Sociology of Race and Ethnicity
2023, Vol. 9(2) 164–178

DOI: 10.1177/23326492221138222
journals.sagepub.com/home/sre

Hypervisibility and Invisibility: Black Women's Experiences with Gendered Racial Microaggressions on a White Campus

Veronica A. Newton[1]

Abstract

This study focuses on the gendered racial microaggressions that Black undergraduate women experience while attending a historically predominately white university. Expanding from the racial microaggression literature, gendered racial microaggressions demonstrate how race is gendered and how gender is racialized for Black women. Because Black women experience dual oppression, the microaggressions they receive should be examined from an intersectional perspective. My study helps fill in the gaps of literature by taking an intersectional perspective to explore and center Black college women's experiences with gendered racism by examining the gendered racial microaggressions they experience within the classroom and in general areas on campus. This study took a qualitative approach to uncover Black women's experiences with microaggressions at a white university. I interviewed 25 Black undergraduate women who attended a flagship university in the Midwest. Gendered racial microaggressions showed up in themes of hypervisibility within classroom settings and invisibility in general spaces on campus. Within classroom settings, Black undergraduate women's race and gender were seen as hypervisible and were microaggressed by white classmates and white faculty. On the contrary, in general spaces on campus, Black women were ignored or excluded from conversations with white students. Both invisibility and hypervisibility speak of Black women's marginalization. Their experiences demonstrate the ways that both sexist and racist ideas about Black women and their abilities contribute to their marginalization, invalidation, and erasure on campus.

Keywords

gendered racial microaggressions, Black undergraduate women, higher education, hypervisibility, invisibility

INTRODUCTION

The literature on Black students' experiences in higher education has mainly focused on racism as the main issue at white universities (Dancy, Edwards, and Earl Davis 2018; Hurtado and Alvarado 2015; Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Mwangi et al. 2018). These studies demonstrate that racism functions within institutions of higher education and often creates a hostile environment for Black students. However, for Black women racism is only one factor that can negatively impact their college experiences. Black women experience sexism and racism at HPWIs (historically, predominantly white institutions) or what Black feminist scholars call gendered racism (Essed 1991). Thus, the discrimination they experience is not only based on their race, but on their gender as well.

A lowercase w is used for white and whiteness to decenter white privilege and power in this work.

[1]Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Veronica A. Newton, Georgia State University, 38 Peachtree Center Ave. SE. Langdale Hall, Room 914, Atlanta, GA 30303, USA.
Email: vnewton@gsu.edu

It has been well documented that Black students who attend HPWIs experience racial microaggressions, which can be described as subtle, but derogatory communication toward people of color (Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury 2018; Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Mills 2019; Morales 2014). Microaggressions speak of the discriminatory campus culture and reveal a racially hostile campus climate for Black students (Szymanski and Lewis 2016; Williams and Nichols 2012) while also perpetuating stereotype threat and isolation (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000).

Research shows that microaggressions marginalize Black undergraduate women's involvement on campus because they often report a lack of support and an unwelcoming environment (Shaw 2017) while perceiving student services and academic support as inaccessible because these spaces are often deemed as white-centric (Banks 2009; Winkle-Wagner 2009). However, to better understand the discrimination that Black undergraduate women experience on campus, researchers must take an intersectional approach when examining microaggressions so that we recognize how racial microaggressions are also gendered. Gendered racial microaggressions are tools of gendered racism, which speaks to Black women's unique experiences of oppression.

Exploring gendered racial microaggressions (Lewis et al. 2013) allows for the researchers to gain a fuller understanding of the ways that gendered racism impacts Black women's college experiences. The gendered racial microaggressions that they receive are often embedded in controlling images such as the angry Black woman or the strong Black woman (Hill Collins 2000). Moreover, gendered racial microaggressions speak of the erasure or invisibility of Black women (Melaku 2022) by ignoring their presence, which is a form of invalidation and is reflective of their subjugated position within society. Paradoxically, Black women also experience hypervisibility when they are microaggressed, insulted when they use their voices to speak up for themselves, or are tokenized when they are the only Black women in the classroom. This embodiment and constant objectification of Black women speaks of the ways they are microaggressed by others (Dunn, Hood, and Owens 2019).

This study set out to examine the following research questions: How do Black undergraduate women experience microaggressions on campus? What type of microaggressions do Black undergraduate women experience? How do these microaggressions speak of their race and gender? By centering Black undergraduate women's experiences of gendered racism, I was able to uncover the type of microaggressions that they experience at an HPWI. To explore their experiences from an intersectional perspective, I utilized a critical race feminism (CRF) framework to examine the ways that race and gender impact their college experiences at a large public flagship university. This intersectional analysis revealed that gendered racial microaggressions are reflective of their marginalization, hypervisibility within classrooms, and invisibility in generic spaces on campus—all of which are indicative of Black women's subjugated position in society and within universities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CRF

