Title
Microaggressions, Marginality, and Mediation at the Intersections: Experiences of Black Fat Women in Academia

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Research on racial microaggressions indicates that the additive experiences with subtle forms of racism have a significant effect on people of color's cognitive and physical well-being (Sue et al., 2008). Racial microaggressions serve to reify the power imbalance between whites and People of Color and are often committed automatically and subconsciously and can communicate a number of messages including that People of Color are intellectually inferior, not from the United States, or more likely to commit crime (Sue, 2010). While subtle, this contemporary form of discrimination challenges intergroup harmony by underrating prejudice, encouraging the internalization of negative messages (Ortiz and Jani, 2010), impinging on the emotional stability and self-esteem of People of Color (Sue, 2010), and preserving an oppressive status quo (Sue, 2010). As People of Color move through predominantly white spaces such as higher education institutions, they are confronted with the reality that they are not perceived simply as an individual but rather a representative of their race and face microaggressions that serve to mark their presence as "other" and unwelcome (Solórzano, 1998). Continued exposure to racial microaggressions communicates to People of Color that the given environment is unwelcoming and unlikely to recognize their experiential reality (Solórzano, 1998). In studying Black students in a predominantly white institution, Solórzano and colleagues (2000) identified low critical mass, negation of the reality of racism, isolation, and other dimensions as characterizing some of the microaggressions that Black college students face.

In the growing field of Fat Studies, research indicates that the public sphere positions fat individuals in an uncomfortable space. Weight is often made public knowledge in school settings, at mealtime in the workplace creating anxiety (Jalongo, 1999). These and other such instances highlight the scorn fat people endure from thin people; it is apparent there is much to understand about the factors that contribute to the differential treatment of fat people. As the field grows, a significant amount of scholarship on the topic points to the differential treatment that women experience in contrast with men (Fikkan and Rothblum, 2012). Researchers explain that because weight is often coupled with perceptions of physical attractiveness, this dimension of identity plays a larger role in discriminatory treatment for women than for men due to the nature of misogyny placing greater emphasis on women's beauty (Fikkan and Rothblum, 2012; Crenshaw, 1993). Ding and Stillman's (2005) study on the impact of size on female applicants' likelihood of obtaining a job indicated that body size played a significant role in potential employees evaluations. Developing scholarship on the embodied realities of discrimination based on size points to a number of ways in which fat people are led to believe that their presence is unwelcome. While certain experiences around this identity have yet to be conceptualized as microaggressions, research utilizing focus groups indicate themes such as

desexualizing fat individuals, negative conceptions of intelligence, and stereotypes about work ethic (Hopkins, 2012) that relate to themes that emerge in research on racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010).

While no field can be expected to capture the entire range of experiences of a given demographic, it must be stated that very few studies on fatness truly account for race as a moderating factor in treatment. For instance, Hopkins' (2012) profile on fat individuals 18-27 years of age accounted for how gender and sexuality can further explain how fat people negotiate discrimination they face from peers and on a societal level, but only made small mention of how race interacts with body size. It was understood how dating prospects are impacted, how femininity is negated when of size, and how thin counterparts serve as policing figures in regulating food consumption and activity level, but little attention was paid to how stereotypes of fat people can be racialized and thus experienced differently by People of Color (Hopkins, 2012). Hopkins is not the only researcher who does not pay particular attention to race in the lived realities of fat people. Ding and Stillman's study (2005) on the impact of size on female applicants job prospects only considered gender as a significant facet affecting weight discrimination.

Further, weight based discrimination has been observed in graduate school admissions (Burmeister, et al., 2013). Burmeister and colleagues (2013) investigated the degree to which weight bias impacted applicants' psychology in doctoral programs. Despite similar qualifications, GPA's, positive letters of recommendation and so forth, fat applicants were offered fewer post-interview acceptances than their thinner counterparts. Such a revelation may be indicative of both the conscious and subconscious biases levied against fat individuals. The researchers additionally noted that body size had a higher impact on the outcome of female applicants pointing to the gendered nature of physical attractiveness. With weight discrimination presenting itself within the graduate school admissions process, it is not only plausible but also logical that some form of weight bias would exist in primary and secondary education.

Critical Race Methodology: Auto-Ethnography and Counterstorytelling

Data was collected through an online survey. Current students at a selective public institution in California were invited to participate through the African American Studies department, Gender Studies department, and through online postings on forums that serve as intentional spaces for community amongst five individuals who identify as fat. Intentional language was drafted for both email invitations and online postings that communicated the requirement that participants must be of size, with an explanation of what it means to be of size, to be a part of the study. For instance, presenting experiences of being unable to fit

into chairs with arms, difficulty fitting into clothing in straight sizes (non-plus size clothing), and other such bodily limitations were used to inform participants how fatness may be defined within this study.

Studies that explore the ways in which Students of Color navigate racial microaggressions directed by peers and faculty informed the design of the online survey. The auto-ethnography of this study was used as a means of identifying the particular experiences that led me to this research path. Rooting the auto-ethnography within Critical Race Theory works to center my narrative as a Black Woman, disrupting majoritarian viewpoints that deride my existence.

