisiveness impacts how Black students view their own race, identity, validity, and sense of belonging in higher education (Newman et al., 2015). Although Newman et al. (2015) focused on Black men’s perceptions of a sense of belonging with faculty members, they also pointed out the importance of understanding Kimberlé Crenshaw’s (2013) theory of intersectionality, which explored the intricacies and interconnectedness of multiple forms of exclusion. In the present study, the focus is on the intraracial discrimination of being Black and female, while also further exploring Black Feminist Critique to understand better the Black female experience (Crenshaw, 1989).

Impact of Same-Race Relationships on Coping Strategies

In many instances, students of color have coped with exclusion by discrimination (Montoro et al., 2021), racial microaggressions (Warner, 2019), identity (MacNear & Hunter, 2023), and other rejection tactics. Some of these measures to cope included finding communal spaces to affirm their belonging (Johnson et al., 2007; McBeath et al., 2018); seeking religious support (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006; Wilczyńska et al., 2015); and ignoring and/or avoiding (Jacob et al., 2023) situations that cause unpleasant feelings, to name a few. Although this study focused on potential dissonance experienced by same-race peers through stereotypes,
it does not ignore the abundance of literature that informs how relationships may help support a sense of belonging as a means to better cope, increase resilience, and improve academic outcomes (Brooms, 2020; Krause-Levy et al., 2021; Lambert et al., 2013; Nowicki, 2008).

Given the barriers associated with being Black and female, a broad literature has focused on African American women’s means of coping while situated in a society that causes them to experience a low sense of belonging, especially in predominantly white academic settings. Some of the means of coping for Black women has been through mentorship and fostering a peer support network within institutions that were not built for the success of minorities (Fries-Britt & Snider, 2015; Kelly & Fries-Britt, 2022, 2024). Opportunities to connect may improve the academic and socioemotional outcomes of Black students, as these connections affirm belonging in academic spaces that often invalidate it (Graham & McClain, 2019).

Even outside of academia, African Americans have longed to use communal spaces to affirm their belonging. Some of these spaces include churches (Lewis-Coles & Constantine, 2006) and social gatherings to listen to jazz to connect one another and cope through the shared Afro American experience (Kofsky, 1971). The power of understanding the unique intersection of being Black and female led Neal-Barnett et al. (2011) to explore how community spaces with same-race and same-sex peers through sister circles are an effective strategy to cope, specifically for Black women experiencing anxiety. This illustrated the importance of fusing culturally relevant viewpoints with those that share the same or similar experiences as a strategy to better care for the psychological well-being of the Black body.

If anything, as African Americans encounter stereotypes from their non-Black and Black counterparts, a theme across the broad literature is that African Americans best manage tensions by increasing their interactions with more Black people who also share additional commonalities
and experiences. This coping strategy validates that their Black identity is important, even if met with stereotypes that may invalidate their Blackness, but additional forms of connection are also necessary to better affirm one’s sense of belonging, as this present study examined.

Conversely, there are lesser studied instances in which Black students are unable to cope within their own racial group. Since stereotypes are often framed from the scope of prejudice and discrimination experienced from peers of a different race, “it is not tenable to suggest that racism can be perpetuated within and among nondominant racial groups, as persons of color do not possess the same degree of power to oppress others as do members of racially dominant groups” (Jones, 1972, as cited by Greer et al., 2015, p. 568). Clark (2004) contextualized perceived racism, stating, “a member of a given ethnic group may hold prejudiced attitudes and exhibit discriminatory behaviors toward members of a different ethnic group (intergroup racism) or toward members of the same ethnic group (intragroup racism)” (p. 507). For that reason, Greer et al. (2015) wanted to understand intragroup race-related stressors on academic performance and overall levels of perceived stress for African American students. They found that exposure to intragroup racial difficulty is a source of stress for African American students at predominantly white colleges and universities and may influence the consequences of exposure, which revealed that disengagement strategies such as alcohol, substance use, and other mental and behavioral strategies to avoid from their problems was the strongest predictor of academic performance (Greer et al., 2015). Clark et al. (1999) also hypothesized that intergroup and intragroup racism can play a significant role in high mortality and morbidity rates in the African American population, given the impact that stress can have on their biological, psychological, and social well-being. This was due to the fact that even among Black peers, African Americans may still perceive racism in a way that prompts bodily stress. Years later, Clark (2004) continued to harp
on the notion that the stressors associated with intragroup racism may lead to a more complete understanding of health differentials among Blacks, not only from the context of race but also of gender, youth, and adults.

Greer and Brown (2011) examined the stressors and coping processes of African American students at a predominately white institution (PWI) and historically black college. They found that a higher use of problem-oriented efforts to address minority status stressors increased overall levels of stress as opposed to alleviating stress. Minority status stressors generally entail difficulties that are persistent and pervasive (e.g., racial discrimination, intragroup challenges) and are likely to be perceived as beyond one’s ability to control. (p. 35)

To that end, even when noble efforts are made to address inequities in race and discrimination, they often result in greater emotional and psychological stress for African Americans, which may be exacerbated on college campuses. However, the implication was that Black students had better coping strategies than participants at the predominantly white college or university (PWCU) (Greer & Chwalisz, 2007). Although Black students reported higher levels of intragroup and environmental stressors at their PWI compared to those of participants at a historically Black college or university (HBCU), it did not completely absolve Black students from having some degree of intragroup stress at their predominantly Black institution. Given this, more research is needed on intragroup and/or intraracial stereotypes, relationships, and means of coping, especially within the context of stereotypes. Greer et al. (2015) spoke to this as one of their implications for future research is as follows:

For African American students who pursue therapy as a way to address life challenges, mental health professionals on college campuses should assist students in coping with sources of racial difficulty that occur among same-race peers as well as with peers of other racial and ethnic groups. In particular, incidences of intragroup racial difficulty should be validated and conceptualized as experiences that can contribute to stress and potentially other adverse psychological consequences. (p. 581)
This present research study uniquely explored intraracial stereotypes in contrast to the broader literature on interracial stereotypes to expand on the limited literature on this specific topic. From this, the study looked at sense of belonging in the context of same-race relationships and communities, rather than in purely cross-relationships and campus environments. Further, this study sought to understand unique coping strategies in this context, especially in spaces where there is a presumption of belonging because one is part of the same racial or ethnic group.

**Conceptual Framework**

To understand how race and gender impact Black females who have pursued higher education even from the in-group (the Black diaspora), I drew on key conceptual frameworks from the literature to guide my analysis. Specifically, I identified a theory of action through which intraracial stereotypes may influence Black female college students’ relationships, sense of belonging, and coping strategies. This theory of action is situated within and driven by the broader theoretical underpinnings of Black Feminist Thought.

**Black Feminist Critique/Thought**

As the foundation and context of my study, I drew on Black Feminist Critique to better hone the experience of African American college students. Given the broader nature of stereotypes being used as a tool to generalize marginalized groups, it was important to consider a framework that resisted intersecting oppressions, even when perpetuated from within the same racial group. Black feminist scholarship draws on Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Intersectionality perspectives. The pioneering theorists of CRT include Derrick Bell (1970), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), Patricia Williams (1987), Richard Delgado (1992), and Mari Matsuda (1993). Some of the first scholars to apply CRT to education included James A. Banks (2007) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (2021). Collectively, “CRT and black feminism are connected
as they think in and between ‘race’, gender and other identities; acknowledgment and understanding of the simultaneity of oppressions” (Rankin-Wright et al., 2019, p. 1116). The foundation of Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is an important theoretical framework for this study because, as Collins (1989) stated:

Black women’s political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups. The unpaid and paid work that Black women perform, the types of communities in which they live, and the kinds of relationships they have with others suggest that African-American women, as a group, experience a different world than those who are not Black and female. Second, these experiences stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning that material reality. (pp. 747-748)

Black female college students experience dissonance not only from within the Black community in which they share the same skin color, but also from the out-group who may regard them as intellectually inferior because of their Blackness and gender. This speaks to the double-edged sword of intersectional disparities and struggles that Black female college students face to assimilate in the in- and out-group because of these stereotypes as related to their pursuit of higher education. I applied BFT as a theoretical approach to this greater conceptual framework, which explained how Black women’s “experiences and identities are inextricably linked; their socialization must be understood through the system(s) in which they are situated” (Porter et al., 2020, p. 253).

Theory of Action

I developed a theory of action guiding my study and illustrating the assumptions and expected mechanisms underlying this analysis. Figure 2.1 positions the Black female college student experience with intraracial stereotypes (RQ1) in the broader issue that has motivated these stereotypes—systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes. These stereotypes may then influence how Black female college students have to navigate their relationships with some of
their Black peers (RQ2), whether their sense of belonging is affirmed (RQ3), and how they have to manage these tensions and/or cope (RQ4).

**Figure 2.1**

*Figure 2.1: A Conceptual Understanding of Intraracial Stereotypes Experienced by Black Female College Students*

As reflected in Figure 2.1, there are two gray boxes. The first box (top left) outlines interracial stereotypes, which are generalizations experienced by Black female college students from their non-Black counterparts. These stereotypes may then influence their relationships with non-Black peers and non-Black faculty, as reflected in the second gray box. These boxes were grayed out because interracial stereotypes are not the intended focus for this research study. This study addressed *intraracial* stereotypes, generalizations of Black female college students experienced by their Black counterparts. However, intraracial stereotypes cannot be effectively called out without acknowledging their grounding in broader *interracial* stereotypes because of
the underlying connections to systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes that also show up in stereotypes perpetuated from within the Black racial group, as indicated by the first downward arrow that addresses this study’s first research question identifying the specific intraracial stereotypes communicated to Black female college students.

These stereotypes may then influence the quality of their relationships (RQ2) (Campbell-Montalvo et al., 2022; Daoud et al., 2018) with their Black counterparts (e.g., faculty, peers, community, family). Although this study hypothesized that intraracial stereotypes impact Black relationships and participants’ sense of belonging (RQ3), this concept remains consistent with broader literature that explains how interracial stereotypes and relationships can influence one’s sense of belonging (Atabongwoung, 2022; Campbell-Montalvo et al., 2022). In other instances, participants may have been indifferent toward intraracial stereotypes in certain relationships, acknowledging that some of their Black counterparts’ limited understanding of how stereotypes perpetuated from within the same racial group are rooted in broader systemic and inherently racist philosophies—to minimize Black academic intellect.

Black female college students may then have to manage these relational tensions that stem from stereotypes (RQ4), invalidating their sense of belonging (RQ3), creating pressures to conform and/or affirm one’s Blackness in some of their intraracial relationships. The literature makes clear that coping strategies can be positive or negative in terms of longer relational impacts (Czopp et al., 2015; Major et al., 1998). When Black female college students’ sense of belonging in Black spaces is impacted, they may have to further manage these tensions (RQ4) that stem from not feeling completely accepted because of their pursuit of higher education. For example, it is possible that this may influence how they cope by ignoring, codeswitching, laughing off stereotypical remarks, disengaging, or isolating from their Black counterparts who
initiate such stereotypes. This ties into the broader scope of historically racist principles that convey the message that Blacks are intellectually inferior, given that postsecondary education was intended to advance and grant access to white, Anglo-Saxon men (Clancy & Goastellec, 2007) and exclude others, particularly women (Graham, 1978), and further, African Americans (Wechsler & Diner, 2022).

Since the intersectional Black female college student experience cannot thoroughly be encompassed under one theory, it is important to understand the intricate nature of their experiences through the lens of additional theories. Sense of belonging theory was also explored to interconnect with Black Feminist Critique when considering the significance of how Black female college students interact in relationships.

Sense of belonging refers to racial group membership and the feelings associated with being marginalized. Hunter et al. (2019) specifically addressed these theories of Black college students’ sense of belonging by stating:

It is reasonable to expect that there is overlap in the articulation of sense of belonging and belonging to academic institutions with respect to being a valued and accepted member of the group. It is also important to consider areas where overlap does not exist because of Black individuals’ shared cultural values and the experience of racial discrimination in the US. (p. 952)

At the core, broader interracial stereotypes fueled by white people toward African Americans have left another side effect of racism that has been limitedly researched—how negative generalizations pertaining to Black academic intellect have created in-group divisiveness that still conveys a message of white superiority by maintaining and perpetuating Black intellectual inferiority via stereotypes. Collectively, these theories, with Black Feminist Critique as the primary framework, served as the lens to understand the experiences Black female college students face with intraracial stereotypes. In this study, I hypothesized that these
Stereotypes are fueled by both the in- and out-group as a direct result of systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes, which may influence Black female college students’ relationships, sense of belonging, and ability to cope.
Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black female college students when faced with intraracial stereotypes. To explore this purpose, my study addressed four research questions:

1. What intraracial stereotypes are experienced by Black female college students?
2. How have these intraracial stereotypes shaped their experiences and relationships with Black faculty, Black peers, family members, and the Black community?
3. How do intraracial stereotypes about Black female college students shape their sense of belonging?
4. How do Black female college students manage tensions arising from intraracial stereotypes?

To answer these questions, I utilized a phenomenological study design, drawing on focus group data. A phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study’s research questions as it allows for the exploration of shared experiences and perspectives (Salmela & Nagatsu, 2017; Szanto, 2018; Van Manen, 2017) among Black female college students, fostering a collective understanding of intraracial stereotypes. While understanding how many participants expressed similar experiences within each focus group can offer some degree of understanding, this study analyzed how often themes showed up across focus groups because consensus or disagreement cannot be assumed or counted at the individual level. The aim is not generalizability; rather, focus groups are intended to generate discussion and meaning-making and are more culturally responsive to best understand participants’ experiences, which quantification cannot best explore to the depth that participants may respond, depending on the discussion dynamics. Furthermore,
focus groups range in size, which could also affect how often or little participants engage in the shared space. To support this notion, Nyumba et al. (2018) stated “the most compelling reason for using focus group discussion is the need to generate discussion or debate about a research topic that requires collective views and the meanings that lie behind those views (including their experiences and beliefs)” (p. 28). To that end, Nyumba et al. (2018) also stated, “focus group discussion provides depth and insight, but cannot produce useful numerical results, hence must not be used where statistical data are required” (p. 28). Table 3.1 reflects how many participants were part of each focus group which may impact how frequently or minimally the number of participants spoke about specific experiences.

Table 3.1

*Study Participants in Focus Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Site and Participant Recruitment

The Southern California region was selected as the research setting, given its convenient access to an abundance of 4-year institutions in the area. This geographic region further spoke to my experiences and positionality as the primary investigator who also attended a 4-year and graduate institution in Southern California. The sampling method used for this study was purposive sampling, given the homogeneity of Black female college students’ similar characteristics and experiences to explore shared perspectives about intraracial stereotypes. With that, I contacted multiple higher education institutions, specifically their Black student centers, to help disseminate my recruitment flyer to their students. I also contacted their institutions’ research boards under the advisement of the Black student center and/or cultural center point of contact to confirm if additional research permissions (e.g., not identifying the specific institution’s name in my dissertation) were required before distributing the recruitment flyer at their site. As an additional measure, with permission from the select Black resource centers, I visited four campuses (two Universities of California and two California State Universities) to recruit participants organically. I sat in the centers for a few hours and spoke to any Black female college students who came into the resource center about the purpose of my study, and asked if they would be willing to participate. Upon agreeing, I placed them in the focus group that best fit their schedule.