To demonstrate the importance of intersectionality when studying Black women's experiences at an HPWI, I utilized a CRF (L. D. Patton and Ward 2016; Wing 2003) approach to operationalize intersectionality. CRF derives from critical race theory (Bell 1992) and Black feminist thought. CRF states that racism is embedded in all systems, institutions, and structures within the United States, while Black feminist thought (Hill Collins 2000), a critical social theory that centers Black women's lived experiences, through an intersectional lens, acknowledges that Black women as agents of knowledge. Combined, CRF states that racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are endemic in systems, structures, and institutions within society (L. D. Patton and Ward 2016; Wing 2003). CRF also takes an anti-essentialism approach demonstrating that these systems of oppression (Lorde 1984) are interlocking and cannot be separated, just as Black women cannot separate their racial and gender identity. In other words, Black women's race is not more important than their gender, so the racism that they experience is not more salient than their experiences of sexism. Hill Collins (2000) provides us with the matrix of domination, an analytical tool that examines the power dynamics between the privilege and oppressed. In this study, I used the matrix of domination to explore how whites on campus use microaggressions toward Black women as a tool of discrimination.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality*, which is a framework that allows for the simultaneous interrogation and analysis of an individual's experiences based on race, gender, social class, and sexuality. Intersectionality can also be used to examine interlocking systems of oppression

(Carbado et al. 2013; Lorde 1984) such as gendered racism (Essed 1991; Szymanski and Lewis 2016) and microaggressions to show how Black women experience multiple layers of oppressions. Just as Black women's identities are intersectional, so are their experiences with discrimination, including microaggressions. Therefore, the microaggressions that Black women experience are not just racial microaggressions or gender microaggressions; they are gendered racial microaggressions (Lewis et al. 2016).

Moreover, Millsom Henry (2017) and Tabbye M. Chavous et al. (2004) showed that Black women experience subtle gendered racial discrimination such as invisibility, which might influence their overall well-being. Invisibility and invalidation are examples of gendered racial microaggressions (Sue 2010). Black women experience isolation and tokenism due to discrimination (Shaw 2017) that may influence their comfortability on campus (Winkle-Wagner 2009). Tokenism describes that the ways that minorities are hypervisible in spaces dominated by the majority group. Adia Harvey Wingfield and John Harvey Wingfield (2014) discuss the gendering of tokenism for Black men. In my study, Black women are tokenized by both their race and gender, which speaks of their hypervisibility (Allen 2021). Overall, taking an intersectional approach when uncovering the microaggressions that Black women experience helps us better understand gendered racism.

Leading scholars in the microaggression field (Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2015) state that microaggressions can be used as a tool for critical race research. I follow these scholars' works to demonstrate how gendered racial microaggressions can be discussed by using a CRF approach from Black women's perspectives. By focusing on their lived experiences, I was able to see the types of microaggressions they were experiencing, which Derald Wing Sue (2010) frames as microinvalidation and microinvisibility. However, Sue (2010) discusses microaggressions from the perpetrators' perspective or the person doing the microaggressions, while a CRF perspective only focuses on the people of color who are being microaggressed (Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2015). Although my study does not focus on the perpetrators' perspective like Sue (2010) and colleagues, I did inquire about the race and gender of the person microaggressing Black women to demonstrate how others use microaggressions to reinforce Black women's subjugated position on campus. I follow in the CRF tradition by focusing solely on the perspectives of Black women and their experiences with microaggressions. By utilizing CRF, my study uncovers how microaggressions are tools of gendered racism in higher education. In the next section, I define gendered racial microaggressions and discuss the importance of intersectionality when researching microaggressions for Black women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The section defines gendered racial microaggressions and discusses how they are reflective of both race and gender for Black women. My work builds off J. McCabe's (2010), Rachelle Winkle-Wagner's (2009), and Rachelle Winkle-Wagner et al.'s (2019) work on gendered racial microaggressions, where Black undergraduate women's race and gender are centered in the analysis to access their lived experiences of gendered racism at HPWIs. I use and expand Jioni A. Lewis et al.'s (2013) definition of gendered racial microaggressions, which can be described as insults, invalidation, and erasure—all which render Black undergraduate women invisible or hypervisible. Audre Lorde's (1984) work *Sister Outsider* provides us with concepts of hypervisibility and invisibility of Black women as sister outsiders, in which they are included but marginalized in white spaces. The hypervisibility and invisibility (Allen 2021) of Black undergraduate women speak directly of their embodiment and marginalization at an HPWI (Mowatt, French, and Malebranche 2013; Obasi 2022).

Gendered Racial Microaggressions

There has been extensive research on racial microaggressions (Mills 2019; Pierce 1970; Solorzano, Allen, and Carroll 2002; Solorzano et al. 2000; Sue 2010; Sue et al. 2007) and their impact on students of color at white institutions. In general, racial microaggressions are comments made toward people of color that are marginalizing and dehumanizing. Derald Wing Sue et al. (2007) state that there are the following three categories of racial microaggressions: first, micro-assaults, which refer to explicit derogatory communication targeted toward someone because of their race; second, microinsults, or subtle remarks that demonstrate racial insensitivity; and, last, microinvalidations that alienate, exclude, or nullify a person of color's experiences. Furthermore, Sue and Capodilupo (2016) have expanded their work on microaggressions to include gender microaggressions that also include "objectification (sexual or embodiment), treatment like second class citizens, and assumed to be inferior to men" (Williams and Nichols 2012:77). Racial microaggressions are daily and

chronic acts of racism (Sue 2010) while gender microaggressions act as a subtle form of sexism. Therefore, I am arguing that Black women experience gendered racial microaggressions.