Critical Race Theory challenges dominant ideologies of race and racism through five tenets by dispelling liberal modes of redressing racism through colorblind practice and also by being cognizant of the true nature of such stratification and centering the perspectives and experiences of People of Color to dismantle this system of domination (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Critical race scholars recognize that institutions of learning are not neutral and often times replicate and reify racial stratification, stereotypes, and violences that serve to impede the academic success of Students of Color (Delgado Bernal 2002; Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). Critical race theory operates on the premise of working towards social justice and in doing so it rests upon five tenets to actualize this goal.

1. The importance of transdisciplinary approaches (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Critical Race Theory recognizes the importance of integrating literature and methodologies from across different fields in order to bring about research that interrogates the heterogenous realities of People of Color

2. An emphasis on experiential knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002). The experiential knowledge of People of Color has often been refuted as valid forms of knowledge because it is deemed as "subjective." Critical Race Theory pushes back on the entire notion of objectivity by naming the way in which majoritarian perspectives mask themselves as absolute truths (Solorzano and Yosso, 2005).

3. A challenge to dominant ideologies (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Challenging dominant ideologies allows educational researchers to both dispute deficit perspectives that exist regarding the abilities and beliefs of marginalized people as well as what constitutes as valid knowledge production (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado Bernal 1998; Solorzano and Yosso, 2005).

4. The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination (Delgado Bernal, 2002). This paper lives at the

intersections of identities and hopes to embodies how Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) defined Intersectionality as living at a particular site of marginalization. Crenshaw's theorizing of Intersectionality was used to describe the ways in which Black women experienced racialized gendered violence simultaneously and not as adjuncts to either identity. It is the particular identity of being a Black Woman and not a Black person that happens to be a woman or a Woman that happens to be Black that serves to make Black women vulnerable to violences in which their bodies become abject and their being is seen as appropriate for derision.

5. A commitment to social justice (Delgado Bernal, 2002). In similar fashion to how Delgado Bernal named raced-gendered epistemologies as resistance to both racism and sexism and thus an effort in enacting social justice (2002)

By focusing on the tenets of Experiential Knowledge and Challenge to Dominant Ideologies, this pilot study investigates the experiences of Black fat women and was conducted as a means of uplifting the voices that are most closely tied to this reality. The methodology employed in this work pushes back against that perspectives of the marginalized as being "subjective," "biased," "too emotional," and other characterizations that serve as coded language for "not right" (being white, cisgender, straight, able bodied, upper class, etc.). This work blurs the lines between "researcher" and "participants" and engages in what Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) theorizes as "cultural intuition." I use my personal experience to trace the genesis of my understanding of what it means to live as a Black fat girl and woman, looking at my past and naming the marginalization that had always been there. Previous literature contextualizes the ways in which Black fat female bodies served as economic insurance and success for the United States in locating an abject body perfect for revulsion and exploitation. The analytical research process is the point in which collaborative efforts of sharing stories expands my own thinking about this experience.

Black Feminism and the Naming the Unnamed

Black Feminism provides a framework for understanding how Eurocentric standards influence the pervasive view of beauty, exalting the approximation of whiteness, where whiteness encompasses the configuration of facial features, hair texture, body size, skin color (Shaw 2006, p. 19). For Black fat women in particular, the construction and devaluation of an archetypical Black fat woman

has been instrumental in the proliferation of dehumanizing ideas about Black people (Shaw 2006, p. 19; Hill Collins, 2014, p. 7). The mammy is a stark example of the reviled Black fat body. As a caretaker (to white people) devoid of sexual agency, she often holds the ideological perspective that liberation for Black people is unnecessary while happily serving her white "family" (Shaw, 2006; Hill Collins, 2014). In her seminal piece *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins (2014) explains the manner in which the Black female body was a semiotic point of defining Black marginalization and dehumanization for the purpose of economic success for the United States via slavery. Hill Collins (2014) writes, "By loving, nurturing, and caring for her White children and 'family' better than her own, the mammy symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal black female relationship to elite White male power" (p. 72). Shifting and mutating over time, the mammy archetype has persisted and maintained cultural significance through advertising (Aunt Jemima) and media portrayals (*Big Momma's House*, *Norbit*, etc.). Where her allegiance to her white "family" is no longer the central part of her identity, her purpose in showcasing a body that is to be rejected sexually, devoid of agency, and made an acceptable target.

Where Hill Collins notes the mammy's economic exploitation as integral in fostering white male power, Andrea Elizabeth Shaw highlights how the embodiment of the Black fat female body itself through the genesis of the mammy has been marked as the cultural, physiological other in contrast to white male power. Shaw writes,

> Performing triple duty as an inverse signifies, the fat black woman's body is triply removed from the West's conceptualization of normalcy and situated beyond the outskirts of normative boundaries, which makes its incorporation into the body politic an impossible undertaking" (2006, p. 26.

As economic exploitation and an inverse signifier, Black feminism has located the Black fat female body as one devoid of power—to be ridiculed, used, and to never truly hold true agency. It is this embodiment that must be understood through the lens of academic experiences to further expound on the ways in which Black fat women navigate prescribed silos.