I also distributed my research flyer online via social media, specifically Black Facebook groups. Any respondents who reached out to be part of the focus group and could not generate proof of enrollment or communicate using a student email address from a Southern California 4-year institution were automatically excluded from participating. Any inquirer who did not have a valid phone number at the time of inquiry was also excluded, as a valid phone number was
necessary to confirm they met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study and to be reached for potential follow-up questions after their participation in the focus group.

A confirmation email was sent to participants who fit the criteria with their selected focus group date, time, and link to the electronic consent form (made with Qualtrics). I confirmed that participants completed the consent form before the start of every focus group. The \( n = 31 \) participants consisted of 22 Black female college students enrolled across four of the Cal State Universities (CSUs) in Southern California, and nine participants enrolled at two Southern California Universities of California (UCs). The participants’ majors across multiple disciplines included but were not limited to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) fields, art, business administration, law, creative writing, Spanish, and African American and/or ethnic studies. All interviewees’ names were changed to pseudonyms in this study to protect their privacy and confidentiality.

To ensure participants met the research criteria (18 years of age, Black female, enrolled in a 4-year institution in Southern California), all email communications related to the study had to come from their institutionally issued student email address. All participants received a $10 Amazon e-gift card that was also sent to their student email address immediately following their designated focus group. This was an additional operational measure to clarify the channel through which the incentive would be sent that also ethically affirmed their student status and receipt of the incentive based on being a presently enrolled student with current access to their student email address.

**Data Collection**

This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted with in-depth semi-structured 90-minute focus groups via Zoom with Black females over the age of 18, who were enrolled in
4-year undergraduate institutions in Southern California. According to Powell and Single (1996), “a focus group is a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research” (p. 499). Focus groups were the best suited method for this study as this format helped facilitate in-depth discussions that could uncover common themes and variations in how stereotypes influence relationships, sense of belonging, and coping strategies. Thus, focus groups would provide a holistic view of the participants’ lived experiences within the broader sociocultural context, allowing me to build on and make meaning of their responses with additional questions as themes emerged within the focus groups. Focus groups were better suited for this study instead of one-on-one semi-structured interviews because they provided participants with the opportunity to further validate their own experiences by hearing from others who shared similar experiences. Moreover, interactions were generated that allowed participants to build on each other’s thoughts as well as disagree; this is especially useful when talking about the experience of stereotypes because they can be implicit at times. Lastly, focus groups were better suited for this study as they fostered a more culturally responsive approach, given the collectivist versus individual nature of Black culture and the importance of creating spaces to engage in these discussions.

All focus groups were audio-recorded for transcription purposes only. The recorded files were stored on a secure password-protected computer to which only I, the researcher, had access. The files are scheduled to be destroyed 1 year after research publication. To further protect confidentiality, the participants’ names were changed and referred to as pseudonyms for clarity of who said what.
**Sampling Approach**

Eight focus groups were held via Zoom for this study. The goal was to include six to eight individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Hennink and Kaiser’s (2022) empirical data, four to eight focus group discussions are acceptable with relatively homogeneous populations and narrowly defined objectives to reach saturation. For this reason, I intentionally hosted the highest number of focus groups, as I was able to reach saturation given the common nature of intellect-related stereotypes and microaggressions experienced by Black female college students and no new themes emerged around the fourth focus group and beyond. To understand these experiences, the type of questions for the interview protocol included participants identifying and defining specific stereotype terms they heard in connection to their intellect or pursuit of higher education; a description of who they heard these stereotypes from; and how these stereotypes impacted their relationships, sense of belonging, and coping strategies (see interview protocol in Appendix A). The interview protocol also prompted participants to explain what they believed was the underlying reason for stereotypes—most of the focus groups identified *racism* as the root cause. Even when participants did not express a specific stereotype term, they all spoke to the experience of having their intellectual capacity and/or ability verbally or nonverbally minimized in non-Black and Black spaces.

**Protocol Matrix**

The following matrix was used to ensure that my interview protocol aligned with and addressed the four research questions and the broader conceptual framework (see Table 3.2). My interview approach was inductive and designed to address the underlying reason(s) why these intraracial stereotypes are perpetuated (see Appendix A for the complete interview protocol).
Table 3.2

Alignment of Research Questions with Conceptual Framework and Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Main Construct</th>
<th>Sub-construct</th>
<th>Interview Question(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1</td>
<td>Intraracial stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 3a, 3b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interracial stereotypes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2</td>
<td>Intraracial stereotypes</td>
<td></td>
<td>3, 3a, 3b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2</td>
<td>Sense of Belonging; Relationships</td>
<td>Systemic Racism/White Supremacy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Effects on sense of self</td>
<td>3,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 2</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black peers</td>
<td></td>
<td>5, 8, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black faculty</td>
<td></td>
<td>8, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black community</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 3</td>
<td>Sense of Belonging</td>
<td></td>
<td>4, 5, 6, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ 4</td>
<td>Coping Strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pilot Study

To explore my research questions and test my interview protocol, I completed a pilot study which included five Black female college students in my academic network. I conducted in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews via Zoom between 1-1.5 hours with each participant. These interviews helped me explore the specific intragroup/intraracial stereotype terms used to describe high academic-achieving Black female college students, what Black women described as the root cause of these stereotypes, the impact these stereotypes had on their sense of belonging, and how they managed these tensions in their relationships.

The interviewees’ responses from my pilot study affirmed that my interview protocol questions supported my understanding of the intraracial stereotype phenomenon experienced by Black female college students. The findings indicated that Black female college students encountered such stereotypes, which impacted their Black relationships, sense of belonging, and ability to cope, specifically in Black spaces. My dissertation expanded on these findings and added to the gap in the literature about stereotypes perpetuated from within the Black diaspora and how they are situated in systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes.

Coding and Analysis

Analytic memoing (Birks et al., 2008; Mihas, 2021) was done after every focus group to identify larger themes and to act as a reference tool to better contextualize the primary takeaways from each discussion. I then thoroughly reviewed misheard words, corrected typos, and manually transcribed any portion of the transcript that Zoom was unable to translate effectively to ensure the accuracy of research participant’s remarks. Additional memos were written as the meanings of each code emerged from the participants. I inductively precoded the first focus group, which helped outline the coding scheme for future focus groups. I then created a codebook (Saldaña,
2021) using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software based on the inductively determined
codes, grouping them into categories based on participants’ descriptions and evoked meanings or
expressions to ensure that all needed codes were generated. The focus groups were coded
thematically based on Black female college students’ experiences with intraracial stereotypes. I
used the codebook deductively for the remaining focus groups and added inductive codes as new
concepts emerged. As new concepts arose, they were retroactively applied to all transcripts as
appropriate during a secondary thematic analysis.

The final codebook had seven parent codes that included: stereotypes, relationships,
sense of belonging, reasons/rationale (sensemaking) for stereotypes, effects on sense of self,
coping strategies/supports, and value of higher education. A total of 42 child codes fell across the
seven parent codes that included, but were not limited to, intraracial stereotypes, family
relationships, dissonance stereotypes created within the broader Black community, feeling
unwelcome, white supremacist attitudes, media perpetuation, isolation, codeswitching,
mentorship, and family pressure to pursue higher education. Table 3.3 presents a simplified
codebook; see Appendix B for the complete codebook.

These analysis strategies gave me an opportunity to assess the raw and secondary data
quickly to identify emerging themes that connected to my broader research questions in order to
understand the phenomenon of intraracial stereotypes, their impact on Black female college
students, and how these stereotypes are rooted in broader systemic issues. This connected to this
study’s theoretical framework, Black Feminist Critique, centralizing the stereotype phenomenon
of Black females’ experiences of the intersection of their race, gender, and academic status.
### Table 3.3

**Simplified Codebook Outlining Parent and Child Codes for This Research Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Child Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stereotypes</strong></td>
<td>• Interracial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intraracial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>• Effects of stereotypes on relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Other intraracial college/academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Other interracial college/academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dissonance stereotypes create within broader Black community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sense of Belonging</strong></td>
<td>• Welcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unwelcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Academic spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Non-academic spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reasons/Rationale (Sensemaking) for Stereotypes</strong></td>
<td>• History/policy/legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• White supremacist attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of knowledge in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Media perpetuation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Internalized racist beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Generational norms/perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Jealousy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects on Sense of Self</strong></td>
<td>• Social anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Not affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Questioning Black identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ambition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Selling out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Laugh it off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Disengage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Motivator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ignore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Downplay achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Code switching/conforming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mentorship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Address comment/stereotype</td>
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<td>• Black peer spaces</td>
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<td>• Support from family and friends</td>
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<td>• Yearn for connection</td>
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<td>• Seek solidarity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Value of Higher Education</strong></td>
<td>• Family pressure</td>
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49
Limitations and Approaches to Ensure Validity

Of course, there are limitations to the generalizability of these findings due to the sampling approach and methods. First, the sample was located within Southern California, which may differ in important ways from other geographic regions. Therefore, these findings are most relevant to students in this region, although some of their experiences are likely shared with students nationally. Second, the focus group methods employed used self-reported measures of experience from students. Therefore, the nature of this study should be understood as descriptive and exploratory.

Despite these limitations, I took steps to ensure the validity of my data collection and analysis. First, I was attentive to researcher bias. While positionality as a Black woman provides greater access and understanding to students’ experiences and perspectives, I was mindful of potentially influencing the direction of student discussion. I used open-ended focus group questions to elicit authentic responses from students. Further, a focus group structure provided a space for rich discussions among participants who may not have known each other but shared similar experiences, affirming the phenomenon of intraracial stereotypes associated with Black females’ pursuit of higher education. This helped counter some of my researcher bias as focus groups “allow the members of the target population to express their ideas in a spontaneous manner that is not structured according to the researcher’s prejudices” (Bertrand et al., 1992, p. 199). In the analysis, I was careful to use a primarily inductive approach to allow student voice, rather than my expectations, to direct the findings. To ensure validity, I engaged in thorough memoing after each focus group to capture emergent themes and coded using deductive and inductive codes until saturation was reached and no new information emerged.
Researcher Positionality

I am a first-generation Black female college and graduate student, raised by a single Black mother who held education to a high standard. Although my mother and father did not obtain a college degree, I was always taught that education was the “ticket out of poverty” and that “no one could take it away from me.” Following suit, I actively pursued higher education as a means of expanding my opportunities. However, in doing so, I noticed a stark parallel in having support from my Black peers as a result of pursuing higher education, while also being met with negative remarks perpetuated from within the Black community that depicted me as believing myself to be better than my same-race counterparts because of obtaining an education. Some of these remarks included being siddity, bougee, high maintenance, snooty, or acting and/or speaking White—stereotypes implying that my academic pursuit was to become more white and less Black. These negative associations within the Black community acted as the driving force for why I focused on this topic for my study, taking note of the impact stereotypes have had on my relationships with Black counterparts, how it affected my sense of belonging and ability to cope, and, more importantly, how I can address this under-researched intraracial stereotype topic which, at its core, is another ploy rooted in systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes.

Ethical Considerations

I obtained approval from the CGU Institutional Review Board to distribute my research flyer and conduct focus groups via Zoom. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, all files were kept secure on a password-protected computer to which only I, the researcher, had access. The files are scheduled to be destroyed 1 year after research publication. Also, given that focus groups cannot guarantee anonymity, at the start of each focus group, I asked that the
participants respect the privacy of their focus group peers and refrain from sharing anything they heard within their focus group.
Chapter 4: Findings

The findings are organized by the study’s research questions, with attention to the prevalence of themes emerging across focus groups. This study explored Black female college students’ experiences of intraracial stereotypes that may have impacted their relationships (academic and non-academic) within the Black community by way of pursuing higher education. However, these stereotypes did not negatively impact their academic resilience, as none of the participants described wanting to give up when met with these stereotypes. When faced with these stereotypes, participants were able to identify an array of reasons why these negative remarks exist and persist, thoroughly pointing to their embeddedness in broader systemic and white supremacist attitudes. Although these stereotypes may have had some positive, negative, and/or neutral effects on their sense of self, many of the participants felt more inclined to align with other Black peers who understood the demands of higher education. Many of them found greater community with their Black peers at their predominantly white institutions, further affirming their sense of belonging, their means of coping, and their resilience to persist for the greater advancement of Black people.

Research Question 1

What intraracial stereotypes are experienced by Black female college students?

The foundation of this study was, first, to understand the types of stereotypes experienced by Black female college students. I determined the source of the stereotypes, which consisted of *interracial stereotypes* (stereotypes perpetuated between different racial or ethnic groups toward Black female college students) and *intraracial stereotypes* (stereotypes perpetuated within a single race and/or group of people or those of the same race of Black females). To reiterate, the purpose of this study focused on stereotypes perpetuated from within the Black community;
however, these stereotypes were often made in comparison to stereotypes perpetuated from non-
Black peers, affirming the systemic and inherently racist underpinning of intraracial stereotypes
in connection to interracial stereotypes.

The concept of interracial stereotypes came up 12 times across all eight focus groups in
which participants shared similar experiences of feeling out of place and dissonance between
themselves and their non-Black counterparts. This was often attributed to their intersection of
being both Black and female. Twenty-eight intraracial stereotypes (generalizations perpetuated
from within the Black diaspora) were analyzed across seven of the eight focus groups. The
eighth focus group (specifically Focus Group 2) did not identify any specific stereotype terms as
the participants from the other seven focus groups did. However, they alluded to consistent
experiences with intraracial stereotypes from the broader Black community, primarily from those
who did not pursue higher education.

**Intraracial Stereotypes Connection to Whiteness**

Two key categories of intraracial stereotypes emerged from the focus groups—
stereotypes centered around perceived white superiority and stereotypes centered around
mimicking or embodying whiteness. For the first category, all eight focus groups described these
stereotypes as “thinking you’re better than us” and being “bougie,” “stuck up,” “uppity,” or
“high maintenance.” This classification of intraracial stereotypes targeted Black female college
students for their academic efforts by Black peers who subconsciously or covertly perpetuated
the historically racist basis of education, specifically higher education, which was intended and
only granted access to white males, who are part of the “superior” race. For example, Jamie said:

I think a stereotype is that Black women who go for higher education are like ‘bougie’
and they want to be better than like the rest of their family I guess by pursuing higher
education and trying to achieve something different than what their family has done if
people in their family haven’t gone to college.
The term *bougie*, also spelled and often used synonymously with *boujee*, has French origins. Wallerstein (1988) stated:

> In English, we tend to avoid the term ‘bourgeois’, preferring in general the locution ‘middle class’ (or classes). It is a small irony that despite the vaunted individualism of Anglo-Saxon thought, there is no convenient singular form for ‘middle class(es)’. (p. 91)

Further, “the one thing the new middle classes can offer their children, now that they can no longer bequeath a past (or at least are finding it increasingly difficult to do so), is privileged access to the ‘better’ educational institutions” (Wallerstein, 1988, p. 105). As the collective messaging of higher education is that it has historically been a privilege for the white middle and upper class, anyone who pursues an education outside of this phenotype may be met with stereotypes that assimilate their intellect to whiteness.