Kristine S. Lewis and Stephanie C. McKissic (2010) take an intersectional approach to microaggressions, stating that women of color experience gendered racial microaggressions which are subtle, daily, environmental, and behavioral expressions of oppression based on one's intersection of race and gender together. Expanding from the definitions of Sue and colleagues (2007; Sue 2010) and Lewis and McKissic (2010), I define gendered racial microaggressions as explicit derogatory communication, microinsults, microinvalidations, and sexual and embodied objectification of her race and gender together. The term *gendered racial microaggressions* (Kilgore, Kraus, and Littleford 2020) speaks of how gender is racialized and how race is gendered (Davis 2008). Overall, Black women experienced gendered racism (Essed 1991; Melaku 2019) through microaggressions, which are often reflective of racist and sexist stereotypes about Black women, their experiences, and their academic abilities. In the next section, I will discuss how Black women are seen as hypervisible and invisible by white peers in white spaces on campus.

Black Undergraduate Women: Hypervisible and Invisible on Campus

Previous literature supports the framework that Black college students' experiences of discrimination vary by gender (Settles 2006). Kristen J. Mills (2019), Erica M. Morales (2014), and Isis H. Settles (2006) demonstrate that Black women's experiences of discrimination in college were not based on just their racial identity or just their gendered identity separately; they were based on their race and gender together. Black women's hypervisibility on campus speaks of their oppression rooted in sexism and racism. Through the white gaze and male gaze, Black women's bodies are objectified and policed in white spaces, such as HPWIs. White universities are a habitus, a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) to describe social norms, behaviors, and attitudes of a particular group or space. More specifically, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Carla Goar, and David G. Embrick (2006) discuss the white habitus, which refers to the hegemonic and pervasive nature of whiteness in organizations, institutions, and structures as well the white dominant norms and white people present in that space.

Their hypervisibility is based on the saliency of their race and condemnation of their gender, which together makes Black women a target to be microaggressed by whites (Mowatt et al. 2013; Obasi 2022). Black women's bodies have always been politicized in the United States and college campuses are no exception. Black women face embodiment (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2009; Dunn, Hood, and Owens 2019), where there is a hyper-focus on their body parts, hair, and skin tone (Awad et al. 2015). Black women's natural hair (T. O. Patton 2006) is viewed as unprofessional and their bodies a distraction; thus, Black women are unfit for white spaces (Awad et al. 2015; Hunter 2005). Their embodiment makes them hypervisible in white institutional spaces (Gusa 2010). This hypervisibility of Black women comes in the form of insults and verbal attacks or gendered racial microaggressions (Kilgore, Kraus, and Littleford 2020).

In addition, the hypervisibility Black women experience at HPWIs can speak to the controlling images of Black women as the "angry Black woman" or the "strong Black woman." Hill Collins (2000) discusses the impact of controlling images of Black women, which are based on white patriarchal standards for race and gender (Jerald et al. 2017; McCurn 2018). For example, Black women are often stereotyped as loud and angry, making their race and gender hypervisible to others around them, which allows for the dominant groups to perpetuate and control the narrative about Black women (Winkle-Wagner 2009). McCabe (2010) showed that Black women experienced more microaggressions in the classroom when they contributed to the class discussion. Their opinions were diminished, and they were tokenized, while also being stereotyped by racist and sexist ideologies (Winkle-Wagner 2009). The microaggressions were reflective of gendered racist perceptions about Black women and their abilities (Lewis et al. 2013; 2016; McCabe 2010; Szymanski and Lewis 2016). The classroom discrimination that Black women receive speaks of their hypervisibility within the white habitus of HPWIs (Schachle and Coley 2022). White colleges and universities are white institutional structures (Embrik and Moore 2020; Melaku 2022; Moore 2008), which privileges whiteness to serve as the powerful superior opposite.

Moreover, Henry (2017) showed that Black women reported feelings of alienation and had concerns for relationships and stressors on campus. Black women experience isolation when they are flat out ignored by white students on campus—this is an example of invisibility (Melaku 2022).

Ignoring Black women not only erases their presence, but it also invalidates their experiences, and diminishes their voices. This invisibility speaks of the ways in which Black women and their needs are marginalized or ignored at HPWIs (Allen 2021). Historically speaking, Black women and their contributions have been erased or excluded in almost every field and aspect in society (hooks 2015). This erasure is a product of white patriarchal domination and social control over all spaces, institutions, universities, and narratives within society writ large—which all marginalize Black women.

Last, HPWIs are sites of white patriarchy and were originally created for white males only (Wilder 2014), so gendered racism (Melaku 2019; Szymanski and Lewis 2016) is perpetuated and reified within systems of higher education and the campus culture. Patriarchy creates an environment of objectification for Black college women. Both whiteness and patriarchy are hegemonic and normative within the campus culture. Overall, Black undergraduate women who attend an HPWI experience gendered racial microaggressions in forms of invisibility and hypervisibility, both of which reflect Black women's subordinate social position on campus. This study demonstrates the gendered racial microaggressions they experience are embedded in hypervisibility and invisibility within the classroom and general areas on campus. White students, white classmates, and white professors all participated in the hypervisibility or invisibility of Black undergraduate women at an HPWI.