Research on racialized experiences in education point to a number of barriers that impede Black girls and women's ability to succeed academically. Research indicates that teacher biases play a significant role in the academic achievement, punitive measures (Lei, 2003), and self-concept of Black students in K-12 schooling and in higher education (Evans et. al, 2011; Solórzano et. al, 2000). Race and gender stereotypes for Black girls in particular has positioned them as unnecessarily loud (Lei, 2003), unacceptably aggressive (Blake et. al, 2011), and unable to moderate emotions appropriately (Crenshaw et al., 2015).

Because stereotype threat tends to lower the self-esteem and in turn the performance of marginalized people (Sue, 2010), efforts to understand the factors that enable this phenomena as well as the means to interrupt it have been investigated. While the impact of stereotypical images of Black fat women has mostly been investigated in the realm of cultural studies, the intersection of marginalized identities can also manifest in academic settings. In studying the effects of race, gender, and body size for students, Black fat women's experiential reality offers a view into the multi-layered way in which anti-blackness manifests.

As further research on microaggressions expounds on the impact of additive experiences with such subtle forms of bias, it is imperative that attention is paid to the nuances that arise from the realities of individuals at the intersections. While Black people share the common thread of living under global anti-blackness, research on Black individuals of multiple marginalized identities such as queer and trans Black people, disabled Black people, Black people of non Christian religions, and so on is necessary to draw a more complete picture of this identity. The importance of this work lies in it the possibility to 1) name a form of discrimination with little research on the topic and 2) provide a forum through which individuals can interrupt this prejudice. As Solórzano and others explain,

> When the ideology of racism is examined and racist injuries are named, victims of racism can find their voice. Further, those injured by racism discover that they are not alone in their marginality. They become empowered participants, hearing their own stories and the stories of others, listening to how the arguments are framed, and learning to make the arguments themselves (2000).

In this way, research on how Black fat women experience marginality in academia can pave the way to combat isolation and inspire collective work towards dismantling this particular form of oppression.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography as Praxis

My positionality as a Black fat woman doing this work offers me an immense amount of insider perspective. While I didn't always have the language to explain how I perceived my treatment, there was some understanding that I was treated differently based upon my identities and not my actions. I combine my autoethnography along with self-observations over the past academic year to inform how my own experiences relate to the topic of marginality on the basis of size, race, and gender. Subtle instances of bias were apparent as I encountered individuals who were not completely aware of my research project. In some way,

I believe that once I alerted people to how I view body size as a social identity people were more aware of how they interacted with me. It was the subtleties with colleagues around discussion of food, how seats that accommodate certain body types were chosen, and so on that I was able to see how despite one's best intentions or efforts, implicit ideas of normative bodies persisted.

Identity at the Intersections

In conjunction with the narratives of the participants that I surveyed, I include my own story to further investigate the way in which body size, gender, and race played a role in my marginalization in school. This particular marginalization brought me to this work. It took me years to find the particular way to name this experience and give validity to what I was going through. As a child I did not know how to say that 1) I was experiencing things differently than my thin and non Black counterparts and 2) I did not know that what I was experiencing was not my fault. That is a trick of the interlocking systems of domination. Traditionally, oppressed people are led to believe that they are the genesis of their own oppression and any efforts to redress those issues should come at the individual level by either replicating some form of meritocracy or internalizing one's imposed subordination.

I offer vignettes from my life in direct opposition to the ways in which marginalized people are demanded to play along in their own domination. I offer my story to blur the lines of researcher and collaborator, to push back on the notion that to conduct rigorous research one must be "objective." I reject the notion that objectivity exists and instead recognize that objectivity serves to validate majoritarian perspectives that mask themselves as universal truths. I offer my story as an act of both resistance and healing.

Constructed Otherness

Bodies like mine were meant to be reviled and degraded. At no point did I feel empowered to seek help from teachers. Why would I when in class we learned about what a healthy body looked like? My body was not included in such depictions and I thought that by extension I may have deserved what was happening to me. Maybe if I changed the way I look I wouldn't be teased as much.

Maybe if I wasn't Black I wouldn't be reprimanded as harshly by my teachers. I got straight A's all throughout elementary school. It was not something to boast about when it was simply what was expected of me. I was quiet. Very quiet. But the few times I talked out of turn I remember being hushed harshly. In particular, I remember walking to the school field during a fire drill and how I

was reprimanded for it. Small stone half circles lined the path from my 1st grade classroom to the central part of campus. Being kids we thought it was fun to test our balance by walking on top of the stones that lined the path. Fire drills were generally relaxed events with the most pertinent piece of information being that we knew to walk to the field in the event of a fire. Teachers treated it as a leisurely time to walk with students outside.

My friends and I walked atop the stones giggling with one another and counting how many stones we had completed before stumbling off. Before I could tally up my stones I heard my 1st grade teacher gruffly tell me to get off the stones and walk properly before I felt her push me off the stones. My other friends quieted down a bit as they saw it happen and slowly got back on the smooth concrete path. We didn't discuss it much with one friend simply saying "Yeah, Ms. Van is mean like that" but I was struck by it. My friends were all thin. Some of them were Kids of Color. All of them were girls. I was confused.