For the second category, seven of the focus groups alluded to or explicitly expressed how intraracial stereotypes centered around *mimicking or embodying whiteness*, with descriptors such as being “whitewashed,” a “white girl,” or “talking or acting white.” As with the first classification of intraracial stereotypes, there was still a direct link to whiteness; however, these stereotypes were explicit and overt verbal callouts to white superiority. One example of this was from Olivia, who said, “It’s like when you’re talking and you’re seen as talking too proper or something you sound like a white girl.” Additional stereotype terms that came up in seven of the focus groups who actually identified these terms and their descriptions included: “whitewashed,” “thinking you’re better than us or Black people,” “bougie,” “white girl,” “speaking or acting white,” “stuck up,” and “high maintenance,” to name a few. Regardless of the classification, participants made the connection that these stereotype remarks assimilated their Black female academic excellence to whiteness.
In addition to identifying the intraracial stereotypes they experienced, respondents also shared how they made sense of why the underlying assumptions and sociohistorical context of these stereotypes have persisted. The following is in order of focus group prevalence: internalized racist beliefs (seven focus groups); history, white supremacist attitudes, and misunderstanding of stereotype implications (six focus groups); and media perpetuation and generational norms and perspectives (four focus groups) (see Figure 4.1). From this, it is clear that participants could explicitly identify and rationalize how these stereotypes have become a side effect of systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes, as identified in this study’s overarching conceptual framework theme.

**Figure 4.1**

*Frequency of Participants’ Sensemaking of Stereotypes Across Focus Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensemaking Reasons (boxes reflect number of focus groups topic came up in)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>7 Focus Groups</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6 Focus Groups</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4 Focus Groups</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3 Focus Groups</strong></td>
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<td><strong>2 Focus Groups</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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**Internalized Racism Reinforces Anti-Blackness Beliefs.** Respondents understood stereotypes as internalized racist beliefs. This came up in seven focus groups. This concept was defined as potential bias and oppression about Black academic excellence without explicitly verbalizing whiteness or anti-Blackness remarks. Given the historical nature on which America was built, often access to sectors that improve one’s socioeconomic status, such as higher education which had been inaccessible to Black people, may be viewed as a white trait that shows up unconsciously in Black female college students’ same-race relationships. An example of this came from Brandy who stated, “They’ll be like ‘Oh, you think you’re better than us.’ ‘You’re bougie,’ this and that, but I’m just trying to learn.” This quote references white supremacy and creates in-group divisiveness.

**Stereotypes Invoke a Long History of Racial Exclusion.** Participants identified how stereotypes have persisted throughout history and embodied racial exclusion. The prevalence of exclusionary historical context, white supremacist attitudes, and misunderstanding of stereotype implications came up across six focus groups, further affirming how participants came to understand the inherently racist implications of even same-race stereotypes. Historical context was defined as stereotypes that were rooted in history, specifically calling out the exclusionary practices in education that trace back to slavery. An example of this was stated by Deja:

> For so many years, we were not even allowed to learn, you know, learn how to read and this and that. So, it was a whole change that we’re you know, coming through and so, we do have to be patient with each other, but we have to also push each other to become better.

Nancy expressed the same historical point in a different focus group:

> I think historically that’s just accurate too. Like if we really go back, we can find that, you know, people who didn’t fall in whatever kind of line it was, they saw consequences, and that’s just one way that we’ve kind of internalized trauma over the years. If we really did step out of line and cross that line on some things, we might not have seen the next day.
Nancy’s remark spoke to the potential reasoning for why intraracial stereotypes persist, given that pursuing academia is a counter behavior that was not expected and/or allowed of Black people. Participants were able to identify how these intraracial stereotypes, although perpetuated among Black people, have situated themselves in the broader context of this nation’s history, which is built on slavery and thus carries forth racism and white supremacist philosophies throughout time.

Participants described many points that spotlighted this nation’s racist history in connection to Black academic pursuit and the potentially life-threatening dangers associated with obtaining an education. Historically, this then forced Blacks to accept not being able to pursue higher education by perpetuating poor interracial stereotypical representations that counter the academic intellect of African Americans. The participants not only identified how African Americans have been excluded academically through legislative policies, but also how these inherently racist practices have remained embedded in our academic system and actively plague the Black community to the present day. An example of this was stated by Charlie:

I think the stereotypes come from previous stereotypes and molded in Black people… I’m taking an African American history class. Now, these ideas of Black people don’t necessarily go away, they just conform to what is modern. So, to be covert enough, there’s no overt like we can see back in the 1800s… [Now] it’s just done in a way that’s less obvious, but they used to really take time to think about the fact that they were making fun of Black people for not being educated. It’s not something new, it’s on purpose to make fun of Black people for really not having an education or just assume that they’re not educated or assuming that they are lazy and don’t want to work hard. So, I think it’s rooted in ideas that were done on purpose to mold this idea of Black people, whether it be in or out of the [Black] community.

All of the focus groups identified systemic barriers rooted in our nation’s racist past (and present) that have weighed on the Black community, in turn affecting their relationships with Black counterparts (an emerging theme discussed later in the findings section about
relationships) and lent reason for some African Americans’ negative perception and continuous down-talk toward Black counterparts who pursue higher education. Charlie, who is minoring in African American Studies, grew up in the suburbs and acknowledged that she had a higher level of access to better schools, grocery stores, and other amenities not afforded to the main population. Even with her heightened degree of privilege, she still pointed to the constant battle Blacks have had to face to advance in systems not designed for them. She said, “Systems also play a role in it. As much as we can try to tell [Black] people to aspire for more, we also have to be realistic that we are also lacking in resources.” Although she may not have personally lacked resources to thrive academically, Charlie made historical connections that, holistically, Blacks have had significantly fewer opportunities for academic advancement, compared to white people. Charlie further elaborated that because of consistent oppression to advance in systems designed to maintain Black inferiority, this may be one of the reasons some Black counterparts may perpetuate negative stereotypes of Black female college students; doing so indirectly addresses the inherently racist higher education system built on European values. As Charlie added:

It’s not just that [Black] people don’t aspire for more, but when we do start to do more, what’s the reaction? There’s been a lot of effectors that have fought against systems to get us where we are and a lot of them are either dead or in jail. So, it’s not just that [Black] people don’t care, but also people are tired of having to fight.

Since African Americans experience fatigue from fighting racism in micro- and macroaggressive forms, some Black people may choose to project their frustrations with racist systems—that seek to keep Blacks out of school in ways that fuel the school-to-prison pipeline or death—on Black female college students in the form of stereotypes. Even if not spoken explicitly, these stereotypes may become a ploy that communicates a message to Black female college students to accept their inferior status.
One way this message is conveyed in the broader context of education is through literature, which prioritizes knowledge of white males, speaks to our founding principles of white supremacy, and reduces Black history to slavery and the inferior status of African Americans. Ariel, a Psychology major, said, “Even in our history books, I feel like there can be so much more, but yet I feel like it’s not there for a reason. On the deeper level, the people who create those history books don’t put that there for a reason.” Ariel was speaking to the deliberate exclusion of Black contributions and academic achievements that have advanced the nation as a policy measure to counter Black intellect. Because of these racially charged educational practices and constant negative depictions and prejudices of African Americans that trace back to slavery, Deja (in the same focus group as Ariel) explained this as a way that was “limiting our [Black] mindset.” Deja went on to say:

A lot of our community probably really thinks that we cannot do it (pursue higher education), that we are not smart. For so many years we were not even allowed to learn how to read, so it’s a whole change we are coming through, so we have to be patient with each other, but we also have to push each other to become better.

Ultimately, the reasons participants gave for why intraracial stereotypes persisted stemmed from the collective understanding and subconscious/conscious belief that the pursuit of higher education by African Americans misaligns with the Black history that has been taught, in which Blacks are subpar to white counterparts in academic spaces.

**Stereotypes Were Rooted in White Supremacist Beliefs.** Respondents identified how stereotypes made against them because of their pursuit of higher education were rooted in white supremacist attitudes. This was noted when participants mentioned how their Black counterparts may have implied that the participants’ behaviors aligned with white superiority because of their pursuit of higher education. One example was “We’re whitewashed because we’re more educated on different topics that they don’t know of.” Similar to the concept that explored the
historically racist aspects of education, this idea was used when participants described their encounters with Black peers who did not make a historic connection to academia but still aligned Black academic pursuit to whiteness.

Deja recalled an exchange with a former Black coworker who said she was not “Black enough” and was going to “pull her Black card.” When Deja further reflected on that encounter, she spoke to underlying white supremacist attitudes and implicit biases that some of her Black counterparts may carry unknowingly. She said:

It seems that when people try to say ‘act Black,’ what is Black? You’re acting like a stereotype, and when you see Black stereotypes, it’s always a majority of negative stereotypes. So, when you see people like, especially people that are not really Black or whatever, trying to act Black, they’re usually acting like a negative stereotype because that’s the only thing of like, Blackness has really shown a lot of, sadly. You see people like doing drugs because they’re [the media] purposely showing negative stereotypes. So, I feel like when you’re showing positive things, for some reason, sometimes people have a hard time connecting that to Blackness even though like baby (exclaimed confidently), I’m Black excellence!

In adding to why intraracial stereotypes remain heavily embedded in the Black psyche and force white supremacist attitudes to persist, participants also made connections to the early concept of history leaving an impact. This point further addressed how intraracial stereotypes are situated in systemic racism. Charlie noted this, as mentioned earlier, when referring to African Americans fighting systems that may have resulted in their imprisonment or death. Another example that explained the reasoning for intraracial stereotypes being used to stigmatize Black intelligence was expressed by Jordan, who said that education for her was a chance to not be complacent with life’s obstacles. However, when she shared this belief with some older Black counterparts, they shunned her as being “ungrateful for everything that they’ve [Black people] done for us in the past.” Because of the fatigue and emotional and mental impact racism has had on the Black body and mind, participants reasoned that for some Black people, it is easier to
accept academic inferiority because today’s circumstances are better than what circumstances were historically. However, these stereotypes still maintain white supremacist philosophies that disrupt camaraderie among the Black community by communicating the same out-group message, which is that Black academic advancement has a ceiling.

**Stereotypes Create Misunderstanding within Black Racial Groups.** Respondents described how stereotypes created misunderstanding about higher education. As a result, Black counterparts perpetuated stereotypes without truly grasping the implications of how their remarks were not affirming of Black academic intellect. An example of this was from Breanna as she stated,

I’m a first generation 4-year college student. My mom went to the community college to get her associates. The rest of my family is in disbelief that I’m the first to go to a 4-year, and that I have all these plans set out, and that I wanna do things a certain way to make me and my mom comfortable. I just feel like it’s hard for them to grasp.

Many of the participants across all the focus groups shared that they were first-generation college students, which was a primary reason for why their family was proud of them and their accomplishments. Most participants across all eight focus groups also added that although some of their family were proud of their pursuit of higher education, this did not completely absolve them from encountering certain stigmas and stereotypical remarks, given the lack of understanding their families had about the demand associated with pursuing higher education. As Brandy stated:

My family is proud as well, like they really celebrate the fact that I’m here, but I think for them it’s more of the end goal. They don’t understand the parts that it takes in between before getting that degree, before going off to the job, before the career.
Marlo, from the same focus group as Brandy, also expressed the lapse in understanding from some of her family relationships, which she said was a possible underlying reason for perpetuating stereotypes within the same racial group. She noted:

Our family is proud. They like to see, you know, any of us trying to elevate. It’s always like, “yes, I’m happy for you,” but at the same time, my family is still so confused and puzzled about what exactly I do and what I’m studying. So sometimes, like before I transferred, they were just like, “Oh, you still in school? Like, what you going to school for? When you graduate?” That’s their attitude.

Marlo’s remark highlighted an interesting finding that even for participants whose parents, close relatives, or peers in the broader Black community pursued and completed higher education and expressed pride in their academic accomplishments, this did not necessarily stop their college-educated counterparts from perpetuating similar stereotypes related to Black academic intellect. This is analyzed further in a later concept when Black females shared some of the dissonance they have experienced from Black peers on campus that is connected to microaggressions and stereotypes. Nonetheless, when participants’ families or the broader Black community did not understand the demands and the natural development that came with them pursuing higher education, some participants cited how that created dissonance fueled by intraracial stereotypes within their relationships.

Collectively, internalized racist beliefs, history, white supremacist attitudes, and misunderstanding of stereotype implications were the most prevalent reasons across the focus groups from participants’ sensemaking of why intraracial stereotypes persisted. This is an exceptionally important aspect of this study because it calls out the dissonance that African Americans may experience with each other as a result of intraracial stereotypes that are not necessarily the fault of Black people. Historically, these stereotypes appeared as a side effect of racism and white supremacist attitudes which, by design, were meant to keep Blacks inferior to
whites and created in-group divisiveness among African Americans to restrict their own advancement. This pattern speaks clearly to this study’s conceptual framework.

**Stereotypes Persisting due to Media Perpetuation, Generational Norms, Fear, and Jealousy**

Participants presented additional reasons based on their sensemaking for why intraracial stereotypes have persisted, some linked back to systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes. Although still valuable to understand this study’s research questions, these reasons were not as prevalent across the focus groups. This included media perpetuation and generational norms/perspectives (across four focus groups), fear (across three focus groups), and jealousy (across two focus groups).

**Media Perpetuated Stereotypes.** Participants described how stereotypes were supported (even if inaccurate) in contemporary media (e.g. TV, movies, shows). An example was provided by Shannon:

It comes from the media. A lot of people see it on tv and online through shows, like comedy shows, like adult animation. Those shows make jokes about stereotypes. Then you also see it in reality shows and videos, like someone recording a fight, or something happens, or an argument, and then people see that and make that fit the whole narrative for all Black women.

Many of these stereotypes were in connection to how non-Black people perceived People of Color. However, because these stereotypes were so prevalent, three participants (Amel, Aurora, and Nancy) expressed how they internalized *interracial stereotypes*, which caused them to sense-make how *intraracial stereotypes* persisted within the Black community. Aurora described how contemporary media stereotypes of Black women were very linear and consistent, even if they were inaccurate depictions. Nancy explained as well:

When you choose to have your own character development, that’s when we start to say that we’re moving away from our Blackness because we’ve been so stereotyped in the media that like we can only be that one dimension…. It’s almost like we’re trying to limit
ourselves and put us in this box of like self-hate because only a certain group of people can fit in here.

The participants’ responses indicated that broader stereotypes have made it harder for Black female college students to have an academic identity within their own racial group because contemporary media narratives prevail and impact how the Black community may perceive itself.

**Generational Norms and Perspectives Reinforce Stereotypes.** Participants identified how generational norms and perspectives have also reinforced Black inferiority. This was noted when participants recalled what they believed to be their parents’ and/or grandparents’ perceptions of higher education for Black students. Deja gave the following example:

> Sometimes it’s a different story, but because of what our parents went through, like their mindset, like they really couldn’t do it. So, they formed a different mindset. Sometimes that mindset gets pushed on, sometimes a different generation, when the circumstances could be a little bit different.

Participants were able to identify how these stereotypes created dissonance for them within the broader Black community. Nala even described the intersection of being Black and female that made it harder for older family members to grasp her pursuit of higher education. She said,

> “Them seeming you being Black and a woman being able to do something that they weren’t able to do, really is personal.” In a different focus group, Jamie said, “I believe it’s also generational. I think some people are complacent. I think it can really stem back from a lot of things, like they really just come from not really being respected, I feel like as Black women.” Conversely, when Layla was asked to expand on why she believed the term “bougie” was prevalent in her family, she said it was because they expected Black women to go further and further and do more than what generations before them had done. This was a unique cross-finding for a number of reasons. First, it affirmed that even when there is a gap in understanding about the demand to
pursue higher education, as addressed in an earlier concept, there is still an underlying expectation for Black women to push toward socioeconomic advancement and remain resilient. Second, even with a family expectation to pursue academia, participants were not absolved from being faced with intraracial stereotypes in connection to that advancement, such as being deemed “bougie,” as Layla was. Third, despite the prevalence of in-group stereotypes that undercut Black intellect, many Black households and the broader Black community still hold and value education to a high regard—a common theme identified throughout this study.