METHOD

By applying intersectionality, this study examined Black undergraduate women's experiences with gendered racial microaggressions. Working at the intersection of race and gender, I uncovered how Black women's lives are affected by gendered racism (Essed 1991) at an HPWI. The findings discussed below are part of a larger qualitative study. To ensure intersectionality was operationalized throughout this study, I utilized a Critical Race Feminism Methodology (CRFM) to center not only the voices of the participants, but to analytically interrogate the racialized gendered experiences of Black women. Lori D. Patton and LaWanda W. Ward (2016) define CRFM as a tool to examine Black women's lived experiences from an intersectional perspective. CRFM utilizes critical race theory and Black feminist thought to call attention to intersectional lives, but also challenges the hegemonic power structures that marginalize and silence Black women to a position that erases their voices. CRFM relies on multiple forms of "information to conduct research such as interviews, articles, and ethnographies" (p. 332).

This study conducted interviews to center the voices of Black women. To better understand the gendered racial microaggressions on campus, I utilized the matrix of domination as an analytical tool to see how privilege and oppression function on campus. Hill Collins (2000) developed the concept of the matrix of domination to show how systems of oppression (Essed 1991) are interlocking and to demonstrate the connection among power, privilege, and oppression of race, gender, class, or sexuality. This tool allows for us to see that whiteness and maleness carry power and privilege while Blackness and woman-ness are marginalized and oppressed. By inquiring about the race and gender of people who microaggressed Black women and where it occurred, it allowed for me to examine the dynamics of gendered racism from Black women's perspectives.

Procedure

The recruitment strategy for this study was convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Twenty-five Black undergraduate women students who attended a large, public, flagship university called Jackson University (pseudonym) were recruited at events held at the Black Student Center, Women's Center, and the Student Center on campus during the first several weeks of the school year. Students were also recruited in general quad areas on campus where they congregated. I approached students by asking whether they would be interested in participating in a research project about Black women on campus. Once I interviewed several students, participants informed their peers about the study and forwarded my contact information to other Black undergraduate women, who then contacted me to set up a time for an interview. Funding for this project was secured through internal grants and fellowships. Participants received US$20 for their participation in the interviews. All interviews were one-on-one and lasted 45 minutes to an hour and a half. All 25 interviews were conducted in private spaces on campus, such as my office or private room. I used a list of questions to guide the interview, while using a nondirective approach, and asked further questions in response to participants' narratives. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for coding purposes. Length of time on campus had no bearing on when discrimination

occurred; the participants' year in college is listed to show that gendered racial microaggressions happen throughout their duration of college.

Setting and Sample

This study was conducted at a large public flagship university in the Mid-Southern region of the United States. Jackson University (pseudonym), located in a rural area, has a total of 30,000 students with 8 percent of undergraduate students identified as Black or African American. Most of the participants were from Midwestern and Southern states and ranged from 18 to 21 years old. Their majors included biology, sociology, journalism, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), and Black studies. There was a mixture of first-generation and second-generation college students.

Data Analysis

To ensure that race and gender were centralized during coding, I looked for phrases or experiences that highlighted how the women were racialized from a gendered perspective. That way I was able to ensure that intersectionality was used during my analysis. By focusing on how each participant discussed their experiences of discrimination through actions of microaggressions, I was able to see common themes within the microaggressions the women experienced. In general, the entire campus was a racially hostile environment, where instances of racial slurs and racist symbols were often spray painted on campus each school year. The spaces on campus where these experiences occurred were in the classroom, student centers, general quad areas on campus, professor's office hours, meetings for student organizations, or when the participants were simply walking on campus. This white habitus provides the space for microaggressions to occur at any time and in any space (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006; Combs 2017).

Utilizing intersectionality as an analytical lens allowed me to centralize the race and gender of the participant as well as the race and gender of the person committing the microaggression. Framing microaggressions from an intersectional perspective while using the matrix of domination to see the race and gender of the perpetrator such as white men and white women helps us better understand how power, privilege, and oppression operate through microaggressions from Black women's perspective. In addition, operationalizing the matrix of domination allows for me to see how people of privilege use their power during interactions with oppressed individuals to maintain the social hierarchies of race and gender. Moreover, focusing on the spaces on campus where microaggression occurred highlights the habitus of gendered racism. Overall, by operationalizing intersectionality and using the matrix of domination, I was also able to explain the social interaction of the microaggressions from Black undergraduate women's perspectives. They discussed being microaggressed by white students and white professors.

Overall, this study set out to understand the types of microaggressions Black women experience while attending an HPWI. Just because HPWI's retain and graduate Black undergraduate women at a steady rate, it does not mean they do not face gendered racism during their time in college (Winkle-Wagner 2015). By centering their race and gender simultaneously, we have a better understanding of their experiences and the challenges they face in college. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the importance of intersectionality when examining and exploring Black women experiences on a white campus. Although I uncovered the gendered racial microaggressions they experienced, I did not include social class, sexuality, or physical ability in the analysis of hypervisibility and invisibility. Future studies should aim to include class and sexuality, in addition to race and gender, when examining Black women's educational experiences from an intersectional perspective.

