Not Your Angry Black Woman

The Influence of a Stereotype on Participation and Belonging

By

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Abstract:

This study seeks to understand how the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" influences classroom belonging and participation with varied levels of emotion management. While much research exists on the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" in media with regard to how Black women are represented, there is a large gap in evaluating the stereotype's effect on their emotions, especially the emphasis on remaining calm and collected. My study interrogates the following questions: (1) Where does the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" originate? (2) How does the internalization of the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" influence classroom belonging? (3) How does emotion management influence the fear of classroom participation in relation to the stereotype of the angry Black woman? (4) Why are Black girls specifically taught to not give in to their emotions? Through several semi-structured in-depth interviews with Black, female-identifying college students, I conclude that the internalization of the stereotype influences classroom behavior due to fear. The expectation of being stereotyped often leads to Black women in classrooms feeling as if they don't belong. Many participants stated that even when their anger is justified, they are ignored because they are viewed as irrational, without any acknowledgement of what they're actually saying. Every interviewee noted that in childhood, anger was viewed as disrespectful, so in adulthood, they cry when angry. Continued emotion management influences the fear of classroom participation because by the time a student enters college, many of their coping mechanisms through emotion management are engrained in who they are.

Introduction:

Women of color face countless disparities in society today. One issue often ignored is a lack of consideration for the validity of their emotions. In the news and media, the representation of Black women is that of anger. There is a lack of respect in understanding their thoughts and

arguments which leads to a modification of emotions to not be viewed as the stereotypical "angry Black woman". The goal of my research is to study how Black women are taught to properly manage their emotions whereas their White counterparts cannot only speak freely but are encouraged to do so. I plan to conduct a qualitative study where I interview Black college students about how and if they were raised to manage their emotions and how it influences their college academic experience. I argue that there are consequences of emotional management within Black female college students regarding classroom participation, and although women of all races are encouraged to remain calm and collected, there is a particular encouragement for Black women where I find a gap in previous research in relation to this requirement for Black women to be in control of their emotions. In other words, based on my findings, I argue that the stereotype of the “angry Black woman” leads to emotional management which influences college classroom behavior and belonging.

My aim was to prove that the fear of being stereotyped leads to a lack of belongingness and fear of participation. My topic is an important topic of study because all students should feel support in a classroom. Those subject to stereotypes are treated differently because of the stereotype and the ways that it functions. Not everyone is treated equally, and amongst many other

issues, stereotypes are one of the reasons. Without properly understanding the history behind stereotypes, we unknowingly treat others differently. By ignoring stereotypes, those manifesting the attributes of the stereotypes are often misunderstood. The main topics of discussion in my paper are classroom belongingness, gender perceptions of anger, and the history and reality of the stereotype.

Classroom belongingness varies based on diversity, professor support and understanding, instructional style, interactions with faculty and feelings of acceptance, and peer interactions. Out of all of these variables, the most prevalent theme found in an article noted: "the effect of faculty instructional style on perceptions of classroom community" (Booker, 182). This feeling of belongingness relates to gendered perceptions because how women vs. men belong varies. Gender and perceptions of anger are important to my study because it demonstrates how perceptions of anger are not all the same. The main points being analyzed are class expectations, purposeful differences in anger expression and restraint, and emotional restraint as a masculine trait. In all settings, but particularly in the classroom, there are "middle-class Black strategies for managing the cultural dilemmas posed by Black anger" (Wilkins, 1). Gendered differences in anger expression tie closely to the history and reality of the stereotype. With a lack of understanding of

the reasoning behind the stereotype and its internalization, Black women are not only perceived as particularly angry but internalize the stereotype as well. Although Black women are believed to experience more anger than others, research has found that this is untrue, making the stereotype a myth (Walley-Jean, 2009; Ashley, 2014). This is a vital point because although the stereotype is proved to be a myth, it still remains a prominent stereotype in our society. This leads to the questions of where the stereotype originated from and why we as a society continue to believe it.

Although the media often portrays Black women as unjustly angry, research has shown that African American women report fewer angry emotions than others, even when faced with situations that would make them more likely to feel this way (Walley-Jean, 2009). While some studies focus on the stereotype of the angry Black woman, few studies analyze how the stereotype affects these women in societal as well as in private situations. Only through studying the history and cultural impact of the stereotype, research may begin to decipher how to combat the stereotype. For example, in understanding the history of why Black women are viewed as angry and the impact it has on their mental well-being, educators can become more versed in understanding them in classroom settings. Regardless of the research already in circulation, African American girls and women in classrooms are often misunderstood, ignored, or dismissed. Taking this one step further,

by feminizing anger, Black women are more likely to be perceived as angry compared to Black men, even when anger is not the emotion trying to be expressed (Wilkins, 2010).

Literature Review:

History and Reality of the Stereotype of the "Angry Black woman":

Examining the Reality of the "angry Black woman"

The stereotype of the "angry Black woman" has been reproduced by media and continues to be studied as accurate. In movies and television shows, there is a history of the different roles Black women can play- that of the caretaker, that of a woman who is overly sexualized, and that of the social climber who conforms to White norms but is presented as the antagonist. Kretsdemas' article studied the portrayal of Black women in media, particularly on the 2006 show Ugly Betty. The show itself surrounds a Mexican-American woman with a lack of fashion sense who lands a job at a fashion magazine. Her largest threat at her job comes from the Black creative director, Wilhelmina, who plots against Betty and her friend Daniel for the position of Editor-In-Chief. Kretsdemas questioned how and why the portrayals can be noted as a new translation of the "tragic mulatta stereotype" from previous shows in the 1960s and 1970s. Kretsedemas found that "most of the ‘authentically black' female characters that are depicted on Ugly Betty are no more agreeable than the Wilhelmina character [meaning that] they are all different versions of the angry black woman stereotype" (2010, 168). In having every character with the same underlying role, it is almost natural that Black women are perceived as angry. The article referenced various theories

that come into play when perceiving black women. Secondly, it outlined the reality that the stereotype becomes understood and internalized through media. As Walley-Jean (2009) explained, the stereotype is proved to be a myth, but its origins lie in media, making it so believed today. Being such a prominent force, common tropes in the media seep into our subconscious. By portraying Black women as angry in commercials, ads, or in this instance, in television show, the stereotype becomes widely represented and therefore believed.