**Stereotypes Persisting Due to Fear.** Participants believed that stereotypes sometimes persisted because of fear of what high education may imply for them. This was described as participants recalled family or another Black person projecting unease about higher education on them. For example, Olivia reflected on her time in high school and how some of her Black peers would make fun of Black students for being smart or getting good grades and being “nerdy.” She said, “I feel like we can do better in that sense, like seeing how education is really good and it’s very beneficial. I feel like we’re scared of that.” Similarly, Nancy connected fear to the nation’s history, shedding light on why she believes we internalize stereotypes:

> We’re afraid of our own ambition almost because the Black figures we have seen in history have been torn down, not only by the government, but just by our oppressors as well. So, it’s just frustrating to always see somebody who’s in a very ambitious state be torn down and ripped away from the community, not just from inside the community as well, but in general.

This is connected to similar beliefs expressed earlier by Charlie, calling out the historical impact and fatigue Black people feel as they make efforts towards socioeconomic advancements that are often met with resistance from their non-Black and Black counterparts. Raven also addressed how family will project their fears on her because of the inherently racist founding principles of
America, specifically speaking to the intersection of being a Black female pursuing education. She explained:

I feel like the biggest fear that a lot of the people in my family have because of the way that society is or the way that the world is that people are gonna discount you and discredit you for being Black and for being a woman.

Although fear has not stopped any of the participants from pursuing higher education, it did, however, partially ground their understanding of why stereotypes persist within the broader Black community.

**Stereotypes Persisting Due to Jealousy.** Participants described how jealousy shapes some of their relationships (a cross-cutting theme between Research Questions 1 and 2). This was defined as someone being hostile to them for their academic pursuit. This only came up in two focus groups from three participants. Raven described this as “It’s probably jealousy, like most likely because they probably didn’t do well in their life when they were going to school. So, it’s like they just want to be like, hating on you.” In the same focus group, Asia described microaggressions from some of her family members because of her pursuit of higher education. She said, “It’s just their facial expression kind of like gave it away how they’re looking down on me.” Krystal said, “It’s almost like they’ll act encouraging, but at the same time they’re kinda resentful about it, and then they’re like jealous of the accomplishments that I get because I work so hard.” On a similar note, many of the participants expressed how their extended family members did not share the same level of support and had negative regard for higher education. Ariel said, “My family from [a few cities over] don’t understand…I could sense they wish that it was them, but since they do wish that, since they do wish that like, they were in my position, I kind of get jealousy vibes sent to me.” In a different focus group, Krystal expressed that some of her extended family members stated, “Oh, you gotta go to school your whole life?” So, it’s also
like backhanded things. I don’t really feel the support. When it’s positive, it’s very backhanded.” As an extension of this concept of jealousy, participants identified how this trait may have shaped their relationships within the broader Black community. Although none of these stereotypes affected participants to the point of changing the trajectory of their pursuit of higher education, the greatest impact identified by participants was how said stereotypes have stigmatized Black advancement. Sometimes participants were unclear of where family and/or Black people stood with them because of the mixed messaging of support. This concept illustrated that even when stereotypes were unspoken and/or Black women did not clearly specify some of the stereotype remarks they heard, they connected to feelings of being subject to microaggressions that imply someone’s hostility toward their pursuit of higher education.

Overall, the additional reasons participants gave in making sense of intraracial stereotypes still spoke to limited affirmations of Black intellect in higher education settings. This was prevalent for Black female college students as they were the focus of this study, especially if non-academic spaces (e.g., contemporary media) painted inaccurate narratives of African Americans.

**Research Question 2**

**How have these intraracial stereotypes shaped their relationships with Black faculty, Black peers, family members, and the Black community?**

Relationships determined the participants’ sense of connection and belonging, as marked by any mention of their recalling interactions with another person or group. Relationships with family and friends, intraracial college/academic relationships, other intraracial non-academic relationships, and other interracial college/academic relationships were all important to students’
experience in higher education. While there were widespread experiences among participants’ family and friends, only one focus group (two participants) addressed their experience with Black faculty members, perhaps because there were fewer Black professors at the participants’ predominantly white institutions. Given that, this study outlined participants’ feelings when met with and/or were referred to as a stereotype and what impact it may have had on their relationships.

**Family Relationships Ranged from Support for Education to Disdain**

The first relational dynamic was *family*, which was defined as any positive, negative, or neutral remark from immediate and/or non-immediate family members resulting from participants’ pursuing higher education. Family came up across all eight focus groups in a combination of positive, negative, and neutral regards. However, the family unit was the most prevalent source of support, as described across all eight focus groups, while family dissonance showed up across four focus groups, and neutral family remarks showed up in two focus groups. Figure 4.2 presents a continuum depicting the level of support participants felt.

**Figure 4.2**

*Continuum of Support Participants Felt from Relationships Across Focus Groups*
**Family Support**

When exploring the participants’ responses to understand how supported they felt in pursuing higher education by the family, all eight focus groups expressed a high degree of encouragement. A positive family example came from Ariel, in which she described her family as “super supportive, like my immediate family, like the people I live with, because they see the everyday struggle, like what I had to do and everything. They saw how my mom was, like, super on top of me when it came to school, so they knew what my plan was, and how I wanted to do it.” In most instances across the focus groups, participants described how immediate family, specifically family with whom they shared a household, showed a greater deal of support compared to their extended family members.

**Family Unsupportiveness and Neutrality**

Across four focus groups, participants described unpleasant experiences from loved ones that often minimized their academic endeavors or aligned them to whiteness. While the previous theme of family support identified how most participants across focus groups had a heightened sense of support from the family members within their household, that was not always the case for each participant. Some participants experienced a negative family regard in their pursuit of higher education from the immediate family with whom they shared a household or neutral remarks in which participants may have felt supported by family but were still met with intraracial stereotypes from them. Jazmine described that she was often met with criticism from her mother:

She constantly will be like, “Oh, like you think you’re so smart, you think you know everything because you’re at school or because you’re getting a degree,” but then to everyone else, like her friends or something, she’ll brag and be like “Oh, my daughter’s doing this, my daughter’s majoring in biochemistry.” I’m just like, why can’t you share that same support to me?
In the same focus group, Danielle expressed a similar sentiment of unharmonious ties with her mother, echoing how her mother would praise her achievements to others but was unsupportive behind closed doors. Danielle said, “My mom was really proud when I graduated and got my associate’s degree and all that, but [now] when it comes to me being interested in grad school, she’s like ‘Oh, are you trying to be a forever student?’” In a different focus group, Nancy shared a more neutral take, coming to terms with the idea that she may feel supported by her close family members, but it did not necessarily stop them from perpetuating stereotypes that negatively impacted her. Some of the more neutral remarks from family (which came up in two focus groups) as stated by some of the participants were not necessarily positive or negative, but to them, the remarks were an indicator of how their family pinpointed ways in which higher education was causing some type of change within them. As a result, the participants were left feeling somewhat self-conscious of how they may be perceived because of their academic evolution. Nancy said, “Oh, you’re acting white.’ My own brothers even joke about that, like that’s how seriously it goes, but I don’t think they necessarily see how it affects me either.” Avery stated, “So they don’t necessarily feel negatively, but they do often call out the things that they see that are changing within me that are not necessarily things that they love, which I get, but at the same time it doesn’t make me feel great.” Avery’s remarks also intersected with similar concepts mentioned earlier, such as some Black peers may not understand the demanding and multilayer development associated with pursuing higher education, including evolutions in behavior and mindset; thus, this may lend reason to why they perpetuate same-race stereotypes related to Black intellect. Nonetheless, these stereotypes did not deter Avery from continuing to pursue higher education.
Common among the participants’ remarks was that many of them internalized these feelings and did not mention anything to their families about the emotional impact it was having on them—which is the primary way these stereotypes impact family relationships. Participants were less inclined to address the emotional toll that intraracial stereotypes may have had on them with their family members because they did not want to injure or further injure the relationship by addressing unpleasant feelings associated with said stereotypes; essentially, the stereotypes did not impact any of the participants’ academic trajectory or willingness to pursue higher education, despite how it made them feel.

**Education Viewed as Valuable in Family Relationships**

Although not related to the overall construct of this study, a cross-cutting theme found throughout the literature and findings was that despite facing an abundance of stereotypes undercutting Black academic intellect that may place a strain on African American relationships, participants across all eight focus groups identified how education was viewed as valuable within their family. The singular concept was *family pressure*, which was defined as how participants felt a sense of obligation and/or expectation to pursue higher education in the household. Although this only came up in four of the focus groups, it also spoke to the broad literature about academic persistence among Black students. Family obligation to pursue higher education illustrated an interesting tension. Black female college students are faced with two opposing and highly complex pressures to pursue higher education for advancement, while balancing negative stereotypes associated with their pursuit of higher education. An example of this came from Olivia:

I’m Nigerian, so the culture is like, if you don’t seek higher education then you’re not really going to be anything. We’re seeing, kind of education, is what teaches my value as a person. So, if I’m not in college, then I’m not gonna be anything.
This same pressure was also what Olivia believed to be the reason why she thrived academically. Karmen echoed the same sentiment as Olivia, as her family is also Nigerian and holds higher education to an exceptionally lofty regard. Another participant, Jazmine, had a similar family expectation to pursue higher education particularly by her mother, who not only harped on the notion that higher education was expected, but it also was not warranted to be rewarded for doing well because it was what Jazmine was “supposed to do.” This was an interesting case, given that Jazmine also shared how her mother would not encourage her privately but did boast about her academic achievements publicly, as stated earlier. Jazmine said:

If I got a hundred on my test, my mother would be like, “What do you think? You’re supposed to get a prize for that? You’re supposed to get a hundred. You’re supposed to get good grades. You’re supposed to do well in school.” So, it was never even something that I was rewarded for, like it wasn’t incentivized to do. It was just expected, and then you got punished if you weren’t doing that. So going to college doesn’t even feel like an achievement anymore. It just feels like, if I don’t do it, then I’m a failure or that I decided not to do something better with my life.

Two participants (Amel and Shannon) also talked about additional reasons why education was important to their family household because they were second-generation college students. Given that one or both of their parents attended college, it was only natural that their parents wanted their children also to pursue higher education, thus speaking to the sense of pressure for participants to follow suit academically.

This heightened sense of pressure to thrive academically delivers a stark contrast for Black female college students from the broader Black community. Even when there was not always an affirming and emotionally supportive tie in the family relationship, particularly when anti-Black stereotypes were perpetuated that forced Black intellect to mirror whiteness, those same relationships or those of the broader Black community may also convey a message to remain academically resilient.
Friendships Ranged from Support for Education to Dissonance

Participants identified how they experienced an array of positive, negative, and neutral experiences among their friends. Some of the friendships these respondents mentioned included former friends, high school friends, childhood friends, and current friends. Friendships ranged from positive to negative support for education. Unlike family, which participants still felt was a primary source of support even if met with stereotypes, friendships—many of which were relationships that the participants chose over their lifetime—proved to have more negative effects. The negative was prevalent across five focus groups, while support and neutrality of support for education only came up in two focus groups. This was not necessarily because their friends were unpleasant people; rather, with time, the relationships grew apart because the participants decided to pursue higher education while their friends may have elected or were obligated to pursue a different non-academic path. As a result, many of the participants’ friends did not understand the demand that came with the pursuit of higher education, which forced the friendship to grow apart naturally.

Friendship Support

Friendship support was mentioned infrequently, compared to unsupportiveness and neutrality, as it only came up across two focus groups. An example of this came from Breanna who stated, “My relationship with the Black community has been more positive than negative now that I’m actually in college because our campus has a lot of resources for Black students.” Even with this remark, Breanna only had a firmer sense of belonging with Black friends by way of her academic setting. The same could be said for Angel who expressed that she still found a stronger sense of belonging with her five close friends on campus who were also science majors, despite feeling dissonance in her broader Black peer relationships on campus.
**Friendship Unsupportiveness and Neutrality**

Unfortunately, friends’ lack of support (across five focus groups) and neutrality for education (across two focus groups) collectively were more prevalent than friends who supported the participants’ academic endeavors. A more unsupportive example of this came from Brandy who stated, “The Black people from schools or like friends that I used to be friends with it’s like, ‘Oh, you don’t have time to hang out with us anymore because you think you’re better than us and all that.’” From the context of intraracial stereotypes specifically, one participant (Karmen) described how some of her friends would call out her “customer service voice” and made her feel a reduced sense of belonging and community among her Black peers because they implied the way she spoke was indicative of acting white. Karmen said:

> When I talk like this my other Black friends in high school and even in college, they’d be looking at me like, “Why are you talking like that? Why are you bringing up your customer service voice?” I’m just like hmm, I’m sorry to be myself. Now I have to put up my whole other persona again just so you guys can accept me. And I’ve been doing this for like 20 years now, you know. This is what I know.

Participants elaborated on how their friendships had more neutral remarks in two of the focus groups. Angel described her experience by stating:

> I do a lot on campus. My friends from high school and stuff, they’re like what Brandy said, like, “You don’t have time for us anymore,” and it’s like, no. I’m going to college to get a degree because that’s the point of going to college and while I’m there I want to be involved and stuff. I still have time for you.

What appeared to be most consistent was how participants could identify that much of the dissonance they felt from their friendships often stemmed from their friends not understanding the demand college had on them and what it would mean for their relationship, and this often presented a level of strain.
Intraracial/Black Academic Relationships: Unsupportiveness and Neutrality

When looking at Black academic relationships specifically, six of the eight focus groups express dissonance. One of the most surprising findings was that even when participants engaged with more Black scholars on campus or other Black peers from a different college, the engagement did not necessarily affirm their belonging. Two focus groups expressed neutral feelings related to their intraracial college relationships. When this came up, one participant shared that she may have had an initially unpleasant encounter with a Black peer, who then realized the peer had made unfair assumptions about her and later embraced her after acknowledging those biases. Another participant gave grace to the lack of support, but not the direct disdain some of her Black college counterparts may have; she stated that much of it was learned behavior because of historically poor treatment, African Americans are often “trauma bonded.” Nancy also shared a similar take on what she believed was the reason why intraracial stereotypes persisted that may result in experiences that were not necessarily positive but also not completely negative from Black counterparts, even in higher education settings. She said:

There’s a lot of pressure that comes from being just a student in general, and when you kind of like express that to other Black folks, it’s like a lot of friends you make in college are almost like trauma-bonded, and instead of us kind of looking for ways to think positively or even make the situation better, it’s like that trauma is what’s constantly connecting us. I don’t want to say that like sometimes [these stereotypes] bring us down, but we have that tendency to kind of just stay in that same energy.

Surprisingly, an equal number of focus groups expressed the dissonance they felt on their college campus, compared to the support.

This was Avery’s case as she expressed that she did not grow up with a lot of Black people, so once she got to college, she did not feel as if she was being herself. She described having to “put on a face every single day,” which only eased after she found her own group of Black friends to be around while on campus. She continued, “At first it was very intimidating to
come into that space because I was like, I don’t know how to act.” Shannon echoed a similar sentiment: “I kinda like shy away from those [other Black students on campus] when I really should be going out there and trying to make more Black friends, so it makes me second-guess who I talk to.” Alasia stated, “Usually I don’t have as many Black friends at college because they might look at me sideways.” Angel expressed:

My core group is like five people and even then, we’re all in science. So, it’s kinda like they understand me, but then when we try and make other friends with like our Black business students or our Black art students, they kind of look at you a certain way and we’re like okay, let’s stick to our group cause why would you wanna make a relationship with somebody who’s bringing a negative vibe or like a negative light to you instead of being positive?