FINDINGS

The Black undergraduate women in my study experienced gendered racial microaggressions in two forms: invisibility and hypervisibility. In this first section, I discuss how they experienced gendered racial microaggression through invisibility and invalidation from white students when walking on campus and when having direct interactions with white male students. Then, in the following section, I will discuss how they experienced hypervisibility within the classroom from white peers and white faculty as well as how they are discriminated and embodied based on their race and gender simultaneously.

Gendered Racial Microaggressions: Invisibility and Invalidation

In this first section, I will discuss Black undergraduate women's experiences of erasure or invisibility while in general areas on campus. Among the

participants, there was a consensus that racism was very palpable and salient on campus and that the university administration was slow to condemn acts of discrimination. The campus was "extremely white," with only about 8 percent of undergraduates identifying as Black. I asked the participants whether they have ever experienced racism on campus. Overall, the participants either stated that they had experienced racism or stated that they knew someone who experienced racism on campus.

Ronnie, a freshman first-generation college student and biology major, told me that she had not had any overt experiences of racism, but she explained what it was like to be Black while walking on campus. She states,

> I haven't really personally had any racial incidents here, which I'm shocked about, but I do see some people [white students] staring at me or looking at me funny and stuff like that. And just look like "Why is she here?" and stuff. I see that a lot. But no one ever says anything to me.

Ronnie's experiences speak of the white gaze and demonstrate the subtle ways in which Black women's presence on white campuses is invalidated. The fact that white students look at Ronnie but do not speak to her ultimately renders her invisible, sending a message that she is worthless to white students—this is an example of a gendered racial microaggression in the form of a microinvalidation. From Black women's perspective, the lack of acknowledgment by white students minimized their existence and voices on campus. Whites use the white gaze as a tool of discrimination toward Black women to perpetuate their invisibility on campus.

For example, Sapphire, a junior psychology major, echoed Ronnie's sentiments about the white gaze when walking on campus. She stated,

> just when you're trying to be friendly walking on campus, you're like, "oh hey!" And people completely look the other way or just flat out ignore you. You're like, I know it's because of my skin color. I know it's because of what I look like.

This is another example of invisibility (Allen 2021) and erasure of Black women at an HPWI. Sapphire mentioned white students looking the other way as if they did not see or hear her, which sends a message to her that she is not wanted and does not belong on campus. Gazing or ignoring Black women is reflective of the white habitus (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006; Schachle and Coley 2022), which allows anyone who is not white to be Othered. Both Ronnie's and Sapphire's experiences with the white gaze are examples of how white students use their privilege to erase and invalidate Black women on campus through gendered racial microaggressions.

In addition, Stephanie, a senior marketing major, shared an experience with me about a time she was walking on campus with her ex-boyfriend, who was white and Asian, and he was approached by a white student to join a student organization. Stephanie was ignored and not offered an invitation, although they were standing right next to one another. She stated,

> I was walking with my ex who is half Korean and half white but is white-passing. We were walking by this marketing organization and like one of the guys comes like damn-near across the hallway to talk to him. He introduced himself to my boyfriend at the time, shook his hand, and was telling him about the organization, but never looked at me. My boyfriend was uninterested in joining the organizations and the guy was just like "okay have a nice day." And I was like, "Hey, I'm here why didn't you ask me?" He was like, "Oh I'm sorry." And I was like "no, why didn't you ask me?" The guy told me to sign up and I'm like "I don't think you want me 'cause you didn't talk to me and so I'm leaving." He said, "No everybody's welcome!" I said, "Is everyone welcome because there are two of us here and you only asked one." We walked away because he couldn't make sense of it. That was racist! Or that was sexist!

This gendered racial microaggression is an example of invisibility and microinvalidation, which alienates, excludes, or nullifies Black women's existence (Sue et al. 2007). The white male student from the marketing organization chose to invite Stephanie's white-passing boyfriend to join the organization and not her, even though they were standing together. The white male student, consciously or unconsciously, excluded her from an invitation into the organization due to her race and gender. This demonstrates the belief that Black women are unfit, unintelligible, and invisible on campus. However, Stephanie did not allow herself to be rendered invisible in that space. She decided to speak up and address the white male student on his gendered racial microaggression toward her and to call him out by challenging his stance that

the organization was for everyone, when indeed it was not. Stephanie speaking up for herself and not allowing a white man to deem her as invisible speaks of how casual gendered racism is on campus (Szymanski and Lewis 2016). Black women's presence on campus is overlooked and undervalued or, in other words, erased and invalidated by white students on campus.

Unfortunately, Black undergraduate women also experience gendered racial microaggression through invalidations from white faculty as well. Dede, who I interviewed as a sophomore, discussed her experience of being microaggressed by a white woman professor. Dede stated that the professor told her that she did not deserve to attend Jackson University due to Affirmative Action. This conversation happened when Dede visited her professor's office hours:

Dede: My professor for English asked me if I thought it wasn't fair that I was here because of affirmative action and I told her I'm not here because of affirmative action. I'm here because I have the requirements needed to enter the university. And then I proceeded to let her know that I was top 10 of my class [in high school] and had a 4.2 GPA.