Black feminist theory is key when studying this stereotype, and Dianne Hayes (2012) studies how even women in power must constantly monitor themselves, even when they know they will be regarded as "Black" before any accomplishments are noted. As they rise their "accomplishments, education, successes and contributions are frequently shadowed by the realities of misperceptions and stigmas that can potentially mar their legacy" (2012, 18). Hayes incorporates Critical Black Feminist theory by studying how the lack of inclusion for Black women in feminism is often overlooked. Critical Feminist Theory becomes particularly important in her article by explaining how black women are unlike women of other races because they are always under the spotlight, and therefore, always being criticized. Critical Race Theory backs up the argument as well because although the article is about women, the specificity lies in race.

In another article, Walley-Jean (2009) questioned whether African-American women actually have more feelings of anger than others, and argued that not only do they not, but that their perception is different because of stereotypes, status, and the perception of Black women as a whole. The purpose of the study was to "empirically test the stereotypes of the angry Black woman by empirically examining the experience and expression of anger in a sample of young adult African American women" (75). Control groups were tested on implicit and explicit measures of bias. All of the participants completed a standard measure of anger which measured

"the extent to which angry feelings are controlled by either suppressing angry feelings by calming down or cooling off when angered" (76). Contrary to belief, the study found that African American women report far less frequent angry emotions in situations when they would be more likely to experience these emotions. This is important to my study because it provides evidence and history backing my argument about how these beliefs can be internalized which end up leading to negative outcomes in social settings.

In an article entitled "Anger Privilege", Taylor hypothesized that "despite the perception of Black women as angry, they are no more likely to express anger than white women" (2). Through sensationalizing the image, it has become engrained in society and its interactions. She discusses the double standard of anger privilege which influences the stereotype. Black women don't have the privilege of being angry, and instead, their anger is viewed as unjust. In addition, they are often perceived to be angry, even when they are not. This is relevant to my research because the double-standard allows me to dig deeper into how these perceptions of anger influence one's experience in a college classroom. In often engaging and thought-provoking lessons, in my research I explore how Black women face self-expression.

Similarly to Taylor's research, Trina Jones' article discusses how Black women are "frequent targets of bias-filled interactions" (2017). Like stated previously, the stereotype assumption influences how Black women interact not only in public settings, but in semi-private, and hopefully safe-spaces- college classrooms. Colleges and universities are institutions dedicated to educating students. In order to ensure that everyone is given the same opportunities, classrooms must be safe spaces where everyone feels welcome and comfortable. Her article is about the "complexity of that fleeting moment when Black women must decide whether and how to challenge another's assumptions about Black women's status and ‘place'" (2021). This "fleeting

moment" is relevant to my research because I hope to figure out how and when Black college students choose how to present themselves in classrooms, particularly during engaging discussions. Her article also explores the intersectionality of race and gender, something that tends to be ignored not only in feminist studies but in racial studies as well. The particularly different experience that Black women face is important because it shows intersectionality. This argument is important to my study because there is research on gender and race separately, but rarely together. Her article argues that "Black women are rendered invisible in both dialogues about race and dialogues about gender (2025). This sense of invisibility is important to my research because although Black women aren't studied in either dialogue, there is still a spotlight on them in every other sense, and I study this spotlight in future research and within my interviews.

Another article relating to the history and reality of the stereotype is written by Gina Ulysse, entitled "She Ain't Oprah, Angela, or Your Baby Mama: The Michelle O Enigma". She argues that "within the purview of white imagination, black females have existed stereotypically as mammies, jezebels, and sapphires, or their contemporary counterparts of matriarchs, welfare queens, and hoochie mamas" (175). Her article is similar to Krestemas' study on Ugly Betty, in which we learn the limited roles that Black women can have not only in media but in life. Although not everyone in college is of upper-class, the majority of people in college are of middle and upper-class status because of the immense amounts of money it costs to attend, even with scholarships and programs geared to recruiting low-income students. That being said, "Black middle- and upper-class females are bound by the burden of being perceived to be ‘out of place' or exceptional" (175). This is relevant to my research because I am focusing on Black females within college classrooms. Using her argument, it is the assumption, therefore, that the women participating in my study either have to prove themselves or live up to an impossible standard.

The history behind the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" is important because in educators not fully understanding the implications of the stereotype, the belonging or lack thereof for Black female college students becomes affected. These stereotypes are already in place and the social constructions that are tied to it influence the participants in my study. I use the aforementioned articles to prove my own argument and aid in my interviews. These articles relate to classroom belonging because the history and reality of the stereotype influence how Black, female students are perceived. This perception relates to my study because I study its effects in the college classroom.

Classroom Belonging:

Determining Factors in Students' Feelings of Stereotypes

Studies have analyzed factors that influence classroom belongingness, and through two studies, I show the impact of a lack of belongingness is evident. How students define belongingness in classroom settings varies based on diversity, interactions with peers and professors, and instructional style. In concentrating heavily on how we are perceived by others, it is only natural that belongingness would play a role (Goffman, 155). We present the persona that we want to be recognized as, but in situations in which we feel like outsiders, the presented self is different from the self we present in environments in which we feel comfortable. In a classroom setting, belongingness relies heavily on interactions with peers and teachers respectively (Ashley, 2014; Booker, 2007). A lack of diversity negatively impacts the ability to fit in, and faculty support plays a large role in acceptance and belongingness (Booker, 2007). A fear of being stereotyped is a precursor to emotional management, and classroom belongingness

has an impact as well. If a student feels as though they will be stereotyped by their peers and teachers, their ability to fit in and their sense of belongingness is lowered.