Acceptable Targets

School uniforms were uncomfortable for the most part during elementary school. I could fit into the skorts for the most part, but was very mindful of the way my belly visibly bulged. What was meant to be an equalizer amongst students made me feel put on notice for my non-normative body. It was uncomfortable, but at least back then I could somewhat fit into the provided uniforms. That changed in high school when I couldn't fit into the school approved skirts. The options at hand were to pay extra to have one made for my size or wear the pants and shorts designated for boys. Throughout high school I wore these items and felt as if my femininity was stripped from me for both being fat and working class. My lived reality as a fat student didn't end there. Health classes became even more targeted in relegating fat bodies as undesirable and inherently diseased. The text books in my health class seemed to have some adoration of thin, white, conventional bodies and class after class I saw pictures of what it meant to be unhealthy usually coupled with People of Color.

The intersections of my identity felt so loud back then. I continued to excel academically, but it took having a fat Woman of Color as a teacher advocating for me before I was placed in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The teachers that preceded her never neither commended me for my performance nor fostered an environment in which I could strive for more. She shared her own experiences with racism as a child and although it took years for me to fully accept racism as an endemic facet of my life, she shifted my perspective as much as a high schooler can while still entrenched in an oppressive context. In some ways I wonder if she saw herself in me.

The only other Black student in my AP courses was a thin very light skinned girl from an upper class family. While we were on good terms and fairly friendly, I saw how easily she moved through these spaces. She was accustomed to the ways of whiteness in a way that I could never acquiesce to. Where she could materially obtain the markers of goodness from hair that lay in acceptably tame styles or accessories that provided physical proxies of wealth, I was outside of it all. I was too fat, Black, and dark to be acceptable in the same fashion.

At the time I had hoped that I could make some concessions to "make up" for my size and race. Being nice became a way of survival in a world that decided that I was to be left without any agency. If I could not be seen as worth of being mentored by teachers or desirable as a partner, at least I could be nice. It's a method of survival that I know many marginalized people utilize. We try to minimize our experiences of discrimination and violence by those we come into frequent contact with by being more palatable. We make ourselves small. We make it easy for those in power to forget that we exist in hopes of not being targeted with more harm.

Unlearning and Living Unapologetically

College presented the unique problem of living on campus and constantly being surrounded by peers. I was reminded at meals times what constituted as healthy and acceptable and that it was only cute or ironic for someone to eat large amounts of food if they were also thin and conventionally attractive. Issues of romantic partnerships were brought to the forefront for me and the idea of hook up culture was not a reality or an issue that I had to contend with. As a Black fat student at a predominantly white and traditionally oppressive institution, I still felt as if I had to be acceptable in some form to lay claim to some amount of humanity.

I went online to find affirming representations of bodies like mine. I didn't want the revamped mammy stereotype or the images of Black men in drag that degraded fat Black women in particular. I wanted nuanced portrayals of my reality. I wanted to see other fat Black women who were unapologetic as themselves. I wanted less weight loss advice and more guidance in empowerment. It was through blogs that I primarily learned about movements such as the Health at Every Size campaign and academics that worked to show how fatness was a valid social identity deserving of literature to highlight the reality.

I connected with other fat Women of Color and in particular found solidarity with Black fat women. Our particular racialization was important to center. While in between jobs following graduation, I had time to do community organizing and seeing that there wasn't a collective centered on fat folks I decided to collaborate with another queer fat Woman of Color to create one. We started

our collective to support fat folks who live in the Los Angeles area by having an online forum through Facebook and holding in person meet ups. It was the first time I could use the word "fat" in front of others without having to worry that the word would trigger a slew of images that were laden with negative connotations.

It saddens me that I didn't have this language while an undergraduate student or even earlier. I think about all of the shame and embarrassment I wouldn't have to endure if I had the language to name my marginalization and to call it out. There was never a point where I had an advocate around this particular identity during grade school. I thank my mentor for encouraging me to explore this reality as a possible line of research and heart work in an effort to heal myself of all the years of pain. I hope that I can continue to find the words to name this reality, disrupt the ideologies that facilitate this marginalization, and collaborate with others in action.

Counterstories

Open-ended responses from five online surveys were analyzed using a grounded theory approach. This analytic tool allowed the participants responses to guide the emergent themes as opposed to cherry picking results to better fit my conception of what should be true for Black fat women. In conjunction with reading through analytic memos, field notes, and drawing from my own auto-ethnography, themes relating to tokenization, negotiating uncomfortable situations, how familial messages around race and size informed their understanding of themselves, and empowerment. However, participant responses did not reveal instances of recognizing marginalization specifically tied to the intersection of being a Black fat girl or woman. Marginalization was described as happening either due to body size or race, but not simultaneously. Analysis of participant responses revealed the following themes: visibility, racial formation, experiences of racism, awareness of identity, and work on self image. The emergent themes represent the process through which marginalized people often move through identity formation starting at a point of unawareness to the structures of systemic oppression (pre-encounter) to explicit identification in one's identity and commitment to change (internalization-commitment) (Cross, 1995).