VN: Yes! Yes!

Dede: And just like how you [white people] have privilege, we need the privilege too. We need extra help. We wouldn't need extra help [getting into college] if everyone would just be equal. So, it's like just like I'm not saying anything because you got a job because you're simple white. So, don't say anything to me if I got into the university just because I'm Black.

Dede was invalidated by her professor's comment regarding affirmative action, which suggests that Black people are not as smart as whites and thus are less deserving of the equal education. The professor's sentiment toward affirmative action erases the work, labor, determination, and efforts Dede made to earn her right to be on campus. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) discusses how stereotypes such as "Black people are lazy" speak of the cultural racism that is perpetuated by white people who think that Black people should not be afforded the same educational and job opportunities as them. When whites perpetuate these stereotypes, it reifies the normativity of whiteness while erasing the free labor that Black women have done for the past 500 years in white patriarchal spaces (hooks 2015). Cerri A. Banks (2009) also notes that historically, "Black women have been plagued by theories that their gender and race together rendered them mentally inferior" (p. 28), and therefore, they are undeserving of the same education as white people. These racist and sexist notions about Black women are pervasive today and create more obstacles for them to navigate in college.

Dede, like Stephanie, did not allow for herself to be invalidated by whites on campus, although the microaggression came from a white woman professor. However, Dede's experience of gendered racial microaggressions speaks of how white women participate in racism and adopt racist and sexist perspectives of Black women (hooks 2015). A white women professor telling Dede that she is only attending college because of affirmative action demonstrates how white women are implicit in upholding racism and the white habitus (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, and Embrick 2006) at white universities. The fact that Black women must justify their existence on campus to white people is a prime example of microinvalidation, which diminishes their voices and experiences on campus. Black women having to constantly explain and prove to whites why they attend the same university sends a clear message that Jackson University is not for Black women.

Black Women's Hypervisibility within the Classroom

In this section, I discuss how Black women are seen as hypervisible within the classroom due to their race, gender, and embodiment. Being one of the only Black women in the classroom makes their race and gender salient, or hypervisible to white students. This white habitus (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006) of classrooms provides the opportunity for white students and faculty to microaggress Black women because PWIs are white institutional spaces (Embrik and Moore 2020; Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Moore 2008). Black women's race and gender together are seen as hypervisible to white students making them easy targets to discriminate against (Melaku 2022). In addition, a few women in the study mentioned that in-class interactions or group projects with white male classmates made them feel their Black woman-ness. In these situations, Black undergraduate women stated that interactions specifically with white male students made them feel that their race and gender were hypervisible (Mowatt et al. 2013; Obasi 2022).

For example, both Tammy, a strategic communications major, and her roommate Jayla, a health

sciences major, stated that they felt their Black-woman-ness, especially in spaces and interactions with white male students. Jayla, who is in a male-dominated field, expressed this sentiment to me during her interview:

> I guess like being a STEM major I've kind of experienced both [racism and sexism]. Like you experience that fact that you're like a minority and you also experience the fact that you're a woman, also making you another minority [laughs].

Her roommate, Tammy, echoed this sentiment explaining to me she feels her Black woman-ness when interacting with white male students.

Tammy: But I feel like the times I feel, you know, me being a Black woman, is if I'm around white men. I don't know if that makes sense.
VN: Yes, that makes perfect sense to me.
Tammy: Like I had a multimedia class-I have a lot of examples! Sorry!
VN: No, examples are great!
Tammy: I had an um multimedia class that I took last semester that caused me like five heart attacks. But I had this final project, and my group mates are two white guys, and they are really cool. They're great.
VN: Did the professor pair ya'll or did you just pick?
Tammy: We just kind of came together. I sat next to him [in class] and he was cute . . . But it's just like, whenever I'm around white guys that are potentially attractive to me or vice versa that's when I feel it [her Black woman-ness] the most.

Tammy and Jayla expressed feeling their Black woman-ness explicitly when they are around white males within the classrooms. Black women, being a racial and gender minority within the STEM field, make their race and gender standout to other people, but working directly with white male students makes Black women feel tokenized (Obasi 2022). Their race and gender become hypervisible when they are interacting with the most privileged group in society and on campus. Furthermore, an additional layer to the race and gender dynamic is added when there is an attraction between Black women and white men. The power of white maleness juxtaposed to Black women's nondominant social status draws clear boundaries of privilege and oppression between white men and Black women while making their race and gender more salient (hooks 2015). Even without the presence of racial hostility, Black women are hyperaware of their own race and gender and how both impact their interactions with students of other races and genders.

Although Tammy mentioned working well in a group project with white students, most participants in this study described the classroom culture as very white, often racist, and marginalizing to Black women—in other words a white habitus (Bonilla-Silva et al. 2006). Unfortunately for Dede, who I mentioned in the previous section, she was microaggressed within the classroom her freshman year by a white male student before class even started. She explained,

> I sat by this (white) boy who literally got up and said, "I don't want to sit by this Black girl." And I was crying because I couldn't believe it . . . cause I'm just like here because I worked hard to be here, so it made me feel less than. And in my entire life, like I've never felt less than. I'm happy I was able to experience that just because that's what the "real world" is what's going to consist of. I'm going to get looks, I'm going to get comments, but it's me knowing how to control myself in those situations. [But], I refuse to prove any stereotype that's negative.