The feeling of being heard and understood by faculty play a large role in belongingness. Booker found that "instructional style and faculty characteristics were particularly salient factors in their degree of comfort and acceptance within their college courses" (Booker, 184). In her source studying the impact of stereotypes on psychotherapy, Ashley (2014) argues that without understanding the culture and stereotypes, Black women will never be fully understood. In learning the history and reasoning behind various emotions, treatment can be better geared and far more beneficial. Although my study is on classrooms and not psychotherapy, her point is relevant because her study provides a history behind the stereotype as well as how to mediate it in a psychotherapeutic sense which also translates into the academic sense as well.

In a study entitled "Behavior Rehearsal for High Risk Freshmen", Louis Jenkins found that "trainees earned better grades than controls on the campus where training was offered but not at smaller branch campuses" (147). This training consisted of finding methods to predict how one would be perceived and act accordingly. In addition, it focused on methods of critical thought regarding what to do in situations of tension. Another point argued within his article was how there are other forms of stressors that are related to the person as opposed to the setting. Academics view students as "deficient in academic skills and have given less attention to the social situation in which a student lives and the degree to which it supports or interferes with his scholastic activities" (149). These social situations are often stereotypes and assumed perceptions, which, therefore, influence students' scholastic experience. Behavior rehearsal "permits an individual to simulate problem situations and practice new modes of responding without concern for the immediate real-life consequences of his experimental behavior" (149). In

practicing how to react to stereotype, it allows for students to prepare themselves. This contributes to classroom belonging because when students know how to react to various situations, they feel more confident and therefore that they belong.

The "angry Black woman" for my purposes is about students, but professors also suffer from the assumptions that go along with it. In her work entitled "The Angry Black Woman Scholar", Charmaine Williams argues that "women of color are positioned to seek favor with powerful white men who can grant privilege or take it away [and] it is important to see this discourse as constructed and vulnerable to rupture" (90). In academic institutions, women, let alone women of color are rarely in supreme positions of power. By being taught early on to seek approval from white men, and men in general, women of color are less likely to show their true selves for fear of being stereotyped, often unnecessarily. Williams argues that there is a lack of solidarity between Black women which leaves them vulnerable to Black men who view themselves as the intellectuals. In alienating themselves, they remain unheard and dismissed. Being Black and in positions of power leaves scholars forced to prove themselves as worthy of being in their position, making it difficult to teach.

The stereotype surrounding Black women affect their feelings of belonging because in going into a setting where they believe they will be perceived as angry, they automatically feel as though they belong less. On the other end, if they feel they don't belong in a classroom setting due to the factors influencing belonging, they are more likely to notice a higher perception of the stereotype. An automatic lack of belonging will lead to reservation and emotional management in order to not be stereotyped. Classroom belongingness relates to gendered perceptions of anger because there is a difference between men and women's sense of belonging, and there is an ignored version of intersectionality between gender and race.

Gender Perceptions of Anger:

Gender as a Variable in Expression and Perception

Emotional expression or restraint varies not only by race, but by gender and class as well. Studies have shown that within classroom settings, multiple factors determine how a student will choose to express themselves, and if they will. Gender is important in the discussion of anger because Black women and Black men are perceived differently regarding how they express anger, and there are purposeful differences in anger expression and restraint known as a gender strategy. Finally, emotional restraint itself is viewed as masculine, so there are gendered differences not only in expression, but in *emotion* itself. There are certain expectations that come with gender, and the presentation of gender is the starting point in what is assumed to be true. In Goffman's theory of the presentation of self, it is made clear that we change our persona depending on who is watching, and we perform different roles to different people (Goffman, 255). This theory is relevant to gender as a variable in the expression of anger because depending on the setting, Black women and men have their own respective ideas of how to best present themselves.

The expression or suppression of emotions varies by both gender and class, and "middle class emotional standards emphasize emotional restraint and positive emotional display" (Wilkins, 2010, p. 2). Since all the students in her study attended a university, it was assumed that they were all part of the middle class. The article analyzed gender differences in reactions to anger. "Emotional strategies help people of both genders identify the type of person that they *are,* and the type of person that they are *not*" (Wilkins, 5). Symbolic boundaries "tie emotion strategies to *gendered* racial identities, which feminize black anger" (Wilkins, 5). This article

was perfect for the larger scope of my research because it uses gender as a variable which a lot of research does not, and it talks about how emotional restraint can influence social behaviors and interactions. The only difference however, is that my study focuses on interactions in an academic setting. The main conclusions from not only the article, but from studying gender as a variable are that emotional restraint is often on purpose and not automatic, class plays a large role in the relevance of restraint, and emotional expression as feminine leads to perception differences. In her study, Wilkins found that Black men tend to suppress their anger to remove the associated stereotype. On the opposite side of spectrum, Black women feed into the stereotype because by expressing anger, they are demonstrating that they are angry. In predominantly White institutions, Black women show anger to start a conversation and make it known that changes to their institution need to be made. At Purchase for instance, one of my participants noted that "I enjoy expressing anger in the classroom because it makes the white people justify their comments". When no one is held accountable for their actions, they continue to get away with often problematic statements and beliefs. Anger can be used as a tool by Black women to question those beliefs. Although not super common in my interviews, it was still relevant that a couple of my participants used anger in their favor to call out racist and sometimes sexist comments made in the classroom.