Avery described this as being made out to feel as if she was “posing,” speaking, or acting a certain way. She explained:

Black people see you a certain way. They don’t necessarily respect you as much as they would respect other Black counterparts who they see as actually Black or like Blacker if that makes sense. So, they’ll look at you a certain way. They’ll walk on you, though. You know, just treat you like you’re a child and not give you the respect of an actual human who actually kind of grew up in the same situation that you were up in just in different fonts.

Karmen expanded on Avery’s point, saying, “If you don’t align with that type of Blackness, you’re not Black. Like, you’re weird. You’re doing too much. You’re acting white.” In a different focus group, Taylor said her experiences with intraracial stereotypes placed her “between a rock and a hard place.”

On a similar note of tension among Black students on campus, some of the participants described a perceived sense of scarcity and competition where only a select few of them would be deemed academically superior. This phenomenon was raised by Jazmine who recounted the numerous times she would race to her dorm room after an exam just to avoid other Black students, who also took the exam and may have inquired about what grade she got as a means to
see who performed better. This point validated what Aurora also said in a different focus group:

“There’s no real community around working through a class together.” Instead of joining forces for both Black students to thrive, the data reflected that many Black students felt the need to “one-up” each other. According to Nancy, “When we look outside of ourselves, look at somebody else, we’re limiting them…. So, if we’re putting somebody outside of that box, then we’re making more space for ourselves to be included”; this has ties to internalized racist and white supremacist beliefs.

Even with the presence of Black resource centers, which was the primary source of how I recruited participants, sharing the same racial identity or space with a group did not always constitute community, especially if participants felt that they were being excluded (e.g., stereotypes). Participants experienced stereotypes, both spoken and unspoken, and felt certain relationships were not uplifting for their educational journey within the academic setting. The need to bond, find, and maintain relationships of the same race who also attended college was still important to them, as these three participants specifically were recruited organically from their Black student resource centers on their campuses. They used these spaces to read, do homework, and converse with Black peers to better affirm their belonging, given their minority status at their predominately white institutions. The findings indicated that intraracial stereotypes or microaggressions were a driving force, even in campus settings, of what caused some dissonance in their on-campus relationships. However, these experiences did not stop participants from completely seeking Black peer spaces to better affirm their belonging in the higher education setting.
Intraracial/Black Academic Relationships: Support

While some participants did not feel an immediate connection to the Black community when on campus, the findings indicated across six focus groups as well that participants also had improved academic experiences because of their connection with other Black peers on campus. This helped better affirm their sense of belonging, often as a coping strategy when met with stereotypes from non-academic Black peers who may discount their academic pursuits. An example of this was stated by Breanna: “My relationship with the Black community has been more positive than negative now that I’m actually in college because our campus has a lot of resources for Black students.” Alonna stated, “I met a whole lot of other Black students and ones that were into stuff I was also into. And I just feel like I’ve definitely been able to grow within.”

With that, participants may not have classified their relationships with other Black students on-campus as friends, but still found community and belonging because of their Blackness, which had positive effects on their academic relationships overall. Battling conflicting feelings with her Black academic relationships and non-academic Black relationships, Jamie shared how she felt a sense of relief sharing space with Black students on campus, but also experienced “unease” because she did not want to be seen as “lazy” or “not doing enough” to be around her own people. Jamie pointed to a stark parallel in her relationships in which she felt a sense of belonging in Black academic spaces with other Black scholars, but when around some of her non-academic Black peers, she felt she was not doing enough to be around them because she did not feel included in those spaces.

Academic spaces proved to be a setting for Black female college students to have a heightened sense of belonging in their Black relationships, even though an equal number of focus groups also expressed how academic spaces may have weakened their sense of belonging.
However, academic spaces showed they were safer for participants to have a greater sense of belonging to counter negative feelings and experiences with Black academic and non-academic peers who perpetuate stereotypes that undermine Black academic intellect.

**Stereotypes Strained Black Non-academic Relationships**

Across four of the focus groups, participants described how intraracial stereotypes were most prevalent in their Black non-academic relationships. Participants often described feelings of strain and isolation in these relationships because their academic pursuits were also stigmatized.

Jamie expressed her perception of relationships with non-academic Black peers. She said that some of her Black peers from the broader Black community maintained these stereotypes because they tried to make students feel they were bragging and needed to humble themselves, “when in reality all we’re trying to do is share our accomplishments and just be proud of the things that we’ve done and accomplished because it’s a lot to be proud of.” Layla expressed similar feelings, stating she felt more “closed off” to share her achievements and even minimize them with the broader Black community and with extended family as a way to avoid the pressures and expectations her family had of her to succeed academically. She also worked out of fear that she was self-fulfilling the stereotype of being “better than” her counterparts of the broader Black community who may not have attended college. In a way, Layla’s practice of self-belittling still speaks to this study’s phenomenon that explored ways in which Black academic intellect is undercut. Layla’s case illustrated how she reduced her own academic achievements as a coping strategy to navigate relationships that may deliberately exclude her from Black spaces because of her academic pursuit.

Further considering how intraracial stereotypes affected participants’ non-academic Black relationships, Jazmine became somewhat overwhelmed, expressing her frustration as
follows: “I genuinely feel like us as Black people enforce our own stereotypes more than a lot of the other races and it makes me so mad…. It still kinda takes a toll, just being around that and hearing that. I would say it’s exhausting. You don’t really feel, like, always safe to be yourself.” Krystal also echoed the same level of drain these stereotypes had on her as Jazmine did, but further explaining how stereotypes left her “unsure” of where she stood in her relationships with other Black peers and “never feeling at rest.” From a different focus group, Elaine shared how she felt when exposed to these stereotypes:

They possibly could isolate you from your community or alienate you from your community. So just the whole concept of not feeling like you’re welcome, right. So, this can possibly cause you not to even attempt to reach out or create those relationships within your community.

Aurora, who was in a different focus group as Elaine, also shared a similar feeling of isolation, citing how stereotypes “strain” her relationships. She pointed to the fatigue that Black female college students face in belonging to non-Black, Black, academic, and non-academic spaces.

These stereotypes are not only fueled within racial lines, while being situated in broader white supremacist attitudes, but they also become heavily perpetuated in mainstream media, which often minimizes Black intellect and further impacts relationships with the broader Black community. Deja vividly expressed the disconnect that happened in some of her Black non-academic relationships that related to media stereotypes that do not place value on African Americans pursuing higher education. She said:

Those mindsets really hinder us because imagine a different community where all your Black friends are uplifting you. “You got this,” like, “Look, come on,” like, “Just come to the library with me. Let’s study because we need to get out this hood!” Imagine if we really had a different mindset. Now, I noticed that sometimes we can have that mindset when it comes to musical things. It’s like, “No, we don’t get out the hood if you don’t come and put in that work [musically speaking].” But when it came to academics, or like when it came to, like, college, we just have this like, “Bro, it’s just not for me,” like, “You really want to spend your time on that,” like “You don’t really need it.”
Although participants identified how stereotypes created feelings of isolation and strain in their Black non-academic relationships, none of the participants expressed disengaging or having a desire to disengage from the Black community as a whole. However, hearing intraracial stereotypes related to their academic pursuit caused them to consider different ways to navigate these relationships.

Stereotypes Strained Non-Black Academic Relationships

While the bulk of this study focused on intraracial stereotypes, the broader argument was that they are situated in inter racial stereotypes, which historically ties to racism and white supremacist attitudes. With this in mind, inter racial college/academic relationships were also briefly explored to understand the broader scope of sense of belonging for Black female college students in higher education, whose intellect is often undermined. This was defined as positive, negative, or neutral remarks from any other non-Black college counterpart (e.g. professors, staff, or students)—as raised in five of the eight focus groups. An example was given by Shannon who stated, “When forming relationships, it’s like non-Black people don’t really want to approach you, but then when they do, it’s like you know, ‘Oh, okay, you’re not what I thought.’” Of the participants who described their experiences with non-Black people on their college campus, the viewpoint was consistent across all remarks, affirming how they were actively reminded of their Blackness in negative ways that invalidated their sense of belonging in higher education. Alasia said, “I’ve definitely seen professors purposely ignore Black students in class if we’re all raising our hand for questions…or like purposely wait before answering their questions.” Avery and Jordan (both in different focus groups) shared a similar dissonance, describing how some professors assumed they needed more assistance than their non-Black counterparts and would break material down to them as if they were children. Another example of how Black academic
intellect is often minimized in academic spaces came from Krystal, who shared how one of her white professors accused her of plagiarism because he was shocked by the high quality of her work. To that end, it appears that these interracial microaggressions were often situated in broader stereotypes and/or preconceived notions of Black female college students being academically inferior, which thus made their pursuit of higher education more challenging. Similar messaging toward Black female college students then showed up within the Black community, thereby impacting their same-race relationships and disrupting participants’ feelings of belonging.

**Research Question 3**

**How do intraracial stereotypes about Black female college students shape their sense of belonging?**

There are several ways in which the participants of this study described how stereotypes perpetuated from Black peers shaped their belonging. Many of them spoke to an *emotional* aspect of how they viewed themselves or how they believed others were perceiving them within Black spaces. The most prevalent ways intraracial stereotypes impacted participants’ sense of belonging across five of the focus groups were through *isolation, impacts on their self-esteem*, or *not affected at all*. Prevalent across four focus groups was the degree to which participants felt a sense of *pressure* related to their academic pursuits and how stereotypes made them question their Black identity specific to their behaviors, not necessarily their personal Black identity. Across two focus groups, the participants felt that intraracial stereotypes made them feel like they were *selling out* within their own racial group. In one focus group, a participant felt that intraracial stereotypes created social anxiety. It appears that collectively, there was a mixture of ways in which participants’ sense of belonging was shaped when they met with same-race
stereotypes as a result of their academic endeavors (see Table 4.3). These emotional ties were a significant indicator of whether the Black female college students of this study felt a strong sense of belonging with their Black counterparts in both academic and non-academic spaces. Given the abundance of research that explored an invalidated or weakened sense of belonging of Black and other students of color in predominantly white institutions from non-Black peers (Ezikwelu, 2020; Johnson et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2021), this study was meant to serve a twofold purpose: to understand a lesser researched angle of Black female students’ feelings when met with a limited sense of belonging (consistent with Research Question 3) and how intraracial stereotypes shaped their experiences with their Black counterparts (consistent with Research Question 2).

**Table 4.3**

*How Participants Felt Stereotypes Shaped Their Sense of Belonging*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Isolation (e.g. ignore stereotypes)</th>
<th>Self-esteem</th>
<th>Not-affected</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>Questioning Black identity specific to behaviors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Selling Out</td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>(Social Anxiety)</td>
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Stereotypes Leaving Feelings of Isolation

Participants described stereotypes causing feelings of isolation. When feelings of isolation came up across five focus groups, the participants spoke to the collective and broader disconnect they felt from the Black community from people they both knew and did not know. This was defined as feeling alone, intentionally avoiding, or separating from a group. An example of this came from Aurora: “Since there isn’t as much, like places, for Black students to feel accepted, especially within extracurricular activities, it’s discouraging when you try to do new things.” Two of the participants (Jazmine and Raven) described that the isolation associated with pursuing higher education was more prevalent among their family unit. As mentioned earlier, Jazmine’s mother expected her to go to college, and although she might have boasted to friends about her daughter’s academic achievements, she did not show support and encouragement to Jazmine directly, which created feelings of dissonance and isolation within the home. Conversely, Raven’s family was supportive of her academic endeavors, but she still felt a sense of isolation because they did not understand the multilayered demand associated with her attending college. Raven described her experience as one that causes a lot of pressure and a lot of isolation. You have to do everything yourself and you kinda have to have everything prepared before you even talk to your parents about it, you know, and that gets a little difficult because sometimes you don’t have it all together.

Angel shared a similar experience, specifically addressing how intraracial stereotypes impacted her sense of self in academia and caused her to become more isolated in some of her relationships, even when she heard the remarks from people she did not know. Angel said:

Sometimes you ignore it because it’s like, okay, I’m doing this for the right reasons and I know why I’m doing it. Sometimes it also makes you shut down, kind of, ‘cause how am I gonna go along this really hard major, like this really hard process? You want to do it for another person and do it for your community, but your community is the one kind of like sandbagging (bullying) you and makes you feel like what you’re doing isn’t important.
These remarks showed the harmful effects stereotypes can have on participants’ sense of belonging even if they did not know the persons directly perpetuating these stereotypes.

**Stereotypes Negatively Affecting Self-esteem**

Participants expressed how stereotypes negatively affected their self-esteem. This was explored to understand participants’ sense of belonging, which, in some instances, discouraged their views of how they felt about themselves as part of the Black community. This was defined as participants’ feelings about their confidence or worth when met with intraracial stereotypes, and the topic was discussed in five focus groups. An example of this was presented by Taylor:

> Personally, growing up, I didn’t believe in myself when I was younger. I didn’t have that esteem, you know, like I have now. And of course, obviously, my mind frame was different. But for me at that time, it affected me because it was like it took away my hope. It took away a lot of things that, you know, that I had to learn about who I am and where I am today.

When met with stereotypes when she was younger, Taylor recalled how they negatively affected her confidence. However, with age, she could better identify how she was not as emotionally swayed by them, nor did they affect how she perceived herself and who she knew herself to be—an educated Black woman. *Self-esteem* came up across five of the eight focus groups among seven participants. Participants shared a number of ways their self-esteem may have been impacted, including being discouraged and setting them back emotionally in some way (Breanna), feeling that their actions were not *Black enough* (Jazmine), and causing self-consciousness about their behaviors (Danielle) that would refute their belonging in Black spaces.

Jordan stayed on the call and expressed another layer that she believed potentially impacted how she processed intraracial stereotypes—her attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). She shared that she sometimes perceived social cues differently and became hypersensitive to intraracial stereotypes to the point that she felt she was doing something wrong.
Isabella also expressed that intraracial stereotypes reduced her confidence; however, she was able to offset unpleasant feelings by having other Black academic peers she could relate to, once again affirming a common finding that kept emerging throughout the focus groups—namely, the yearning for Black connection, despite being met with intraracial stereotypes. Based on the findings, it appeared that intraracial stereotypes may have had an emotional impact on Black female college students’ self-esteem but not to the point that they impacted their pursuit of higher education.

**Stereotypes Leaving No Effect on Sense of Belonging**

Participants across five focus groups felt their sense of belonging was generally not affected (or unphased) by intraracial stereotypes. This was explored when participants described feeling indifferent to stereotypes that invalidated their belief of who they were. An example of this was stated by Zella:

I wouldn’t necessarily say it hindered it [relationships]. It’s kind of put me in a weird position with them. I think it has something to do with myself and reflecting back like, okay, what do you want to do at the end of the day?

Zella also explained that although stereotypes did not hinder her Black relationships, they caused her to minimize how much she shared about her education. To some degree, this still reduced her sense of belonging because she could not show up as her complete self in certain Black spaces.