Dede's reaction to this gendered racial microaggression of hypervisibility is a blatant example of gendered racism. Controlling images, such as the angry Black woman, impacted how Black women reacted to being microaggressed. Participants discussed not wanting to be seen as the angry Black woman when a microaggression occurred for fear of perpetuating the stereotype. Managing these microaggressions creates additional emotional labor for Black women that white students do not have to do in college (Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). Although there was the sentiment among the participants that this stereotype did not inform or influence who they were as Black women, all of the participants were very much aware that the stereotype would be applied to them regardless of the situation; therefore, Hill Collins (2000) termed these stereotypes as controlling images. Winkle-Wagner (2009) also discusses this phenomenon that she calls the "unchosen me," where Black undergraduate women do not get to choose their identities because stereotypes, such as the angry Black woman, are forced on them without choice.

Likewise, the angry Black woman stereotype provides a rationale for people to microaggress Black women. The Black women who speak up and speak out for themselves are challenging the

hegemony of white patriarchy and are therefore seen as loud and aggressive (McCurn 2018). Members of the privileged group often become uncomfortable when Black women contest these microaggressions because it is a threat to their dominant position. This is especially true at an HPWI, where Black women experience gendered racism from whites (Allen 2021). Black women often attempt to avoid or try to curb this stereotype by reacting to microaggressions in subversive ways. Participants mentioned using strategies such as "I just walked away from the white girl after she said that" [a microaggression] or "I did not want to get angry because I knew I would be stereotyped, so I did not hang out with that group ever again." Other participants stated they avoided joining white student organizations ". . . because I know . . . my facial expressions are going to give me away and I already know they [whites] gonna say something to me . . . I'd rather not [participate]."

More specifically, Madison, a journalism major, told me of an experience her freshman year where she was microaggressed in the classroom by a white female student and how she avoided looking like an angry Black woman. This experience is a clear example of hypervisibility within the classroom:

Madison: Okay so I'm really good at Spanish, like to me I'm like the bomb at Spanish and so I'm taking Spanish 1 and this [white] girl behind me in my Spanish class, I came in like a little late, like 2 minutes and I sit down, always in the front of every class. So, I sit down, and my hair is natural [afro] and she's like "yeah I can't see. I don't know why she sat there," under her breath.

VN: But you could hear her?

Madison: Yeah, and I heard her, and I'm just like, are you kidding me. So, what I did was instead of saying something rude back [perpetuating the angry Black woman stereotype] and starting like a whole thing and getting the class off topic and stuff cause like this is college now. So, I just did it a different way. So, when the teacher was speaking Spanish, she [white student] didn't understand it, and so I was just sitting there looking at her and then she said, I don't know what he [professor] said, so I flipped around with my curly hair and said Oh, he said this that and the third and this is how you say it in Spanish. Ever since then when I walk in, she says, Hi Madison!

First, Madison deserves to sit where she wants without being regulated by white students. Second, this is an example of embodiment and Black women's hair being seen as a distraction in white normative spaces (T. O. Patton 2006). Third, Madison felt that the controlling image of the angry Black woman could easily be applied to her (Winkle-Wagner 2009) if she responded directly to the white student who attempted to flex her privilege in the white habitus of the classroom. Madison's awareness of the stereotype and not wanting to perpetuate it by "saying something rude back" demonstrates her strategy of being subversive in her response to microaggressions.

Madison showed her intellect by disproving stereotypes that Black women are unfit for traditional academic spaces (Banks 2009). This was Madison's way of navigating gendered racism while resisting the controlling image of the angry Black women. This additional emotional labor that Black women must constantly do to be on guard and ready to respond in a way that does not perpetuate a racist and sexist stereotype is exhausting. Black women's racial battle fatigue (Corbin, Smith, and Garcia 2018; Quaye et al. 2020) is also gendered as they navigate microaggressions rooted in gendered racism (Allen 2021). This stressor can compromise the health of Black women (Ashley 2014) as well as negatively impact their grades and overall college experience (Shaw 2017). This is especially true on racially hostile college campuses where microaggressions can happen at any moment from anybody. I asked Madison whether her experience with gendered racism made her uncomfortable, to which she replied, "no because these situations are going to happen anywhere." The participants in my study stated that they did not have any place on campus where they felt comfortable and free from microaggressions—this speaks directly of the white habitus of campus (Combs 2017) and demonstrates how HPWIs are white institutional spaces (Melaku 2022). Participants stated that they did not feel welcomed on campus so they would come for their classes and then go home, while some stated that they only felt comfortable in their dorm rooms.

In general, the sentiment from Black women in this study was that campus was not a place they wanted to spend their time. When I asked Madison what space or place on campus that she felt the most comfortable, she told me that the quiet floor at the library was the place she felt the most comfortable on campus because she cannot be microaggressed. Madison stated,

I feel like everyone is in their own thing and they don't have time to really think like "am I

this?" "Am I Black?" Or like what am I gonna do? Like, she's being loud, you know stuff like that. So, that's my favorite place on campus to go.