Participants within the study identified two regions of the United States as their childhood environments: Three out of the five participants attended K-12 schooling in the Northeast region of the United States while the remaining two participants called the Midwest home for the majority of their lives. Four out of the five participants described their neighborhoods and school environment as racially diverse with two going so far as to say that Students of Color constituted a majority of the school population.

Visibility

Oftentimes, marginalized people are made to feel either hypervisible because of their deviation from the constructed norm or invisible as they are not validated by strict definitions of either beauty standards, success, or otherwise. The hyper visible/invisible dichotomy that marginalized people face is difficult to navigate and leaves little to no agency for traditionally oppressed people to utilize within such confines. In recognizing that visibility was not positioned as a value neutral word, but rather one in which an uncomfortable awareness of one's otherness is understood, participants relayed experiences in which their bodies were marked as "other" due to factors such as clothing options, comfortability fitting into seats, racial identity, and bullying from peers.

Issues relating to feeling like one of the only Black students in class came up with one participant discussing how Faith (pseudonym) notes:

> Visibility was me just showing up. Sometimes I was the only Black student in class. Other times it was hard to feel comfortable in the seats provided. When I needed to shuffle through people, I would make it known that my thighs or hips were larger, and ask people to excuse them. I also would say things like, "I was the only chocolate chip" in the class. (Faith)

Faith relates how she was one of the only Black students in class and at a young age is able to recognize this reality by commenting on how she was "the only chocolate chip." In naming this racialized reality, her response speaks to the way Students of Color learn what it means to live as racialized people from a young age. While white students are often not aware of racial dynamics, histories of racialized discrimination and violence, and ways to redress racism, Parents of Color often engage in "race talk" with their children to alert them to the inequitable structures of racism and how to be better prepared to face it. Further, experiences with one's race being noted as "different" from what has been ascribed as the norm (white) facilitates a child's consciousness around issues of race. Visibility based on racial identity was cause for a participant to negotiate how she interacted with peers. Bernice (pseudonym) writes:

> My race was very visible in school. I had both negative and neutral experiences. I navigated the attention with a variety of strategies--direct confrontation of boys my age, internalizing the negativity of other girls, trying to be quiet and "good." (Bernice)

Bernice brings up an important facet of dealing with marginality: resistance. In dealing with aggression from boys her age she displayed direct confrontation while internalizing the messages that girls her age sent her. It is clear that gender plays a role in how she responded to the acts of aggression from her peers. It can be understood that her resistance as direct confrontation can simultaneously exist with the internalization and lack of confrontation towards the girls her age. Marginality calls on those who are traditionally oppressed to make difficult decisions about when to speak up and interrupt their experiences with discrimination and impingement on their mental emotional well-being. It is additionally interesting to note that silence and being "good" was another strategy the participant employed in dealing with experiences of marginalization.

Visibility regarding body size came in the form of bullying from peers and physical limitations with regards to seating and clothing options. In the school setting, peers were noted as the primary aggressors in negatively appraising the participants' bodies. Clothing as a marker of "normality" was an interesting component of how bullying manifested for participants:

> The bullying about my size that took place usually came from boys but sometimes girls made snide comments but not often. In middle school, brand name clothing from stores that barely carried larger sizes and were dubbed "preppy" and "white stores" became a big deal. Fitting into desks was fine except if they were the all-in-one chair/desk type. (Jessica, pseudonym)

Jessica explains that her body size was marked as negative and was vocally targeted by her peers. Her body size made clothing options limited and thus she was unable to dress in clothing that was deemed socially acceptable and seen as more closely approximating whiteness. Her size is confronted in both her ability to buy clothing that others would wear and as well as fitting into desks that were attached to chairs.

Rita (pseudonym) echoed sentiments around seating and clothing being an issue as a child of size:

> Fitting into the seats at school was never easy and it only got worse as the desk got smaller, the schools were remodeled and I got bigger. I was probably one of the fattest girls in the class and a lot of the other girls would wear things that I could not. Not only that, the options for my clothing was so limited I was forced to wear clothes from stores most girls wouldn't have started shopping at until college or later. (Rita)

Starting at an early age participants noted how their bodies were marked as non-normative and thus wrong or even abject. Their limited access to

comfortability in the classroom and to clothing options is evident in the way participants discuss how their experiences differ from their thinner counterparts. Rita names the way in which size was not only visible but marked as different as physical accommodations changed over the years. She notes, "[…] it only got worse as the desk[s] got smaller, the schools were remodeled and I got bigger." Her stratification becomes more apparent as she progresses in her schooling. While size is a visible and differentiated experience for her, the respondent's race is not as salient within school settings.