**Stereotypes Causing Pressure to Affirm Belonging**

Participants explored how they internalized a sense of pressure to thrive academically, while also feeling obligated to be positive representations within the Black community to affirm their belonging, despite being excluded or having their Blackness invalidated via stereotypes in other predominantly Black spaces.
This theme came up in half of the focus groups across 11 participants. An example of this was presented by Nala:

It personally made me feel like I didn’t belong where I was or higher education wasn’t something for me, or that I may let my community down, or you know, let my family down if I wasn’t able to graduate on time or graduate at all or get to college. So, for me personally, I felt that I wasn’t doing enough or I wasn’t enough or there was something wrong with me.

Additional reasons participants described as feeling academic pressure was due to being the youngest of their siblings who may or may not have attended college (Nala); or the eldest of their siblings (Nancy) and needing to lead by example; or a first-generation college student (Zella) who felt responsibility to break generational curses (Deja) and be perfect (Aurora). Most of these feelings stem from the obligation to be a positive representation for the entire Black community (Ariel).

These findings uniquely couple with this broader study because the pressure experienced by Black female college students to thrive academically for the sake of being positive examples in the Black community affirmed their Blackness by Black peers who may also undercut participants’ pursuit of higher education via stereotypes as assimilating to whiteness.

**Stereotypes Invalidating Sense of Belonging by Questioning Black Identity**

Participants across four focus groups expressed how when they were met with intraracial stereotypes and/or microaggressions, they felt they were being judged for being out of sync with their Blackness. To be clear, this was not because the participants deemed themselves as being less *Black*, but rather because their Black counterparts caused them to (negatively) second-guess their identity, behaviors, or speech to feel accepted. An example of this came from Avery:

Sometimes with a certain Black friend, I can be a certain label. With another Black friend, I have to be a different way. It kinda makes you think to yourself like, am I really posing? Am I really like, cause around this person we’re talking this way, but then when I get around this person, we’re talking this way. Am I, is it fake? Is it, you know, energy?
It kind of makes you overthink about your own identity and how you identify with other people because you’ll be around this person and I don’t really act that way around this person or if that person sees you acting that way, then it’s like, “Bye.”

Danielle summed this up by posing the hypothetical question, “Why do I need to perform my Blackness to you to make you understand that I’m Black?” From this, it appeared that participants did not personally question their Black identity or feel less Black, but the remarks they received caused them to have a degree of insecurity because of the expectations placed on them to behave in a manner that was approving to their Black peers.

**Stereotypes Causing Feelings of Selling Out**

Even when participants confidently asserted their Black identity, they may have still been stereotyped as behaving in a way consistent with the out-group (white people) by pursuing higher education or as selling out, thus invalidating their sense of belonging. An example of this was stated by Marlo: “It makes you feel like you are selling it. I’m not. This [education] is why I do it, for us [Black people] in general because it’s not a lot of Black women occupying any professions.” The concept of selling out came up twice in two different focus groups. The other participant to express this was Amber who said, “It created a false sense of self for me because everything that I did was exaggerated in a negative light.” These remarks indicated that stereotypes from their same-race peers created dissonance that spoke to participants’ gender and race that may not have aligned with some of their Black peers’ perceptions of them as part of the Black in-group.

**Stereotypes Causing Feelings of Social Anxiety**

Intraracial stereotypes caused one participant to become socially anxious. This was defined as nervousness, fear of interacting with others, and/or avoidance. Throughout the study, Jazmine mentioned how reserved and introverted she was in all of her relationships (non-Black,
Black, academic, and non-academic) because of the stereotypes and microaggressions she experienced from her pursuit of higher education. She further explained another unique aspect of her experience, which stemmed from attending a predominantly white institution in Southern California. She wished she had attended a historically Black college or university (HBCU), where she believes she would not have consistently been reminded of her Blackness in interracial and intraracial spaces, especially when interacting with other Black people who negatively stereotype her for being a scholar. She said, “It gives you social anxiety, in the sense because now you’re like, oh, I have to do this project with, you know, people from my community.” This was interesting, given that despite feeling anxious to engage with many of her Black peers at her predominately white institution, she still yearned for greater connection with Black peers (another concept explored in this study). This was affirmed as Jazmine expressed that she would have been better accepted had she attended an HBCU, where Black students are the majority.

**Spaces Where Black Female College Students Examined Their Sense of Belonging**

To best grasp where the participants of this study felt the greatest sense of belonging when stereotypes are present, it was necessary to explore feelings of *welcome* and *unwelcome* in *academic spaces* and *non-academic spaces*. Surprisingly, all eight focus groups discussed feeling unwelcome in academic spaces; this was the most prevalent theme across this study and considered how unwelcome they have felt from both their non-Black and Black counterparts. Across six focus groups, participants described feeling unwelcome in non-academic spaces and feeling welcome in academic spaces. Only one focus group described feeling completely welcome in a non-academic space, because the participants desired to find a hub of people to connect with, regardless of the setting (see Figure 4.4).
This finding is important as it points to the perceived experience of Black female college students who face adverse climates, discrimination, and racial tensions that invalidate their sense of belonging in academic and non-academic spaces. It also points to the affirmed sense of belonging participants experience in academic spaces. This speaks to the need for Black students to have safe spaces that counter these disadvantageous stereotypes in order to better reinforce their sense of belonging by uplifting them and providing a greater sense of community with their Black peers.

**Feeling Unwelcome in Academic Space**

Conversely, there were instances in which participants described feeling *unwelcome* in some academic spaces among their Black college peers. This came up across all eight focus groups.

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Figure 4.4

*How Welcome or Unwelcome Participants Felt in Certain Spaces*
groups and 20 participants who acknowledged how they naturally felt a weakened sense of belonging from their non-Black counterparts at their predominantly white institutions, while also attributing some of their welcome feelings to intraracial stereotypes. For example, Amel said, “Oftentimes, the other Black students that were there that we weren’t as close to would call us ‘whitewashed.’” As a result of these stereotypes, Shannon described the need to code switch when she did not always feel welcomed in Black spaces—a feeling she described as changing one’s linguistic pattern to better conform to the present dynamic. She said, “I just feel like I don’t fit in sometimes or should I conform myself to fit in?” Amber, from a different focus group as Shannon, shared her experience of feeling unwelcome among Black academic peers: “At least for me, I would say, I am most of the time the only like Black person in my classes. And then when there is another Black person, we kind of tend to like, stick together. But sometimes there are those instances where like, the other Black person will look at me like, ‘why are you trying to sit next to me?’” This dissonance spoke to the inadequate sense of belonging Black female college students may feel because there are so few students of color at their predominantly white institutions—which, in some cases, brought the participants closer to their Black peers. In other cases, participants may have stalled camaraderie with other Black peers if they felt the academic relationship was forced because there were so few of them on their respective campuses.

On a similar note as related to Black dissonance in academic spaces, Ariel brought up another layer of division that arose among her Black academic peers—colorism, as she said:

It was hard for me to find like friend groups because, you know, I would hang out with the Black girl group, you know, the only Black girl group at the school and since I am like, lighter skin, they will look at me like, you know, I’m too light and I don’t belong, because I’m too light. Or if I go hang out with the white people, then they look at me like, I’m Black and I don’t belong in this group. So, it kind of gave me that internal realization that, you know, I’m gonna just be myself, and whoever’s gonna come with me is gonna come with me at the end of the day.
The statement revealed that Black female college students, even if they had a select group of friends, may still feel excluded among other Black peers on their college campuses, invalidating their sense of belonging, while using intraracial stereotypes and/or microaggressions as a means to do it.

**Feeling Unwelcome in Non-academic Space**

The additional concepts observed jointly were “unwelcome” and “non-academic spaces,” which came up across six focus groups. Individuals described this as not feeling well received in a space, specifically in any other space outside of the college campus (e.g., home, among non-academic peers, in community). An example of this in relation to intraracial stereotypes was mentioned by Elaine:

They possibly could isolate you, from your community or alienate from your community…. So just the whole concept of not feeling like you’re welcome, right. So, this can possibly cause you not to even attempt to reach out or create those relationships within your community. And in this process, it kind of isolates you from the people that you most relate to.

Similar to this, as mentioned earlier, Avery was told she was “posing” if she spoke or acted a certain way that was inconsistent with the beliefs of some of her Black peers outside of academia. These concepts showed up across six of the focus groups from six participants. Similar to the previous theme that explored relationships and the dissonance intraracial stereotypes had on the broader Black community, participants attested to feelings that made them uneasy when interacting with other non-academic Black peers. Elaine stated:

It creates an environment of paranoia. You know what I mean? Because a lot of times, if you’re Black, you’re gonna be in some way connected to the Black community, you know, regardless of whatever social club or whatever academic interests that you align yourself with. So you feel like your community, the people who are supposed to be there to support you are basically like, you know, don’t have, I guess the best intentions for you because of who you have chosen to align yourself with and what it does, in a sense, it also alienates you from your Black community because now you feel like you’re not
accepted by your Black community. You feel like you are maybe being shamed from them.

Raven expressed a similar feeling as Elaine, even though she was in a different focus group. It should be noted that Raven’s focus group did not identify any specific intraracial stereotype terms; however, the group still spoke to the same experience of being met with dissonance from within the Black community because of pursuing higher education. Raven expressed that when negative remarks about her pursuit of higher education came from non-Black counterparts, she could better deal with them because she expected inherently racist microaggressions or behaviors. However, as related to negative remarks perpetuated from within the Black community, she said:

When it comes from the people that you love the most or like the people that are in your community or like your family members, the people that look like you, when it comes from them, it hurts a lot more. And I also, thinking back to like the fact that it’s hard for us to even like acknowledge what stereotypes we’ve heard from other Black people because it’s kind of like we’re not even thinking of it like that because we don’t even have that thing in our mind of like these people would never say anything negative about me, you know; but then when they do, it really hits harder.

Ultimately, the participants were able to describe how negative remarks and/or intraracial stereotypes specifically created “strain” (Aurora) on their Black relationships in non-academic spaces. This illustrated how Black female students’ sense of belonging is often invalidated in academic and non-academic spaces.

**Feeling Welcome in Academic Space**

The “welcome” and “academic space” concepts also came up in six of the eight focus groups (across 11 participants). This was defined as individuals feeling warmly greeted in a space. This study further explored how welcome participants felt in an academic space—defined as a college campus or other scholarly setting. An example of these joint concepts as stated by Amel was “I got a whole lot closer with [Black people] and I felt more like, I had a set
community and I was actually a part of it.” The data revealed that all 11 participants felt closer to the Black community since pursuing higher education. Black female college students felt welcome primarily in academic spaces among other Black peers. Some of the participants attributed it to their Black resource center on campus (Alasia, Ariel, and Imani), as college afforded them the space to make their own connections with more Black people, which was especially helpful if they were not raised in predominantly Black areas. This heightened exposure to Black culture helped some participants debunk their own subconscious biases of other Black people (Avery) and the importance of having and acknowledging the unique intersection of being Black and a woman in community (Nala).

For Avery specifically, she was home-schooled online for some of her elementary and her entire middle and high school career. She described living in the suburbs where few Black people resided. When she got to college, she had the chance to engage with more Black people than she had before. She elaborated that her Black academic connections helped clarify her own assumptions: “I always watched the Black community through social media and TV, but I never had my own experience with it, so I just go off what my parents told me or how they were raised or how I was around them.” Avery’s experience spoke to how her pursuit of higher education actually helped counter her own beliefs of Black people. This, surprisingly, was the exact opposite of this study, which explored how Black female college students experience intraracial stereotypes because they are attending college.

Collectively, it appeared that participants appreciated having other Black students around, especially in the Southern California region where many of them attended predominantly white institutions. To sum up one of the consistent themes touched on by many of the participants, they
appreciated the diversity of Black students, respecting that the ethnic group as a whole is not a monolith. Charlie said:

I think it’s amazing. It [attending college] intensified my desire to be around other Black people. And as well as like, see the beauty and diversity of Blackness and just being around those spaces. There’s still different types of people that are within those spaces I feel like you need to, I guess, heal the inner child.

Despite sharing similar experiences with stereotypes perpetuated from within the Black community because of their pursuit of higher education, participants could still find community and welcoming feelings when they could share space with others who understood the academic journey since they, too, were on the same or similar academic path.

**Feeling Welcome in Non-academic Space**

Feeling welcome in non-academic spaces only came up in one focus group. This was mentioned by Charlie:

Regardless of what other people might have said about their idea of Blackness, it never stopped me. You know, I still need that connection…. There’s certain things that people just aren’t going to understand, or that really had that same experience. So, I’m always looking forward to being able to have that hub of people to share that with.

As a reminder, Charlie shared that she grew up in the suburbs where there was a small population of Black people. She was also minoring in African American Studies, further speaking to her connectedness to the Black diaspora. To that end, based on Charlie’s upbringing, this result was interpreted to better understand how Charlie has grown accustomed to navigating non-academic spaces to seek an affirmed sense of belonging among other Black peers.

**Research Question 4**

How do Black female college students manage tensions arising from intraracial stereotypes?
When participants are met with intraracial stereotypes, they often have to find strategies to cope. This was defined as ways participants reduced unpleasant emotions when met with stereotypes that attempted to invalidate their Blackness. The three most prevalent ways that helped them find strategies was through seeking Black peer spaces (seven focus groups), seeking solidarity from the broader Black community (six focus groups), and ignoring the stereotypes (six focus groups). There were a number of additional ways participants managed these tensions (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5

Ways Participants Managed Tensions Across Focus Groups

| RQ 4: How do Black female college students manage tensions arising from intraracial stereotypes? (Boxes reflect number of focus groups topic came up in) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **7 Focus Groups** | Seek Black Peers | | | |
| **6 Focus Groups** | Seek Solidarity from Broader Black Community | Ignore Stereotypes | | |
| **5 Focus Groups** | Motivating | | | |
| **4 Focus Groups** | Code switch | | | |
| **3 Focus Groups** (Disengaging) | Seeking solidarity from family and friends | Addressing comment/stereotypes | | |
| **2 Focus Groups** | Downplay Achievements | | | |
| **1 Focus Groups** (Laughing off, Seeking Mentorship, and Seeking Support Outside of Black Community) | | | | |
The participants felt a greater sense of connection to the Black community and their Blackness as a means of coping, especially at their predominantly white institutions. The two highest recurring concepts participants addressed as a means of coping included seeking Black peer spaces (across seven focus groups) and pushing for solidarity with other Black peers among the broader Black community (across six focus groups). This is important to consider, given that the participants’ means of coping actually countered a small portion of the anti-Black narratives of the intraracial stereotypes they experienced, which often invalidated their desire to engage with their Black counterparts.

**Primary Coping Strategies of Participants**

As mentioned earlier, the most prevalent coping strategies of participants when met with intraracial stereotypes across focus groups were seeking Black peer spaces, seeking solidarity from the broader Black community, and ignoring stereotypes altogether.

**Seeking Black Peer Spaces**

Across seven of the focus groups, some of the participants intentionally gathered with other same-race like-minded peers as a coping strategy to combat some of the negative stereotypes they experienced because of their pursuit of higher education. An example of this came from Olivia: “To cope with that, having this kind of environment to talk about it with other Black people in these spaces that we share.” Regardless of whether these spaces were on or off campus or with family, participants appreciated the connectedness to their Blackness that certain spaces afforded them, primarily in academic settings where they had more welcoming experiences with Black peers who could relate to their scholarly journey.
Three of the four focus groups across four participants further affirmed how Black academic peer spaces helped counter negative stereotypes and promote an increased sense of belonging with the Black community. An example of this was presented by Brandy:

I would say the Black Resource Center is a great place to make those connections within the Black community. There’s always different events with the BSU (Black Student Union). I feel like college actually helped me become closer with the Black community ‘cause I feel like since they’re such a small population of us here, we have no choice.