Rebecca Epstein's article entitled "Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black Girls' Childhood", focused on how Black girls are often denied the privilege of behaving like children. The assumption that they are less innocent "may contribute to *harsher punishment* by educators and school resources officers" (1). This background information is the platform on which she argues the consequences. In legal systems, kids and adults are treated differently, as they should be, with the goal of protecting children. While children, however, enjoy "greater [legal]

protections[,] while Black children's position remained relatively unchanged" (4). She argues that this is due to the stereotype of Black girls as "loud" which leads to adult-like aspirations leading to them being perceived as threats. This interpretation of outspokenness in girlhood leads to the stereotype of Black women as aggressive and dominating. These adult stereotypes therefore, are often out of their control, as it has been placed on them since childhood. Disciplining Black girls for perceived "loud and un-ladylike behavior that challenged their authority [and they are] under greater surveillance of their decorum than their white peers" (6). From a young age, Black girls are more likely to get in trouble for demonstrating behavior that all children show. Being loud and asking questions are acceptable for White children but are viewed in a negative light for Black children. A lot of this stems from systemic racism which compels Black parents to silence their children first so White authority won't in the future.

This gender and race discrimination tends to lead to higher rates of criminalization. Adultification, a form of dehumanization, doesn't allow Black children to behave like children, but rather applies different standards to them. In her study, Epstein sought to "determine whether adults assign Black girls qualities that render them more like adults- and less innocent- than their white peers [by] assessing childhood innocence [on an adapted scale]" (7). Adults from various racial, ethnic, and educational backgrounds across the United States were surveyed. Participants completed a questionnaire, unaware of its purpose, and were told to assess their beliefs about children's development in the 21st century. They found that "across all age ranges, participants viewed Black girls collectively as more adult than white girls" [and in particular that they need] less protection and nurturing than white girls, and that [they] were perceived to know more about adult topics and are more knowledgeable about sex than their white peers" (8). These findings are significant because since Black girls are viewed as more advanced since childhood, their

adult experience is completely different from that of their white peers. Adultification is intentionally harmful and is relevant to my research because it affects how these Black women are perceived in classroom settings.

An article about the school-to-prison pipeline by Monique Morris relates to the previous article because she argues that "the research literature using the 'pipeline' metaphor fails to completely capture the education-system pathways to incarceration for Black girls" (3). The pipeline refers to the theory that since grade school, Black children are more likely to wind up in prison. She also argues that there is a double-standard which Black girls will never win. Not speaking up leads to distancing themselves from other Black students, but speaking up leads to being stereotyped by teachers and rejecting achievement to higher self-esteem. Black girls are punished for not acting White, and there is an implicit bias "rooted in our subconscious behaviors, our implicit reactions to individuals based on latent, involuntary preconceptions" (6). Black girls are criminalized for traits that are inherently survival tactics, and they are shamed. "Loud" and "defiant" are shamed in academic settings, but they are qualities that allow for resilience to effects of racism, sexism, and classism. By not acknowledging this, Black girls and women are criminalized for surviving. In classrooms, it is expected that students will listen to the teacher and not defy or question their authority. In the real world, however, questioning authority is what allows Black women to move forward. By forcing submission in the classroom, Black girls turn into Black women who don't know how to question their place in society and fear doing so because of the repercussions they faced in grade school

A study by Chloe Lancaster evaluated conflict resolution programs for urban African-American adolescent girls. She stated that "exposure to violence has been found to create normative belief systems around the usage of aggression, which can serve as a precursor to

engagement in violent behavior" (226). Although not all Black students come from dangerous neighborhoods, there are still plenty that do, and that is often ignored. Lifestyles developed from these communities influence their psychological health and interferes with adaptive functioning, essentially undermining long-term wellbeing. To adapt to these situations, Black women sometimes withdraw from spaces that are deemed as mentally taxing. This may prevent assault, but it also leads to a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability which results in depression. Problem-solving skills are associated with an increase of social behavior, psychological adjustment and self-esteem. Her hypothesis was supported because the treatment group developed more positive, assertive attitudes that could help use violence as a means of conflict resolution (235).

The main points linking the articles are that there is a lack of understanding behind where stereotypes arise from, the internalization of said stereotypes, and the relationship between power, control, and respect that leads to how Black women are perceived and feel about themselves. The conclusions are that the history behind stereotypes needs to be studied. Not studying it leads Black women to be misperceived and misunderstood. Secondly, although evidence shows that Black women do not express more anger than others, the stereotype continues to remain relevant and believed. Finally, the modification of emotions is in place for appearance and survival. The history and reality of the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" connects to previous sections because it demonstrates the reality of the situation compared to what everyone else continues to see and believe. This relates to my research because even if the stereotype remains untrue in reality, it still has its origins in media. Since we absorb so much media as a society, we are likely to believe what we are shown.

Identity Conflict:

Identify conflict refers to not fully understanding who one is. In relation to my study, individuals may suffer identity conflict by not understanding their role in the classroom with regard to race and gender. Arthur Whaley sought to determine whether "double consciousness" best portrays identity conflict among African-Americans during late adolescence and young adulthood. The problem, he argued, "lies not in dysfunctional African American personalities but in the message, delivered to African Americans by a predominantly European American society, that African Americans must choose between White or Black" (112). This relates back to my study because being forced to choose causes an internal conflict which leads to issues in the classroom. He explored various identities and found that "African American young adults, who reported that being 'Black' was only important to their national identity, experienced less identity conflict" (116). An article by Roxanne Harlow examined the effect of race on professors' experience. They too face an identity conflict, but it is different because they are the ones in positions of power. The goal of her study was to examine how "crediting and the discrediting of aspects of race differentially shape black and white professors' experiences with undergraduate teaching and classroom emotion management" (349). A key theory when studying identity conflict is that of "identity theory".

Identity theory states that behavior is directly linked to the conception of self, and that these conceptions are partially shaped by responses from others through interactions. A negative input changes the output of a situation, leading to distress. Through a series of interviews, Harlow found that "race affects the amount of work professors do in the classroom; negotiating a racial stigma creates emotion work and labor for African American professors beyond that required of their white peers" (350). Her findings are relevant to my study because although I

only plan to interview Black students, I think it would be important to ask questions regarding their experiences with Black professors. In addition, we internalize racial issues and are aware that stereotypes exist which contributes to feelings of belonging or lack thereof, and classroom participation. Black professors have to earn respect in classrooms whereas white professors receive respect automatically, and this also influences students' ability and desire to learn.