Racial Formation and Racism

Participants relayed how integral their family was in educating them about race and racism. While peers and the larger society were identified as negative influences on their racial identity, families served to instill positive self-images. Messages are also transmitted in school settings, which serve as institutions that reproduce the sociocultural ideologies of dominant society (Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001)

Faith, who noted that she described herself as "the only chocolate chip" in class, reveals how her process of recognizing her racialization as a Black person was gradual. It's not the stark slap in the face that sometimes befalls some marginalized people who are shocked into awareness through an intense experience of discrimination. Faith relates:

> For my race, I do not remember the distinct moment when I realized I was Black. I think I just noticed differences over time. Most of what I experienced was positive until I started to get older, and was confronted with stereotypes from people at school or in the media. (Faith)

Racial awareness is facilitated not through explicit messages from her family, but rather with gradual experiences with learning about stereotypes from school and media. Given that schools are not neutral environments in which all students are afforded the space to learn without their marginalized identities being noted at best and targeted at worst, it is of no surprise that stereotypes regarding race and Blackness in particular would manifest. Further media portrayals of Black people are often written from the perspective of whites due to the imbalance of owning power in the entertainment and news industry. Few neutral and positive portrayals of Black people exist as models for Black children growing up.

Context additionally plays a role in how Kids of Color come to understand their racial identity and racism. Jessica had relayed in previous responses that she attended ethnically diverse schools from kindergarten until the end of high school

and "never felt singled out" because of her race. Awareness of one's racial identity took the form of racial pride for this participant. She explains:

> In regards to race, both of my parents encouraged me to take pride in my blackness by keeping books on black history in the house, speaking positively about black people and only purchasing black dolls. (Jessica)

Her parents instilled positive messages about her race by educating her on Black history and buying dolls that were representative of her racial identity. Such intentional measures to facilitate positive racial formation is imperative in protecting Kids of Color from internalizing negative messages and images of their racial identity. Whereas traditional education may be lacking in teaching Students of Color about their history, Parents of Color often take measures to instill positive self-images.

Bernice noted how she was educated about race and racism by her mother. Her education on the topic comes in the form of activism:

> I was aware of my race and of the existence of racism for as long as I can remember. I remember going to anti-apartheid protests with my mom when I was very young. (Bernice)

This participant names race and racism separately and relates how activism was a significant part of her education on the topic. Through anti-apartheid rallies at a young age, the participant becomes aware of the existence of racism. This experience relates to the larger condition of People of Color coming to know about not only race but racism at a young age. Their awareness of the topic is one that is integral in mitigating internalization of thinking that may define experiences with discrimination as something they are responsible for as opposed to something that is due to the greater issue of the endemic nature of racism on a societal and individual level.

However, Bernice notes that school became uncomfortable "when people of all races started referring to each other as the n-word." Such direct and explicit forms of racial tension were not as common for all participants, with anti-blackness taking more subtle forms for others and even situations changing over time for participants. Faith relates how Black students were discouraged from bringing up the topic of race in class discussions with phrases such as "pulling the 'race card'" used as a means of silencing Black students. She writes on how experiences of prejudice were minimized and defined as "whining" by white peers.

Her frustration with the setting was so intense that she writes, "Those days, I wanted to fight. I guess this left me feeling defensive. I felt like I would always find myself having to defend being fat or Black, or both."

Awareness of Identity

Points of saliency for race and body size came at differing ages and from different sources from participants. As related above regarding racial identity, the majority of participants related that they became aware of their Blackness at a young age. From statements such as 'I was aware of my race and of the existence of racism for as long as I can remember" to recounts of reading about Black history from an early age, it is clear that a positive affirmation of their racial identity was not only evident but came at an early age.

However, participants noted negative introductions to their awareness of their identity as a fat child. In similar fashion, such awareness happened at a young age with Jessica writing, "I would say that early on, I received negative messages about my size from my dad's side of the family." Families played an integral role in their understanding of their bodies, however, Jessica reveals the ways in which peers further inundate fat children with negative self images:

> I first became aware of my size and race around age seven. At age seven, I was first starting to experience difficulties finding age appropriate yet stylish clothing and had been bullied because of my size.

Again, bullying is intertwined with the participant's awareness of her identity. She has a specific age attached with that awareness of her social identity as a fat child. Jessica further discusses how clothing became a marker of social status at her school and noted how shopping at "white stores" was a sign of goodness. Her ability to relate how her size excluded her from partaking in such acts is not only interesting but sheds light on the way in which students define socially acceptable standards on the basis of majoritarian perspectives.

Faith followed a similar route in her awareness of her body size. She notes that around the age of 4 she became aware of her body size.

> I first became aware of my size at a young age. Around 4 or so. I was made aware through my family. I'm sure there were positive things said, but the negative ones stick out the most.

She is also able to give a specific age regarding her awareness of her body size. Faith, however, was not able to provide a particular age regarding her awareness of race and racism. These differing points of saliency reveal how the differential messages affected her education on the topic of her social identities. Speaking on her racial identity Faith notes "I do not remember the distinct moment when I realized I was Black. I think I just noticed differences over time. Most of what I experienced was positive until I started to get older […]" whereas

with her size based identity she received negative messages. Due to her body being marked as non-normative by her family, memories of negative messages are more readily available when recalling her experiences.

However, it should be noted that not all participants were aware of their size at a young age. Bernice's response shows how the way in which one's body changes over time serves to create differences in points of identity saliency. She was able to recognize the issues of race and racism for "as long as [she] can remember," however she "didn't think much about [her] size until puberty, when boys would comment on it."