Even as participants described the effects and dissonance that stereotypes had on some of their Black relationships, the need for Black connection never stopped, nor did their understanding of their Black identity. Charlie said:

Regardless of what people might have said about their idea of Blackness, I still need that connection because I think what has been said before, there’s certain things that people just aren’t going to understand or that had that same experience. So, I’m always looking forward to being able to have that hub of people to share that with and I guess we just tried to undo internalized ideas about Blackness.

This yearning for Black connection was so great for Avery that even when met with intraracial stereotypes, she desired maintaining those relationships if it meant dealing with less racism from her non-Black counterparts. She said:

I would probably rather be in conflict with other Black people versus non-Black people. I think I’d just rather be around Black people in general, no matter how we interact or how we get into it or don’t get into it. I just prefer to be in that versus racism.

It appeared that the yearning for connection was especially prevalent for these participants because so few Black students were represented at their predominantly white institutions in Southern California. This then fueled their value in their institutions’ Black resource centers while also speaking to the importance of Black peer spaces. This finding served as an important callout that Black peer networks were important for Black students to cope, have an increased sense of belonging, and feel supported along their academic journey.
**Increasing Engagement with Black Community**

Participants desired to engage more with the broader Black community as a coping strategy, despite being met with stereotypes that communicated that pursuing academia is a practice of whiteness. This was defined as participants wanting unity or agreeing to improve through mutual support within the Black community (surfacing in six of the eight focus groups across seven participants). An example of this was given by Marlo:

> We should be joining together. We should be one instead of being divided and you know, treating your own persons, your own counterparts like this. So, that is really hard because you know, I want to see us as one, never in conflict.

Many of the participants echoed their hope for the Black community—to suspend these intraracial stereotypes and find more camaraderie among each other. It felt as if the participants were almost giving a call to action or a love letter to the Black community to better unite because of the underlying understanding that African Americans were already divided interracially by stereotypes. These stereotypes then created dissonance intraracially as the stereotypes conveyed the same underlying message—to minimize Black academic intellect. From this, the participants affirmed that they wanted Black students and Black non-student peers to be reminded that their Black pursuit of higher education is often grounded in wanting to see the Black community advance as a whole, not to mirror whiteness.

**Ignoring**

The second concept was to ignore, which was defined as trying not to listen to or think about stereotypes. This was raised in six focus groups across seven participants. An example of this came from Layla who stated, “I kind of just ignore them. I know myself, what I’m doing, what I plan on doing, and why I’m doing it. So, it’s not other people’s business.” Other participants described moving on (Kenya) and tuning people out (Danielle), as the participants
could easily verbalize how the stereotypes did not impact the trajectory of their academic goals. One participant, Taylor, even encouraged participants from her focus group, telling them to “make people conform to who you are. Never change who you are as a Black person. Stay true to you, who you are and what you know.” Kenya went on to share what many of the ladies expressed in their focus groups, which was that despite being met with stereotypes, the aim remains to get their degree and pursue whatever they decide to do. This gave reason to why participants compartmentalized stereotypical remarks and often ignored them.

**Additional Coping Strategies for Participants**

There were many additional ways participants managed tensions when they encountered intraracial stereotypes. In order of prevalence, participants were motivated by stereotypes (across five focus groups); code switched (across four focus groups); disengaged, sought solidarity from family and friends, and addressed the stereotype (across three focus groups); downplayed their achievements (across two focus groups); and laughed off and sought mentorship and support outside of Black community (one focus group).

**Motivating Force to Combat Stereotype Messaging**

Five focus groups shared that they embraced stereotypes and used them as a tool of encouragement (e.g., prove wrong) in order to thrive academically. Similar to much of the literature that addresses Black academic resilience, some of the participants expressed the motivation they felt when encountering intraracial stereotypes. This was defined as participants’ desire to achieve something and being resilience to persist in higher education. For example, Asia stated, “I wanted to prove those people wrong, that I can actually do this and not just be put down.” Three other participants, all from different focus groups (Ciara, Jordan, and Jazmine), also expressed how their pursuit of academia motivated them to prove non-Black and Black
peers (anyone who assumed they would fit a negative Black stereotype) wrong. Brandy expressed how hearing intraracial stereotypes “kind of makes us stronger because why would you let somebody else who doesn’t really know you tell you who you are?” She later went on to call stereotypes a “motivating factor” to continue her higher education pursuit. One participant, Jamie, asserted that her actions of pursuing education would speak louder than her need to explain or affirm her Blackness. Echoing the same ambition from a different angle, Marlo shared how she interpreted stereotypes positively because they forced her to “keep striving, just to keep rising.” Zella explained how intraracial stereotypes made her “go harder” to stand out. She further elaborated on the intersection of how being Black and a woman put a “double whammy” on her in all the spaces she entered, but because of that, it further affirmed her need to pursue education. Collectively, these responses showed that Black women, even when met with stereotypes, are committed to higher education and have not used intraracial stereotypes to deter them from completion. In fact, they may even use these stereotypes as a reverse coping strategy to motivate themselves to complete their degree.

**Code Switching as a Means of Conforming**

Participants across four focus groups also coped with intraracial stereotypes through code switching as a means of conforming in order to affirm their sense of belonging as a coping device. Participants described this as feeling the need to adjust their speech and/or behavior to better assimilate, affirm their sense of belonging, and manage unpleasant feelings. While code switching is often explored in relation to how African Americans have to adjust to another culture, this study further explored how code switching occurred within their own racial/ethnic/cultural group. Marlo provided an example: “You want to constantly make yourself relatable to these people to, I guess, fit in.” Marlo’s reference to “these people” was specific to
Black people who may be perpetuating intraracial stereotypes. Olivia pointed to African American Vernacular English, also known as AAVE, specifically her shift in tone around different groups of Black people. These expectations placed on Black female college students, which overlapped with previously outlined concepts, caused participants to experience unwelcoming feelings (Shannon and Imani), isolation (Jazmine), and hesitation over whether they were being authentic (Avery) around some of their Black peers.

**Disengaging**

The third strategy for participants to cope with intraracial stereotypes was to disengage. The key distinction between disengaging and ignoring is that when disengaging, participants described intentionally distancing themselves from their Black peer(s) who may have perpetuated intraracial stereotypes. Ignoring, on the other hand, implied that participants wanted or happened to share space with other Black people, but when met with stereotypes, they tried not to listen or think about them. Disengaging came up in three focus groups from three different participants. Avery gave an example as she expressed her response to intraracial stereotypes: “I’ll have to distance myself because you’re not treating me like you treat other Black folks because you think that I’m not as Black as they are.” Jazmine also shared that she started “not even really engaging with people enforcing the stereotype.” She went on to say, “I try to avoid as much as possible, but when I see it happening or hear it happening, sometimes it’s not something that I can even get away from.” Aurora’s way of disengaging was to “explore options outside of our community.” Based on their remarks, this was interpreted as participants were not confused about their Blackness, but would rather disconnect from spaces that were not serving them, while seeking belonging in spaces that better embraced them, which may have been from their non-Black peers.
Seeking Support from Family and Friends

Family or friends also provided some support (e.g. academic, emotional, social) which showed promise for Black female participants to cope while pursuing academia and combat ingroup stereotypes. This came up across three focus groups. An example of this concept was from Marlo who said, “I also have a cousin that’s in nursing. So, me and her kind of rely on or confide in each other a lot about school and things that come along with it.” Based on previous concepts, even if family members did not always understand the demands of higher education, many of the participants’ family members were proud and supportive of them, which helped with grounding them in their pursuit of higher education. In Nancy’s case, her mother understood the demands of higher education because she earned her Ph.D. Thus, she prepared Nancy for a world that may not be proud of her accomplishments, and this provided a source of resilience for Nancy when she was met with stereotypes from the broader Black community. Although this concept showed up minimally, participants appreciated the connectedness and support that family could provide, even if it did not always come with total understanding of their academic journey.

Addressing the Stereotype/Comment

Participants in only three focus groups actually called out or addressed the stereotype. An example of this was from Marlo who explained that sometimes she will “sit there and educate them about something,” specifically how disadvantageous the remark was. However, this was not common practice for her as she did not want to carry the emotional weight and drain associated with explaining how people were wrong for stereotyping. When Marlo did not feel like expressing the racial implications associated with intraracial stereotypes, she was led to “laugh it off,” as outlined in an earlier concept. Jordan also expressed that she would sometimes
address the stereotype perpetrator and challenge them to think about their remark. She may ask them:

“If you were in a situation that you didn’t like and wanted to go to a better one, what would you do?” And then they would respond with like, “I would work hard to put myself into a better position.” I’m like, “It’s just like that. Just because I’m Black doesn’t mean that I’m trying to be better than anyone. I’m just trying to put myself into a better position for my kids, you know, and for their kids.”

From this, since the majority of the participants did not mention addressing the person perpetuating the stereotype as a means of coping, this may explain another reason why these stereotypes persist—namely, the stereotyper may not fully grasp the inherently racist implications of their remarks.

**Downplaying Achievements**

Participants across two focus groups refrained from sharing their accomplishments or downplayed their academic efforts to minimize conflict within some of their Black relationships. Layla provided an example: “I’m not one to really talk about my accomplishments, like I kind of downplay things a lot if I get into something or I join something. I just tell my immediate family.”

While some participants limited how much they spoke about their accomplishments as a means of avoiding potentially being intraracially stereotyped, Jamie attributed not talking about her academic achievements to the intersection of being a Black woman. She expressed that she often could not share her achievements because there was an expectation from Black and non-Black peers for her to be humble. If she did not conform to more submissive communications about her academic accolades, Jamie expressed that she would be made to feel bad, as if she was “showing off.” This was an interesting finding as Jamie implied that because she was Black, she felt required to minimize her standards compared to other races. Further, given that she was a
woman, she was expected to be more submissive and limit how much she spoke about her achievements. When looking at the quotes as a whole, the data can be interpreted in a way that shows participants did not have space to express their pride in their achievements in a healthy manner, thereby creating dissonance in their Black and non-Black relationships. Yet, by not sharing details or undermining their own academic pursuits, they still had coping mechanisms that created less friction with some of their Black counterparts.

**Laughing It Off**

Participants in one focus group expressed coping with intraracial stereotypes by laughing them off. This was defined as participants laughing at stereotypes as a way to disengage and not address the remark, even if it caused them unpleasant feelings. Angel gave an example of this when she said she would “laugh it off and walk away.” This focus group shared how this coping strategy was sometimes the easiest reaction in the moment to minimize conflict.

**Seeking Mentorship**

As a means of coping when faced with intraracial stereotypes, Danielle and Krystal (from the same focus group) shared how they relied on mentors to guide them along their academic journey. A mentor for them was someone who understood the challenges of education and the Black experience (which included dealing with stereotypes). This topic was explored when participants mentioned aligning with someone who was experienced and whom they trusted to give advice about their respective academic and/or professional journeys. Danielle noted, “It really helped me to have a mentor, someone who’s gone through this before, who’s had the imposter syndrome, who’s done the coursework, who’s gotten into their field and had done their things.”
Mentorship also spoke to a recurring concept throughout this study, which again validated that even amid negative stereotypes, participants yearning for connection with the Black community hardly changed. Connection to the Black community and those who shared similar experiences was still a need for participants to cope in the best way.

Seeking Support Outside the Black Community

Converse to the previous concept, support outside of Black community was explored. This was defined as participants seeking or receiving assistance (e.g., academic, emotional, social) from non-Black peers. Of all the focus groups, this only came up one time from one participant (Aurora). When expressing her response to intraracial stereotypes, Aurora said, “It just makes me want to explore options outside of our community.” It was the unspoken finding of this concept that spoke volumes. Although participants felt the strife caused by intraracial stereotypes within the Black community, these remarks did not make Black female college students want to disassociate from the Black race altogether, despite perpetuated stereotypes that would imply as such. If anything, participants had a stronger desire for connection with the African American community.

Findings Summary

This study found that Black female college students experienced stereotypes (or microaggressions) from within their racial group across Black family members, Black peers, Black faculty members, and the broader Black community that paralleled their academic intellect or pursuits to whiteness. The study found that even if participants were met with stereotypes from within the family unit, familial support for education was also the most prevalent across all eight focus groups, while academia placed a heightened sense of dissonance on friendships (five focus groups), particularly when the participants’ friends did not attend college. On the college
campus, participants expressed equally in six focus groups how they experienced both supportiveness and dissonance in their Black academic relationships. The participants also shared how they experienced dissonance in their academic relationships with non-Black peers (five focus groups), often implying that they were made to feel academically inferior. This finding solidified the overarching conceptual framework of this study in which same-race stereotypes of Black female college students often parallel broader interracial stereotypes that undermine Black academic intellect. These stereotypes may or may not affect and shape their sense of belonging, but when they did, the results from most focus groups (five) were described as isolation and questioning how their behaviors may not align with what their Black counterparts identified as “Black.” When participants’ sense of belonging was not affected by these stereotypes, it may have created and developed their academic resilience to continue to thrive and remain ambitious in the wake of adversity. This is important to note as all focus groups explored where they felt the greatest and weakest sense of belonging. Across all focus groups, participants expressed feeling unwelcome in academic spaces from their non-Black counterparts and some of their Black peers. By contrast, however, participants understood their need to belong and find affirming Black peer spaces in academic and non-academic settings (the most cited coping strategy across seven focus groups) to combat the negative messaging of intraracial stereotypes.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Presently, there is an abundance of literature on interracial stereotypes that undermine Black academic intellect and their impact on the relationships that African Americans and other students of color have with non-Black (primarily white) peers as well as their sense of belonging and means of coping with these stereotype messages. These skewed stereotypes are often perpetuated in the language (Sue et al., 2007); media (Ash et al., 2021; Dixon, 2019; Graber, 2003; Ramasubramanian, 2007); workplace (Heilman, 2012; Toomy & Rudolph, 2017); education (specific for this study) (Allen & Webber, 2019; Calvanese, 2007; Master et al., 2016; Sheldon, 2004; Wood et al., 2010); and an array of other systems and practices that undermine the value of People of Color (Brussino & McBrien, 2022; Burn et al., 2022; Krishnamurthy & Edlin, 2014). While across the literature, it was clear that stereotypes negatively impacting students of color may impact their sense of belonging (Chavous et al., 2008), stereotype threat can also exacerbate unpleasant feelings that result in their internalizing how they are perceived for fear they will fulfill these skewed beliefs made against them by someone of a different ethnic or racial group (Mosley & Rosenberg, 2007; Smith & Hung, 2008; Spencer et al., 2016).

This study, however, adds to the existing literature by expanding on a lesser researched topic that may overlap with stereotype threat. Leath et al. (2022) also found intraracial conflict as a result of stereotypes, speaking to the dissonance these remarks can have on how one is perceived and received among Black girls. Black female college students may internalize stereotypes perpetuated from within their racial group that communicate a message of how their pursuit of higher education is deemed as “acting white” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), “teacher’s pet” (Neal-Barnett et al., 2009), “thinking they are better than [their Black counterparts], and even within all Black schools, facing a belief that to be smart is to be white (Kunjufu, 1988).
These stereotypes may result in Black female college students questioning if their behaviors in fact misalign with what is deemed appropriate to affirm their sense of belonging within the Black diaspora, while also reinforcing the inherently racist pillars on which this nation was built—systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes.