In classrooms, both Black students and professors can't be too motherly *or* too businesslike, leaving them in a weird in-between state of not knowing how to act. There is a fear of mistakes and professors discussed how race "detracted from their credibility in regard to students' perceptions of their intellectual knowledge of the material" (359). Black individuals in classroom settings always represent the entire group, putting an extreme level of stress on them, regardless of their position as professor or student.

An article by Gary Felton studied Black voices in classroom settings and who listens. He argued that allowing students to be themselves opens the learning experience and allows them to feel and be accepted in the classroom setting. A classroom should be a place that is free from judgement experienced in day-to-day life, and that plays a huge role in how Black students interact in academic settings. When they feel comfortable being themselves, their mental health is improved and they learn better. Students are, sadly, often treated differently depending on their race allowing for schools to "create conditions and a matrix for differential treatment" (288). This then becomes the norm and is often ignored. Although not all Black students are disadvantaged, they are usually all treated that way. They are then viewed as people instead of as coming from different backgrounds. This affects their identity because they begin to question who they really are and who they should portray themselves as. This is relevant to their classroom experience because it leaves them feeling "totally discounted, puzzled, and crazy and

can eventuate in resentment, anger, rebellion, acting out, refusal to learn at all or ultimately in dropping out" (289). His study is key to my research because it provides evidence of differential treatment based on race which not only affects identity, but classroom participation and belonging as well.

As I complete my research on the topic of the "angry Black woman", I find that although the majority are viewed as angry, this anger is always a negative emotion as opposed to having positive elements. In our society, anger is viewed as detrimental, even when validated, and that is an important part of my research and study. Disassembling the stereotype and understanding the contexts of anger "opens the possibility of radically altering assumptions about *belonging* relative to the rewards, consequences, and constructions of citizenship (Griffin, 144). In her autoethnography, Griffin challenges the stereotype by breaking it down piece by piece and analyzing its influence on society. She argues that there are so many reasons for Black women to be angry, and this causes them to question their place in society. By viewing the stereotype as negative, it negates their emotions. By viewing it as positive however, it challenges the norm. Her autoethnography is relevant to my research because it provides a new perspective on the stereotype. I hope to use her argument in my research by challenging why anger is negative when justified. Her argument ties into identity because Black women lose who they are when they both try to play into the stereotype *and* ignore it. It is a lose-lose situation leading to struggles within their identities.

Classroom belonging is important in relation to my research because the stereotype influences students' sense of belonging. The fear of being perceived as angry is enough to make Black women in classrooms feel as if they don't belong. This relates to gender perceptions of anger because women are more likely to be told to not express anger. Black women in particular

are even more likely because of their status as a double minority. Although it was proved that Black women express less anger than is expected, the stereotype still exists and influences how we are viewed. This is relevant to identity conflict because since behavior is linked to the conception of the self, Black women have a rocky understanding of themselves because they have to be extra cautious about the behaviors that they demonstrate. Having to code switch, or not use Ebonics in professional settings or around White people and being criticized for anger leads to Black women not fully having a solid conception of who they actually are.

Methods:

The current sample consisted of 7 African-American female college students who were recruited from a small co-educational liberal arts institution in Westchester, New York. Participants' ages ranged from 18-22 years old. Their majors were diverse, ranging from performing arts to liberal studies.

Data for this study were collected as part of a project investigating how the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" influences classroom participation and belonging. A stereotype is defined as a "widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing" (Dictionary). A survey was shared on social media platforms, and fliers were put up asking anyone who fit my criteria to take the survey so I could contact them for interviews. Participants were provided an informed-consent statement and were given time to ask questions before signing the document. To test the influence of the stereotype on participation and belonging, interview questions aimed to have participants discuss their sense of participation not only in relation to the stereotype, but in relation to race and gender separately. In addition, they were asked to describe their emotion management, as learned emotional management influences the ways that individuals express anger. Lastly, I asked about their names, as seeing

stereotypically “Black names” influence the way others perceive them, even without personal interaction. Although they were not compensated, they contributed to greater research. The study protocol was approved by Purchase College’s Institutional Review Board. Please find the interview guide in Appendix A.

Data Analysis:

After transcribing my interviews, I found a few key themes that reoccurred throughout, which also lined up with the goals of my research. First, I found that the majority of participants were taught from a young age to repress anger. “Growing up there’s a lot of times I’d get told ‘don’t be such an angry Black bitch.” Second, I found that belonging in a classroom often has less to do with direct interactions and more to do with how people believe they will be received in a space. One of my participants noted that her sense of belonging varied to not “offend the people talking because then you’ll just give them what they want.” Lastly, I found that media’s influence on stereotypes is the biggest contributer to the stereotype becoming so believed. BBC News journalist Ritu Prasad remarked that the “‘angry Black woman’ trope has its origins in 19th Century America, when minstrel shows, which involved comic skits and variety acts, mocking African-Americans became popular” (Prasad, 2018). Her comments on the stereotype stemmed from when Serena Williams was unfairly given a code violation during a match. When she fought back, she was punished being unjustly angry. Trina Jones, a law professor at Duke University stated that “Black women are not supposed to push back and when they do, they’re deemed to be domineering. Aggressive. Threatening. Loud” (Jones, 2018). This isn’t the first time that Williams has had to fight back against the stereotype, and it certainly won’t be the last. This contributes to my research because it demonstrates that Black women are condemned for fighting for themselves. Even in situations such as with Williams, when totally justified, it is

expected that the Black woman will remain calm. In disciplining Black women for fighting for their rights and against wrongdoings, it demonstrates to our society and Black girls that anger is a negative trait. Although a perfectly normal and healthy emotion, it is invalidated when expressed by a Black woman.