Empowerment

Empowerment strategies came in many different forms such as reading novels validating that health and body size are not correlated, engaging in activities that helped combat negative self talk, and interacting with others of the same identities. Additionally, participants relayed methods in which they enacted resilience through offering counter information that negated deficit perspectives on their social identities.

Faith noted how she loves both her racial identity and body. She came to find empowerment through reading texts focused on body size and seeing the value in Black people by learning about the border history:

> I love my Blackness. I love my body. I think there has been a lot of moments in the mirror where I had to really take a moment to stop and look at myself. The longer I stayed there, the more I began to appreciate my reflection. There was also a piece written by Jenn Baker, "Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls, So I Will." For some reason, that article spoke to me. Having a boyfriend also played a part, because he accepted me for who I was, which inspired me to do so even more. Regarding race, believe it or not, all of this controversy only helped me to understand how beautiful Black people are. We have such a rich history! When I look in the mirror and in myself, I see strength. I understand why my family now does some of thing we do. I am appreciative of my features, and I have a confidence and pride in myself I never had before. (Faith)

Through reading material that is specifically geared towards fat women, the participant was able to find literature that spoke to her experiential reality written by someone of the same identity. The messages within the text are intended to dispel certain archetypes of fat women in order to bolster self worth in spite of a society that relegates fat bodies as unworthy of respect. Further she notes that her romantic relationship with a boyfriend has helped to make it possible to love her body. Often times fat individuals are told that they will be

unable to find love before changing their bodies or that partners who are committed to being in partnership are doing so in spite of their body and not seeing the individual's body as attractive. Her racial identity is positively reinforced through learning about Black history.

Jessica also took an interest in learning about Black history and has invested time in engaging in fat studies. She writes:

> In retrospect, I believe that I was always empowered but my pride and confidence was challenged. I had always taken interest in black history and I'm currently involved in intersectionality fat studies. I became most empowered about both my body and race through connecting with other fat, black women on blogs and when I created artwork that glorifies fat, black women. (Jessica)

She relates how despite having empowerment already it was threatened by external factors. In working to continue to foster her empowerment she engages in critical education regarding Black history and fat studies. This response relates to how marginalized people are often inundated with messages that contribute early on to a negative self concept and disrupt any vestige of healthy self worth they may have. Additionally, this response points to the way in which access to online communities can serve as a form of disrupting oppressive ideologies that degrade marginalized people.

Jessica also engaged in resistance against the ways in which health was discussed in her classes. She writes about how frustrated she was with a course that discussed multiple illnesses and offered information categorized by different demographics with little context for the privileges and oppressions that facilitate differences amongst groups. In response to such a lesson, she crafted a presentation with more nuance:

> I can remember being in a class and the professor showed a slide of sicknesses. Black people were at the top of every illness except one. My issue with this was that she never explained why or how statistics worked. She just read the slide "as is." I remember leaving that class angry. I also had an opportunity to present a project I worked on in a class regarding size. I did a good job, but I can remember the looks on my classmate's face when I shared statistics about fatness and killed some myths. No one asked questions either. I felt good about the presentation, but awkward since I knew it was a touchy topic.

While angry about the way in which Black people were portrayed as simply being overrepresented in different illnesses, Jessica disrupts myths surrounding body size in her following presentation. Her anger with the decontextualized presentation relates how at times marginalized people are made

to feel that the symptoms of racial stratification are a simple fact and not identifiers of a larger system. Her resistance to such a style of giving information is evident in her presentation regarding body size. When given the opportunity to present, she made it a point to offer context and dispel information that had positioned fat people in deficit frames.

Bernice also found empowerment through reading literature about the lived realities of fat people and engaging in activism:

> I've found empowerment in fat activism, reading books like *Fat!So?,* and seeing fat black women who do kick ass things. (Bernice)

Although short in response, she is able to explain how key elements of unlearning dominant ideologies are facilitated through intentional strategies. Using the three areas of reading, witnessing other Black women do amazing things, and engaging in activism she was able to instill a sense of power within herself.

An interesting aspect of empowerment for Rita through the realm of her religious beliefs. She also found empowerment in others through body size campaigns by clothing brand Lane Bryant:

> I've found a lot of empowerment in other plus sized women, especially those of color. The campaigns by Lane Bryant has helped a lot. My spirituality and religious beliefs play a role as well as the interpersonal relationships I have with others who have never judged me for my size. (Rita)

Through her religious beliefs and interpersonal relationships she was able to foster empowerment. Noting that those she is connected with do not judge her for size is important to draw attention to. For fat individuals the prospect of interpersonal relationships can be affected by one's size due to conceptions around intelligence, work ethic, attraction, and so on.

While four out of the five participants shared similar responses that noted how different areas helped facilitate empowerment around their social identities, Robyn noted that although she has found empowerment she explained fatness as an issue of being unhealthy rather than in terms of a social identity. She writes:

> I am far more empowered because I had to work through bad relationships in order for me to understand that my size is more of a health issue, and everyone has some sort of unhealthy issue, the only difference is that mine is shown more than others via my body weight. (Robyn)

This participant dealt with unhealthy relationships and came to conceive her relationship with her body as an issue based on health. While she notes that individuals of all sizes are afflicted with health issues she states that her health issues may be more apparent due to her body size. In relaying such a message she focuses on the physical nature of her body and aligns more with notions of how fat bodies are seen as indicators of one's health rather than understanding how an individual may be engaged in behavior (i.e. eating and exercise habits) that are more accurate descriptors of one's health.