Although intraracial stereotypes were not as detrimental to Black female college students’ academic resilience and persistence compared to interracial stereotypes or microaggressions, as extensively studied across literature (Brown Givens & Monahan, 2005; Chavous et al., 2008; Gould, 1981; Smith & Jung, 2008), same-race stereotypes that minimize intellect are still not necessarily beneficial for Black students’ relationships, sense of belonging, or means of coping.

In terms of their relationships with Black family members, friends, and faculty, I found that intraracial stereotypes were often present, but their effect on relationships was mixed. Although some participants expressed experiencing intraracial stereotypes from family members, familial support was the most prevalent across all eight focus groups. Friendships, on the other hand, suffered for participants across five focus groups, specifically as they expressed how their academic pursuits may have placed a strain on their friendships with friends who may not have gone to a 4-year college or pursued a different, non-academic path. Some of these effects included experiencing a sense of isolation and questioning how their behaviors may not align with what their Black counterparts deem as “Black.” Nonetheless, participants across the groups still valued their Black relationships and did not let stereotypes generalize their experience with peers and the broader Black community or reduce engaging with same-race peers since it often was a source of belonging and social connection (Walton et al., 2012). Nonetheless, Black
female college students in this study did not let these stereotypes act as a deterrent to their academic success.

To manage these tensions when faced with intraracial stereotypes, I found that participants most prevalently across focus groups sought Black peer spaces (seven focus groups) and solidarity from the broader Black community (six focus groups), along with an array of other coping strategies to better affirm their sense of belonging. This surprisingly countered some of the narrative of these stereotypes that may imply that Black female college students do not want to be like or engage with their Black peers since pursuing higher education is sometimes seen in comparison with whiteness.

Implications

Although this study explored intraracial stereotypes experienced by Black female college students, the implications and considerations for future research and practice expand beyond racial lines and present opportunities for reflection for higher education institutions.

Consideration for Higher Education Institutions

There is hardly any transformative change from marginalized groups when merely being aware of the ways they are oppressed. As expressed in the literature, campus communities may not always present an affirmed sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2018), especially for students of when stereotypes or microaggressions are present (Miles et al., 2020). To that end, higher education administrators and staff have a responsibility to stand in the gap and become more intentional to make higher education institutions a safe space that is equitable for People of Color—given that it has been a system historically structured for the advancement of White people (e.g., Ahn & Davis, 2020, Crawford et al., 2023; Humphrey & Lowe, 2017).
As this research found, participants most prevalently (across focus groups) sought Black peer spaces (often on their campus) and solidarity from the broader Black community to offset the unpleasant experiences of being stereotyped from their racial group due to their pursuit of higher education. The study also found that sharing space with those of the same racial-ethnic identity did not always serve as a safe place to affirm one’s sense of belonging both on-campus and off-campus. While much of the literature addressed the benefits of affirming spaces in the institution such as Black resource centers and counterspaces (Ong et al., 2018) that foster connections with same-ethnic peers (Thelamour et al., 2019), this study found that those welcoming feelings were not always felt outside of academia. This builds on the idea presented by Johnson et al. (2007) who expressed how environmental factors influence a sense of belonging among racial and ethnic groups, while also partially addressing Tinto’s (1993) renowned work in which he partly explored college persistence with external communities (e.g., past friendships, family). In many instances, the transition to college may have problematic effects on students’ external relationships because of the expectations placed on them to perform or behave in a certain manner. This can create dissonance in the relationships, similar to what was experienced by the participants of this study.

Since this research highlighted how Black female college students may not have an affirmed sense of belonging in communities outside of academia, it is especially important for higher education administrators to create safe spaces that better affirm belonging for students of color, while also heeding the fact that space alone is not always sufficient to validate one’s belonging. It is essential that higher education professionals partner with Black students at the minimum to create safe space in which they can listen to their needs in order to identify opportunities to support students of color beyond matters of space and affirm their belonging.
Consideration for Future Research

Although this study only focused on same-race stereotypes experienced by Black female college students, similar stereotypes may be experienced by other groups. Given that, there is an opportunity to expand on this research cross-racially, across gender lines, and further within the Black diaspora outside the scope of education in order to better understand inter- and intragroup relationships and prejudices, sense of belonging, and additional ways in which people of different groups may cope.

Some of the literature reviewed found connections to stereotypes experienced by Latinos that share some overlap with the African American experience (Chang & Kleiner, 2003; Reny & Manzano, 2016), which may also undermine their intellect and academic ability (Owens & Lynch, 2012). For example, Myers and Williamson’s (2001) work described “self-righteous racism” among Latino/as and Blacks were seen as “selling out to the whites” (p. 20). With that, there is an opportunity for future research to explore how similar same-race stereotypes experienced by the Black female college students in this study may also be consistent with what other racial groups perpetuate among each other as related to pursuing higher education.

There is also an opportunity to better understand these stereotypes across gender lines, as some of the literature reviewed indicated similar realities for Black male students and their experience with the “acting white” stereotype (Akom, 2008; Bolton & Moniz, 1993; Kunjufu, 1988) or the learned sense of anti-Blackness among African Americans (Doss & Gross, 1992). This experience may not be limited only to African American boys and men, but it may also be reflective in other ethnic groups (e.g., Latino boys and men) who may also perpetuate pro-white narratives.
Another important consideration for future research applies to Black girls and women. Girls and women who are part of the Black diaspora may be subject to the same stereotypes outlined in this study for reasons that span beyond pursuing higher education. For example, a Black woman may be stereotyped in the same way as the Black female college students of this study while never having pursued a college education. This speaks to the intricacies of *intragroup* microaggressions, as outlined by Solórzano and Huber (2020), which can also have harmful effects that point to the impact racism has had on enhancing camaraderie among same-race peers. Nonetheless, additional research is valuable for better understanding the connectedness of in-group stereotypes as a side effect of systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes.
Epilogue

As a proud Black woman and scholar, I wholeheartedly want to communicate that this research was not done as a means to bash the Black diaspora or to blame our community for why these stereotypes persist. Rather, this research was done to raise awareness of how these stereotypes are a more covert side effect of racism that fuels in-group divisiveness.

Understanding the intersection of race, womanhood, and academia adds valuable insight into the broader conversation of being multi-marginalized, even within one’s own racial group as a result of the inherently racist principles on which this nation was built. The hope is that, first, we make ourselves more aware of the underlying root of these stereotypes, which are situated in systemic racism and white supremacist attitudes that do not highlight or give credit to the excellence of our ancestors, their brilliant minds, their contributions to our society, and often assimilate Black intellect to whiteness. Second, then, with this awareness, we as a people can stop perpetuating such stereotypes and create spaces that provide counternarratives to better affirm, uplift, and encourage each other to validate our Blackness and belonging.

In this study, participants identified many microaggressions consistent with the intersection of being Black, female, and a scholar. As supporters of Black female college students, we need to be intentional about affirming ourselves during our academic journey, especially as we continue our education, often at predominately white institutions that may not have the necessary cultural supports to help students of color navigate academia in a way that makes us feel safe. To that end, this is a call to action for Black faculty. Your mentorship is essential to the success of Black female college students (Kelly & Fries-Britt, 2022), especially in predominantly white institutions (Reddick, 2011; Sinanan, 2016) where scholars are
constantly navigating daily challenges faced in the academy. The mentee-mentor relationship is a vital component of trust to affirm Black students’ sense of belonging in higher education.

For family and friends, unapologetically hold space for Black female college students. We have a responsibility to meet dissonance with healthy counternarratives that affirm and strengthen our spirits as we all navigate spaces that often invalidate our Black bodies and intellect via stereotypes, regardless of educational background. Historically, the value of education has been a prevalent staple and a source of resiliency for Black families, “despite having their learning impacted by racism and stereotyping” (Sims-Schouten & Gilbert, 2022, p. 91). The pursuit of higher education is not a simple road traveled. With that, the next time you call someone “boujee,” “siddity,” “high maintenance,” or refer to them as “acting white” because they are pursuing higher education or any other aspect you feel misaligns with Blackness, just pause. Think through the implications of what you are saying and how it unkindly perpetuates a narrative that glorifies Eurocentric values while undercutting Black excellence and minimizing our contributions as a people—a standalone that needs no leaning against whiteness.

Lastly, for my beautiful and brilliant Black female college students, you do not need to do anything else but be who you are. Although stereotypes are designed to marginalize, continue to manage tensions in ways that empower you most. I hope this research provides a sense of comfort that your experience with inter- and intraracial stereotypes is validated. I understand wholeheartedly the fine line you walk in your skin every day of being perceived as “combative” when advocating for yourself, while also being too tired of always having to “fight” when met with stereotypes and microaggressions. Continue to tell your story with your words and actions to let people know how phenomenal you are and how many ways you wonderfully represent Blackness.
Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Primary Investigator: Alexis Thrower

Research Questions:

1. What are the intraracial stereotypes experienced by Black female college students?
2. How have these intraracial stereotypes shaped their experiences and relationships with Black faculty, Black peers, family members, and the Black community?
3. How do intraracial stereotypes about Black female college students shape their sense of belonging?
4. How do Black female college students manage tensions arising from intraracial stereotypes?

Interview Protocol for: The High Maintenance Black Girl: Black Female College Students’ Experiences with Intraracial Stereotypes

1. Tell me a bit about your educational journey, what school you attend, and what brought you to your current college/university?
2. What stereotypes have you heard from outside of the Black community as a Black female college student?
3. What stereotypes have you heard from other Black people because of being a Black female scholar pursuing higher education?
   a. Can you define each of those stereotypes more specifically?
   b. Can you provide an example?
4. How have these stereotypes affected you?
5. How have intraracial stereotypes impacted your relationships?
6. What do you believe is the underlying reason for these perpetuated stereotypes?
7. How have intraracial stereotypes impacted your sense of self?
8. How have intraracial stereotypes impacted your experience in higher education?
9. How do you manage these situations and/or cope with these stereotypes?
10. Since starting college, how has your relationship with the Black community changed?
11. What do your friends and family think about you pursuing higher education?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share or feel that I need to do better to conduct my research?
## Appendix B: Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stereotypes</th>
<th>Parent code</th>
<th>Child code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interracial</td>
<td>Any mention of a stereotype about Black students or people that is communicated by non-Black people</td>
<td>“unapproachable”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intraracial</td>
<td>Any mention of a stereotype about Black students or people that is communicated by Black peers or people</td>
<td>“I think a stereotype that like Black women who like go. Go for higher education. It’s just like They’re like ‘boujee’ and like they want to be better than like the rest of their family I guess by going to a higher education institution and like trying to achieve something different than what their family has done if people in their family haven’t gone to college.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Any mention of the participant interacts with another person and or group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effects of stereotypes on relationships</td>
<td>Participant’s feelings when met with and/or referred to as a stereotype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td>Positive, negative, or neutral remarks from immediate and/or non-immediate family members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friends</strong></td>
<td>Positive, negative, or neutral remarks from friends (e.g. former friends, high school friends, childhood friends, current friends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other intraracial college/academic</strong></td>
<td>Positive, negative, or neutral remarks from any other college counterpart (other Black student)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other interracial college/academic</strong></td>
<td>Positive, negative, or neutral remarks from any other college counterpart (e.g. non-Black professors or staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dissonance stereotypes create within broader Black community</strong></td>
<td>Any mention of how intraracial stereotypes impact greater Black community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sense of Belonging</strong></td>
<td>Any mention of how individuals feel they are welcome and/or part of the community within Black spaces</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Welcome</strong></td>
<td>When individuals feel warmly greeted in a space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Un-welcome</strong></td>
<td>When individuals don’t feel well received in a space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Even though I know a lot of our Black students, my core group is like five people. And even then, we’re all in science. So, it’s kind of like they understand me, but then when we try and make other friends like our Black business students or our Black art students, they kind of like look at you a certain way and we’re like, okay, let’s just kind of like stick to our group. 11:22:49 Cause it’s -like why would you wanna make a relationship with somebody who’s bringing like a negative vibe or like a negative light to you instead of like being positive? So, I’ll just stick with my group.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic spaces</strong></td>
<td>College campus or other scholarly settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I got a whole lot closer with [Black people] and I felt more like, I had a set community and I was actually a part of it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-academic spaces</strong></td>
<td>Any other space outside of the college campus (e.g. home, amongst non-academic peers, in community)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“the people that look like you, when it comes from them, it hurts a lot more. And I also like thinking back to like the fact that it’s hard for us to even like acknowledge what stereotypes we’ve heard from other Black people because it’s kind of like we’re not even thinking of it like that because we don’t even have that thing in our mind of like these people would never say anything negative about me, you know; but then when they do, it really hits harder.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons/ rationale (sensemaking) for stereotypes</td>
<td>Any discussion of the underlying reason for stereotypes</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History/policy/ legislation</td>
<td>Stereotypes are rooted in historical context of exclusion from education, slavery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White supremacist attitudes</td>
<td>Mention of white people being superior in race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge in community</td>
<td>Encounters with Black peers who have not attended college and are unfamiliar with the academic demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media perpetuation</td>
<td>Any mention of how stereotypes are supported (even if inaccurate) in contemporary media (e.g. tv, movies, shows)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internalized racist beliefs</td>
<td>Remarks that perpetuate potential bias and oppression about Black academic excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational norms/perspectives</td>
<td>Participants recall what they believe to be their parents and/or grandparents’ perception of higher education for Black students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy</td>
<td>Participants describe someone being hostile for their academic pursuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Participant describes family or another person projecting unease of higher education on them, regardless of the reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects on sense of self</td>
<td>Participants feelings of self or emotional responses when met with intraracial stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social anxiety</td>
<td>Nervousness, fear of interacting with others, avoidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not affected</td>
<td>Indifferent to remarks that invalidate one’s belief of who they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>Feel expectation to perform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Black identity</td>
<td>Participant describes (negatively) second-guessing their identity and/or behaviors because of stereotypical remarks and/or need to adjust behaviors and/or speech to feel accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Isolation</strong></td>
<td>Feeling alone or intentionally avoiding; separating from a group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-esteem</strong></td>
<td>Participants’ feelings about their confidence or worth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ambition</strong></td>
<td>Participants desire to achieve something and resilience to persist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selling out</strong></td>
<td>Participant describes feeling as if they are compromising their integrity, morality, authenticity or principles by pursuing higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coping/Supports</strong></td>
<td>Ways to reduce unpleasant emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disengage</td>
<td>Participant describes intentionally distancing oneself from Black peer(s) who may perpetuate intraracial stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivator</td>
<td>Reframe stereotype as a tool of encouragement (‘prove wrong’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignore</td>
<td>Try to not listen or think about stereotypes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downplay achievements</td>
<td>Participants describe refraining or minimizing sharing accomplishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code switching/conforming</td>
<td>Participants describe feeling the need to adjust speech and/or behavior to better assimilate in Black spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentorship</td>
<td>Participants mention aligning with someone who is experienced and they trust to give advice about their respective academic and/or professional journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address comment/stereotype</td>
<td>Discuss with person making comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black peer spaces</td>
<td>Any space in which Black students intentionally gather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from family and friends</td>
<td>Providing assistance (e.g. academic, emotional, social)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support outside of Black community</td>
<td>Seeking or receiving assistance (e.g. academic, emotional, social) from non-Black peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yearn for connection</td>
<td>Regardless of stereotypes, participants still having a desire for connection with other Black people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek solidarity</td>
<td>Unity, or agreeing to improve through mutual support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family pressure</td>
<td>Participants describe feeling obligation and/or expectation to pursue higher education in the household</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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