Thursdays on ABC, Shonda Rhimes runs television for hours. Her shows are popular to put it simply, and yet, a New York Times article wrote that "when Shonda Rhimes writes her autobiography, it should be called 'How To Get Away with Being an Angry Black Woman'". While it might seem like a mistake and not a big deal even after an apology was issued, the influence of the media is overwhelming. For such a powerful news company to write such slander shows that no one is above being stereotyped. In an analysis of representations of African-Americans in the media, Tony Weaver found that "distribution platforms suffer from issues of misrepresentation, [and] there is also an issue of underrepresentation" (2016, 64). Former First Lady, Michelle Obama, also had to contend with the media portraying her as angry. She stated in an interview with Oprah that the stereotype is rooted in other people's fears (2018). These fears influence Black women in all settings, and in the college classroom, it affects how Black women interact with their peers and professors, as well as their sense of belonging. It might seem outlandish that minstrel shows were once the norm, but they have taken a new form with social media. From companies like Gucci "accidentally" having Blackface on their designs to unflattering photos of Black women next to gorgeous photos of White women, racism in the media has morphed to emphasize current norms of racism rather than disappeared. Sonja Givens and Jennifer Monahan published a study analyzing the influence of mediated stereotype perceptions of African-American women (2009). Their findings were consistent with my hypotheses as they found that "participants associated the African-American interviewee more

quickly with negative terms" (87). They also argued that "African American female schemas contain gender and racial cues that may interact significantly to influence the way in which African American women are perceived in social situations" (102).

One of my interviewees supported this point when said that she doesn't think "Black students will ever feel comfortable in PWI's [Predominantly White Institutions] because a lot of times we're being taught material that is about us but not by us." In the classroom setting, my interviewee "was very wary of being deemed the 'angry Black woman' because I knew that it would be something that would follow me for all of my college career." She feared the way she would be perceived, so instead of speaking at all, she stayed silent. Stereotypes are "rooted in discriminatory practices [and] while it is already observed that repeated exposure to these stereotypes has negative ramifications, nonlinear streaming platforms have the capability of increasing these effects due to their availability" (Weaver, 64). The media's influence both on television and social media have affect how everyone, particularly younger generations, view groups of people. Weaver found in his content analysis that "stereotypes like ghetto/inarticulate, criminal, and angry Black woman were most frequently observed" (Weaver, 64). This supports my argument because since these assumptions are the most accessible on media platforms, they are also the most absorbed.

Consistent with Walley-Jean's (2009) findings that African-American women report less frequent angry emotions, my participants commented on the fact that in the majority of their academic settings, even when anger was justified, they remained calm and didn't outwardly express anger. When angry, many of my participants stated that they often cry. "I would never process these emotions properly, so sit here as an adult just like 'I really wanna fight you' but violence is not the answer. If I'm not happy, I'm sad, if I'm angry, I'm sad." I didn't originally

question where the stereotype arose from, but after most of my participants discussed that anger was viewed as disrespectful while growing up, I began to ask participants about where they believed the stereotype originated from. One of my participants said that the stereotype came from the media, saying that "it started out with White people, pushing the stereotype that Black women are angry. And White women said it because it made them better than us. They have femininity, and we have anger. We're either mammies or sapphires. They only see anger. They don't allow us to be humans." Their comments were similar to one of the coping strategies that Lewis & Mendenhall & Harwood & Brown (2012) noted in their study on coping with racial microaggressions. Becoming desensitized and escaping were the main strategies that their participants used to cope. During encounters with microaggressions, one of my interviewees noted that "I wouldn't call myself desensitized, but I am much more thick skinned [and] I'm emotionally numb to other people and their problems because everybody is numb to my problems." A participant noted that growing up, if she wanted to express herself, she "couldn't be loud or excessive." This was a common theme throughout the interviews and my participants are conditioned to brush off microaggressions as normal. This supports my argument because I hypothesized that becoming desensitized to the stereotype was an aftereffect of the constant fear of being stereotyped and facing microaggressions.

A 20-year-old remarked that "if I wasn't happy or content, if I was sad, I got threatened with violence. If I was angry I got threatened with violence. Everything was threatened with violence or being said to bed, or being told to go sit in my room. I would never process these emotions properly." This led me to question why anger is viewed as a negative emotion both in general and specifically in Black communities. What I found was that the history of subordination for African-American elders specifically, has led them to teach their children to

remain quiet as they had to. One of my participants commented that her mom "wanted me to be perfect and good and clean and proper." William Cross is a theorist in ethnic identity development, and in "Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience", he argues that in a society in which Black people face prejudice and discrimination, it is difficult to develop a positive racial identity. The "pre-encounter" phase is most relevant to my research as it argues that from childhood a person is "programmed to view and think of the world as being non-Black, anti-Black, or the opposite of Black…[and the] psychological conditions that relate from this world-view are the same for both lower -and middle-class Black people." Although slavery and segregation are legally over, its repercussions are still prevalent today. The fear of violence from a master is still a fear in Black parents today. The fear of their children being met with violence or dismissal from White people has led to them silencing their children before anyone else gets the chance. It is done for protection, but ultimately has negative consequences.

For Black parents and grandparents, expressing anger in their childhood could have gotten them killed. It is because of the history of the imbalance of power written into laws that Black children today are taught to avoid anger. In an excerpt from *The Reader's Companion to American History (1981),* Robert Zangrando noted that "between 1882 (when reliable statistics were first collected) and 1968 (when the classic forms of lynching had disappeared), 4,743 persons died of lynching, 3,446 (73%) black men and women" (Zangrando 1980). One of my participants supported this argument by saying that she "thinks it's just engrained in Black parents and households and culture to be quiet, to be docile [and] Black parents have this fear of 'if I teach my kid to speak, then they'll silence them'. So we're taught to be silent so we don't have to be killed or attacked". While silencing their children's emotions is currently done to protect their kids from the authority that once stifled them, this ultimately ends up leading to

their kids being unable to express emotions at all. One of my interviewees supported this by stating that she's "so bad at managing emotions in the classroom. I was brought up to be so proper that now if something frustrates me, I start crying or just shut down." Our anger has never been viewed as legitimate or warranted due to unfair treatment; instead, it's been twisted into a pathology (Allers, 2018). This internalization of a stereotype derived from the media has a huge influence on the way that Black women view themselves in public and analyze themselves in private. The "prolonged or traumatic frustrations (and contestation) of these high expectancy levels may produce a Black person more deeply rooted in nihilistic expectancies than witnessed in the behavior of individuals function at the pre-encounter level" (Cross, 21). These negative introspections are passed down through generations, leading to Black women today with an internalized sense of hatred that has essentially stemmed from early 19th Century media portrayals.