Madison's above quote is a very clear depiction of the impact that controlling images and gendered racial microaggressions have on Black women at HPWIs. The second floor of the library is the quiet floor where students go to get work done. Therefore, the opportunities for Black women to get microaggressed are reduced as students are not allowed to talk in this space. Furthermore, Madison finding the quiet floor the most comfortable space on campus highlights the pervasiveness of gendered racism and speaks of how Black women must constantly navigate microaggressions. It was a relief for Madison to find a space where she could not experience discrimination, even if it silences her voice. Racial battle fatigue (Corbin et al. 2018; Quaye et al. 2020; Smith et al. 2016) led Madison to seek out the quiet floor in the library. Self-isolation is a way to navigate gendered racism on campus, but it also contributes to the alienation and erasure of Black college women (Shaw 2017). For them to succeed in college, they must find ways to protect themselves from microaggressions and one way of doing that is to study in a location where talking is prohibited. This speaks to the magnitude of the emotional labor, alienation, and stress of microaggressions that Black undergraduate women experience at an HPWI (Lewis et al. 2016; Smith et al. 2016; Williams and Nichols 2012).

CONCLUSION

Paradoxical Existence of Black Women at an HPWI

The findings of this study suggest that Black undergraduate women's experiences with gendered racial microaggressions can be both hypervisible and invisible. These paradoxical experiences speak directly to how gendered racism operates across the white habitus of campus (Moore and Bell 2017). In some spaces, Black women were dismissed or ignored, which speaks of their invisibility and marginalized social status (hooks 2015), while in other spaces their race and gender were hypervisible, making them targets of microaggressions or hyperaware of their own Black womanness (Winkle-Wagner et al. 2019). This paradoxical existence makes it unpredictable to where, when, and who will be microaggressing Black women, which is an additional stressor they experience during college. Hypervisibility was not solely tied to the classroom and invisibility does not always occur in general spaces on campus. These themes speak of the way that gendered racism operates across spaces on campus in salient and subtle ways (Mowatt et al. 2013; Obasi 2022) as well as the unpredictability of the types of microaggression Black women receive such as microinvalidations (Sue 2010).

Overall, Black undergraduate women are seen as hypervisible to white students within classrooms and thus are microaggressed. Their existence on campus and hard work to get into college are minimized and rendered invisible by whites. Whether it was classrooms, general spaces on campus, or professors' office hours, Black women experienced gendered racial microaggressions. The gendered racism that they experienced is a clear example of what discrimination looks like for Black undergraduate women. Both invisibility and hypervisibility demonstrate how Black women are othered, ostracized, and diminished at HPWIs.

DISCUSSION

This research helps highlight the importance of intersectionality for microaggressions by confirming that Black undergraduate women's college experiences are shaped by both race and gender simultaneously. This study demonstrates that Black women's lived experiences can show up in paradoxical ways, such as hypervisibility and invisibility, which makes Black college women's lived experiences unique due to the hegemony of whiteness (Patton and Ward 2016) and the patriarchal embodiment of Black women (Haley 2016). Moreover, the findings contribute to the use of CRF and intersectionality for research on microaggressions by centering the voices and lived experiences of Black women or the person being microaggressed (Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2015). Framing microaggressions from an intersectional perspective while using the matrix of domination to see the race and gender of the perpetrator such as white men, white women, and white faculty helps us better understand how gendered racism, power, privilege, and oppression operate through microaggressions from Black women's perspectives.

The invisibility of Black women, coupled with their successful matriculation through college, renders their racial and gendered oppression invisible to many, resulting in the erasure and lack of understanding of Black college women's continued oppression at HPWIs. Focusing on the race and

gender of Black women helps us better understand the stress and emotional labor that they experience in college (Quaye et al. 2020). Their racial battle fatigue is gendered so they must find ways to combat gendered racism and stereotypes that are rooted in racist and sexist notions about Black women's academic abilities and belonging on campus. Black undergraduate women's resistance and refusal to be erased at an HPWI could also help us better understand how they encounter microaggressions in the workplace and other white institutional spaces (Melaku 2022). Even when participants were unclear on whether they experienced a microaggression or not, this highlights the intangible nature of microaggressions while also revealing how Black women comprehend these as acts of discrimination. This is important to note because Black women are often viewed as unreasonable, "crazy," or exaggerating when calling out their experiences of sexism and racism.

Sociological Implications

Gendered racism through microaggressions toward Black women shows us that there needs to be a focus on patriarchy and gender within institutions of higher education and in discriminatory-based studies. Discrimination can be experienced differently even among individuals of the same race and gender. Examining microaggressions intersectionally shows us the ways that discrimination and gendered racism manifests on campus and how microaggressions are a tool of oppression to marginalize Black undergraduate women, which subsequently keeps them in nondominant positions in society. Moreover, using the matrix of domination to further understand how privileged people use microaggressions to demonstrate their power and dominance over oppressed people gives us a clearer understanding of how racial and gender hierarchies are maintained at HPWIs and other white institutions.

ORCID ID

Veronica A. Newton https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0339-790X

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Veronica A. Newton is an assistant professor of race at Georgia State University. Her work is embedded in critical race feminism, which examines systemic racism and patriarchy within systems of higher education. Her research centers Black women's lived experiences from Black feminist standpoints.