Implications

It is apparent that there are particular instances in which others make participants' social identities aware to them. For body size, peers serve as aggressors that remind them that their bodies are seen as non-normative and deride them for not meeting standard conventions. Consistent with microaggressions literature, verbal and nonverbal affronts to the marginalized maintain the status quo through creating and solidifying a noticeable "other". Youth like their older counterparts are subject to the same ideologies prevalent within media, their immediate surroundings, and general sociopolitical context. To deride an abject body as a youth can be seen within the same light as white youth who belittle youth of color for their otherness (i.e. "where are you really from?," "Can your parents speak English?," etc.).

Further, family members are significant voices in the messages Black fat women receive about their bodies. This exploratory project did not find how the intersection of identities facilitated a particular manifestation of marginality; however, it did inform how future studies may be tailored to investigate such a reality. Disciplines such as Cultural Studies have located the modern vestiges of the mammy archetype in our media, a figure that with her large size, Blackness, and lack of sexuality is one that is fit to made abject for audiences, that have led to sociocultural ramifications for Black fat women. As I look further into this reality, I should consider heavily employing Cultural Studies to investigate how that lived experience manifests within academia. Further, the limitations of online survey are evident in this study. Where I would be able to offer my own story as encouragement for participants to think of their identities simultaneously, they were left with a computer screen and their singular thoughts on the topic. Additionally, the promise of building community with other Black fat women who think similarly on the topic was not possible through such a study.

In spite of the very evident limitations of such a study, there is promise in the responses offered from participants. Themes relating to feeling apologetic for one's size, trying to make oneself "smaller" to minimize further negative appraisals, and the multiple forms and sources of degradation point to there being

something unique about fatness. What needs to further be interrogated is how to link these bodily forms of marginalization to racialized forms. Participants were able to expound on how empowerment was linked to finding community particularly with other Black fat women, yet did not often note how this particular identity served as a target. It brings me to how Lindsay Perez Huber came to collectively define *testimonio* with her collaborators during one of her studies. Perez Huber writes (2009),

> Based on our own theorizing, we arrived at the following understanding of *testimonio – a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future.*

In future studies, the opportunity to collaboratively define what our counterstory represents, what it means to each of us, what it can do for the possibility of healing and creating solidarity can be actualized through in-person gatherings. Even with the limits of digital communication in place of in person meetings, Jessica communicated the need for my research in this area. She wrote:

> We need to keep doing research on this very topic and continue to build and sustain positive spaces so that more fat, black women and especially little girls can be empowered. I work in a predominately Black K-8 school so I see many larger, black girls experiencing issues regarding identity because of how they're treated.

Keeping in mind Jessica's call to action, it is imperative to expand the consideration for weight based discrimination and bias to encompass the experiences of younger fat Black girls. The possibility to create space for language and environments that are affirming rather than hostile is at hand with more focus on this intersected and siloed positionality.

While there is a lot to learn from this, I appreciate the information that was gleaned. Bullying in particular seems to be a significant experience of marginalization for participants. It leads me to wonder how further research on bullying may focus on the ways in which social identities are targeted and not simply studied as if it is an inevitable facet of childhood.

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Appendix

Online Survey

Open Ended Response Questions
1. Can you talk about when you first became aware of your size and race? Where did this awareness come from? Was it positive or negative? Who was sending you certain messages about these identities?
2. In what ways was your size and race made visible in school? Was this visibility positive or unnerving? How did you navigate this attention? How did kids dress at school? Was fitting into school seats easy?
3. How did you describe your body when you were a child, adolescent, and young adult? Were there people around you with a similar body type? What about people of the same race and ethnicity?
4. How have your peers talked about your size and race to you? What was different about those conversations within each school setting (K-12, undergraduate level, masters program)? Were these conversations positive or negative? How did these conversations affect you?

5. In what ways have you found empowerment regarding your body size and race? If you have felt empowered, how did you arrive at this place? If you have not felt empowered, what do you think would move you to this place?
6. What else would you like to say about this identity? What more is there to learn about treatment in school settings based on being a fat Black woman and/or femme? How did you describe your body when you were a child, adolescent, and young adult?

Demographic Information
1. What is your racial identity? Recognizing that Black people are heterogenous please check all that apply.
   - If the above racial identifiers are not descriptive enough of your identity, please provide additional identifiers.
2. What is your sexual orientation? Please check all that apply.
   - If the above sexualities are not descriptive of your orientation, please provide identifiers that are applicable to you.
3. What is your gender? Check all that apply. For reference, cisgender refers to individuals who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.
   - If the above genders are not descriptive of your gender, please provide an identifier that is applicable to you.
4. How would you describe your socioeconomic status?
5. Do you have any disabilities? If you are comfortable, please name your disabilities. If you do not have any disabilities, please fill in "no disabilities."
6. What schooling have you completed?
7. Are you currently in school? If so, what level of schooling are you currently working on? What is your major?