Once acknowledged that the stereotype didn't directly stem from the women themselves, many of my participants believed that it stemmed from the media, noting that "it started out with white people, pushing the stereotype that Black women are angry. And white women said it because it made them better than us. They have femininity, and we have anger." This comment is supported by various sources, one Washington Post article by Macy Freeman (2017), and a research study by Philip Kretsedemas (2010). Kretsedemas argued, through analysis of *Ugly Betty*, that "most of the 'authentically black' female characters that are depicted on *Ugly Betty* are no more agreeable than the Wilhelmina character [meaning that] they are all different versions of the angry black woman stereotype" (2010, 168). He outlined the reality that the stereotype becomes understood and internalized through media in general. Freeman's article also analyzes the stereotype in media. She notes a study by the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority which was

coordinated by the American Advertising Federation which "found that 72 percent of the black women perceived depictions of themselves in the media negatively compared to 46 percent of white women" (Freeman, 2017). In addition to characters, Black women in positions of power, such as producer Shonda Rhimes and First Lady Michelle Obama, are also subjected to these stereotypes publicly. One of my interviewees was confused about the origin because "we're angry, but no one is fighting on the streets. Usually we're overly calm." Living in a world where the media cannot be avoided, these stereotypes seep their ways into our beliefs and influence how we feel about ourselves and others, often subconsciously. In an article about the media's influence on stereotypes, Erica Scharrer found that there is "potential for media literacy education to intervene in the media's influence on racial and ethnic stereotypes" (2015, 171). One of the factors that contributed to students feeling comfortable in classrooms was a sense of support from their professors (Booker 2007).

With regard to classroom belonging, I came to the conclusion that it had more to do with the possibility of being stereotyped than the actual behaviors of their peers and professors. This finding was inconsistent with Booker's article which found that "instructional style and faculty characteristics were particularly salient factors in their degree of comfort and acceptance within their college courses" (Booker, 2007). Although my participants referenced instructional style, the simple aspect of the stereotype being prevalent in society was enough to question their sense of belonging in the classroom. In addition, one of my interviewees thinks that "a lot of times classrooms feed off of the pain that they perpetuate to their Black students and marginalize them." When uneducated about the impact of stereotypes on the way that they interact with their students, Black students are more likely to feel uncomfortable. "Media literacy education holds great promise for its ability to shape media-related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors and

encourage an active and critical stance toward media (Scharrer, 171). Thus, media literacy is a huge factor in professors understanding the impact of stereotypes and moving past it. In doing so, they are creating a safer and in turn, more productive environment. As leaders in the classroom, it is important for professors to learn this material, but it is equally important for students to be made aware as well. Emotion management became a key theme throughout my interviews. All of my participants were frustrated with the fact that they had been taught to manage their emotions to an extreme level, often never being told why. This suppression of emotions, anger in particular, led to participants being unlikely to participate in classroom settings.

There's got to be a way to represent this vicious cycle of despair for Black women in relation to processing, managing and internalizing the stereotype, all self-destructive process they are forced into by powerlessness in the face of racism. One of my participants said that classrooms put her "in this predicament where I would love to speak out, but I'm only allowed to make White people be comfortable in this classroom. I'm not allowed to be enraged". In their article on social media's contributions to the strong Black woman ideal, it was found that "clinicians, instructors, parents, and media activists should be mindful of how the use of both traditional and race-related social media may be both liberating for, and detrimental to, Black women's well-being" (Stanton, Jerald, Ward, Avery, 465). Well-being was a relevant topic of discussion during my interviews, and one of my participants noted that "Black students are marginalized in the classroom so we have to be affected by race in a classroom because we're the only ones willing to talk about race. We're the only ones being pointed to talk about it in a classroom." *Being forced to speak on aspects of race while simultaneously being observed leads to Black students in classrooms feeling unwelcome and affecting their well-being*. One of the

main reasons that the stereotype is projected at all is due to projection. Jones and Norwood (2017) argued that "projection operates as a defense mechanism [because] people feel better about themselves and experience less anxiety as a result of projecting unwanted traits onto others (Jones & Norwood, 2055). Seeing anger in Black women has to do with the media influence and insertion of the stereotype, but also the theory of projection.

It operates in two ways, as "an individual who fears having certain traits may attempt to suppress thoughts about that trait [and the suppression] may increase the likelihood that people will come to believe others can be labeled with that very trait" (Jones & Norwood, 2055). In other words, stereotypes are often projected because the projector sees these negative traits in themselves which leads them to project, and ultimately begin to see these negative traits in others. Secondly, "because some individuals desire to avoid the consequences of their own bad acts, projection may also increase the likelihood of deflecting blame" (Jones &Norwood, 2055). The history of the media showing Black women as angry combined with the theory of the projection leads to the stereotype being infused into society. In the college classroom, Black women are faced with the double burden of being Black and a woman. Put together, Black women are forced to cope with being stereotyped in ways that have nothing to do with them as individuals. These are systems put in place over decades, meant to put them in a box and discredit their accomplishments. Black women are called upon to be the voice of race in the classroom, somehow mediating between being angry Black women and an academic interpreter of racism and how it functions in the classroom and in wider society.

After multiple interviews and data analysis, it became clear that the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" originated in early 19th Century minstrel shows but remains prevalent today. In classrooms, Black women are forced to speak about topics that directly relate to them,

making it difficult because they are both the subject of discussion and the "object" of analysis from their White peers. While some Black women use anger to demonstrate issues in the classroom, many repress their anger and translate it into sadness. This repression of anger stems from the fear of violence from their parents which has roots back into slavery. Black parents would rather subdue anger in childhood than lose their children to racist violence in adulthood. Although done with their best interests at heart, this repression of emotions remains in adulthood, making it difficult to stand up for themselves in the face oppression.

Next Steps

After completing my research, I think the next steps would be to increase the sample size to both prove the data collected and produce more questions to investigate. In addition, I think it would be important to interview psychologists about the direct effects of perception and stereotypes, and while difficult, interviewing non-Black students about their likelihood of stereotyping would be interesting as well. Moving forward, I think it is important to introduce media literacy in classrooms for both the benefit of the professor and students. In addition to media literacy, it also becomes vital to prevent and remove racist propaganda from what we absorb on television, in movies, and on social media platforms. Media literacy itself is only necessary because of the negative stereotypes that have been placed on Black women. Lastly, it is important to educate ourselves and our leaders on the ways that stereotypes block our vision. As an already unrepresented group of people, Black women are often represented negatively with their ideas and voices dismissed. *As the group in question, it is important they are not forced to speak about these problems,but listened to when they choose to share their ideas.*

Conclusion:

After conducting preliminary research and interviewing my participants, I found many similarities in their responses. I was able to come to the conclusion that the stereotype of the "angry Black woman" arises from the media. While I first assumed that it came from non-Black people's interactions with Black women, I learned the opposite after my interviews. My participants were very clear that expressing anger was incredibly difficult for them, and they instead converted it to sadness. The emotional management is generational and stems from decades of oppression. During slavery, African-Americans could not express for fear of punishment and sometimes death, and this trauma is still engrained in African-American minds.

Children today, specifically Black girls, over 150 years later, are still taught to repress any emotion other than joy. Black parents are still under the impression that if their children aren't careful in the emotions that they express, that harm will come to them. In many ways, they are right, as African-Americans have to work twice as hard and be twice as careful just to be given the bare minimum amount of respect. At the same time though, suppression of anger in childhood becomes incredibly detrimental in adulthood. The values and belief systems we learn growing up are difficult to stray from when our brain becomes more fully-developed. In adulthood, Black children, particularly girls, struggle to express emotions, especially the emotions that are frowned upon such as frustration, sadness, and anger. In the college setting, this is displayed through lack of participation and a belonging.

The fear of participation stems from the fear of others believing that they will be perceived as unjustly angry, so instead of risking the stereotype, the stay silent instead. When angry, often justly so, they have no proper way to express it due to the generational trauma and fear of those in positions of power. This fear is passed down through generations, and my

participants therefore only cried when angry and had no proper way of communicating their feelings. Classroom belonging is a complicated issue that depends on both students, professors, and individual confidence. They all believed that anyone who paid tuition belonged in a classroom, but they seldom felt that internally. While their White peers felt free to express themselves, they rarely believed that they had the same right to self-expression.

The stereotype of the "angry Black woman" is a real issue that Black women of all generations, socioeconomic statuses, and locations have to contend with. It is a stereotype that arises from the media and is believed to be true, even when proven false. The fear of expressing anger is generational and stems from a racist society that Black girls today are growing up in. There is no way to remove the stereotype from our history, but moving forward, there needs to be acknowledgement that Black women are not angry unless they say they are, and that their anger is justified. Educators and students alike need to be made aware of not just this stereotype, but all stereotypes that prevent students from performing at and feeling their best. Stereotypes and internal biases are automatic, but what we do with them is what matters. We cannot control our immediate reactions to others, but we have to make an effort to see where others are coming from. Without understanding stereotypes and their influence, we adhere to whatever we are told, creating spaces where others feel unwelcome. Generational trauma is only recently being researched and studied, but it is a topic that is incredibly relevant in both my study and moving forward. It is trauma completely out of our control, but that we must contend with anyway.

Many groups of people have generations of trauma in their mindset that their ancestors had to suffer through, and it is only just now being worked through. In addressing and altering these mindsets, current generations are able to move forward. The fear of expressing anger and "negative emotions" is a form of generational trauma that Black women have to contend with,

and through my interviews and research, it is clear that we are succeeding in working off the trauma. Moving forward, it is important to understand Black women's history in this country and the reasoning behind many of the mindsets instilled with us today. In doing so, we are better able to move forward with confidence in our emotions and ourselves.

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Appendix A

1. Below is the specific announcement I will use to recruit participants:
    a. “I am looking for students aged 18 or older to complete an online survey to determine their eligibility to participate in my research study. Its goal is to learn about the social constructs that surround the stereotype of the ‘angry Black woman’.” My social media announcement will be the same.
2. Below are the demographic questions which will be asked before the interview and are attached to the Informed Consent Form
    a. How old are you?
    b. What is your name?
    c. Where are you from?
    d. Are you a college student?
    e. What race/ethnicity do you identify with? Is it the race that you believe people assume you to be?
    f. What gender do you identify as? Is it how you present?
3. Below are the interview questions that I plan to ask eligible participants:
    a. Please tell me a story about a time when race influenced your behavior in a college classroom.
    b. Please tell me about a time when gender influenced your behavior in a college classroom.
    c. Was there ever a time in a college classroom where race and gender influenced your behavior?
    d. Do people ask about the origin of your name?
        i. How do you address this?
    e. How do you think your classroom feelings are influenced by the stereotype of the “angry Black woman”?
        i. How do you think your classroom behavior changes in relation to the stereotype?
    f. How do you define “classroom belonging”?
        i. How were you taught to manage your emotions growing up? Please tell me a story of how you did this.
        ii. How do you think emotion management influences your experience in the college classroom?