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Stand Your Ground: Black Women and Perceived Gender Schema Trangessions

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Stand Your Ground:

Black Women and Perceived Gender Schema Trangessions

*"Because I feel like when you're raised in the Bronx you have to like, stand your
ground or else like people step over you easily, you know."*
— *Kayla[1]*

by

Chelsey Minerva Sarante

Senior Project submitted to the Faculty of the Undergraduate School of Denison University in
Granville, Ohio, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts Degree from
the Black Studies Program

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[1] Kayla is a pseudonym for a participant of this study.

Copyright Statement

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My sorority sisters who have always poured into my cup when I couldn't.

My mom, my dads, and my little sister. Everything I do is for them.

I would like to acknowledge Black women from NYC - this is by us, for us. Don't ever let nobody tell you who you should be, what you should do, and how you should act.
Love a Black woman from infinity to infinity

Table of Contents

Introduction: "Why You Dapping Me Up?"

Gender norms are a global dynamic of human relationships. Such norms span cultures, countries and continents and vary across these contexts. As such, gender norms impact Black people and People of Color (POC) in different ways and have a range of consequences for the quality of life and relations with others. This research will interrogate how gender norms pertaining to what it means to be and act in accord with "feminine" gender norms affects Black women. This research is interested in exploring the implications for Black women's well-being when they experience negative reactions for transgressing what others perceive as the appropriate way to express gender norms. Generally speaking, gender norms are commonly organized into meaning-making systems, or frameworks known in scholarly research as schemas. A gender schema is defined as: the natural extraction of information from social environments at an early age, which they organize into their respective meaningful system that allows them to make sense of the world and themselves (Canevello, 2020).

Black women's experiences of gender schemas are a fruitful site of inquiry because Black women are held to expectations deriving from both race and gender. People in general, including other Black people, scrutinize the behaviors of women and particularly the women within their same identity group. In this study, the Black intra-group scrutiny and judgements toward Black women will be the focus. Moreover, for the purposes of this study, Black identity is defined as those persons who understand their biological ancestry to be of African/a origins and their primary socialization experiences to be within Black culture within the United States. Transgression of social norms pertains to Black women's perceptions that other/s disapprove and express some form of disapproval or negative message toward them because of behaviors (e.g., verbal and/or nonverbal) that defy the gender norms of those that 1) they and interacted with, and

2) with whom they perceive that the interaction or interactions included disapproval or a negative message relevant to their gender behavior.

I begin by owning my positionality in this world as someone who has experienced this phenomenon and found it disturbing to my sense of freedom of gender performance in the world. As a first generation Dominican-American, I identify as a straight, cisgendered Afro-Latina, meaning that my romantic preference is towards males, I identify as my gender assigned at birth, and am both Black and Latin. I have three loving parents: my mother, my step father, and my biological father. My mother and biological father separated before I was born, and my mother and step-father have been together since her pregnancy with me. I consider him my father, despite my biological father still being in my life. My mother immigrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic when she was 15. She completed her high school education at John F. Kennedy High School in the Bronx. She was unable to pursue higher education due to not having the necessary finances, but also needing to support her mother, step-father, her three siblings, her nephews, and her father who was still living in the (for lack of better word) "slums" in the capital, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

I was born and raised in the Bronx, New York City (NYC), in a neighborhood called *Kingsbridge* in the North-Western part of the borough. The area of Kingsbridge is a low-income neighborhood with a predominantly Black and Hispanic population. Furthermore, this population is predominantly Black, Dominican, and Puerto-Rican. There are more ethnic groups that reside in Kingsbridge, but they do not presume the majority. The Kingsbridge area is physically located next to the neighborhood of *Riverdale*, the most affluent residential area in the Bronx. Living in Kingsbridge my whole life and next to Riverdale, I can quickly tell the difference between my neighborhood and Riverdale. John F. Kennedy High School located in Kingsbridge had a

graduation rate of 35% (*John F Kennedy high school (2022 ranking))*, one of the lowest in the city and in the borough. After closing in 2015, the physical building remains along the community's memory of its despair. I did not attend John F. Kennedy High School, but IN-Tech Academy, my high school, was right next door. The school followed the same demographic as its location, meaning that the students were predominantly Black and Dominican Latine. Just like Kingsbridge, the school and its students were underprivileged, underserved, and underrepresented. Being a low-income Afro-Latina allowed for others to perceive me as low class, "ratchet," or a delinquent. Existing within these parameters, I had the privilege of being admitted into a prestigious scholars program in high school, called *The Heckscher Scholars Program* of The Heckscher Foundation in New York City. This program allowed me to receive SAT/ACT preparation, summer enrichment courses, study abroad opportunities, internship opportunities, tutoring, and college counseling that I would not have gained due to not being able to afford it and not having the access. This program is the main reason why I am currently a student at Denison University.

Being raised in New York City, and more specifically the Bronx, there is a sense of toughness one must have. As former Governor Cuomo would say, we need to be "New York Strong." Although this toughness is not something I can name, it is something I feel and embody. This causes me to be closed off and can hinder me from forming relationships or allowing existing relationships to better. In high school, I was known as "one of the guys." It was fine then because that was my friend group, but it was not until I reflected on how I took on some of their traits that I became aware of the masculine demeanor I adopted. I have received comments on the intonation of my voice such as it being deep and "sounding masculine." Even on *Twitter* and *Instagram*, there are memes that state "Bronx women are the strongest men in New York."

Seeing and thinking this now, I do not want to be considered one of the guys. I am a Black woman, I am a Latin woman, I am a Bronx woman, I am a woman.

My social positionality personally connects to my experience(s) as a Denison student, in organizations, as a young woman, and my senior research topic. There have been instances where Black men in social settings ask me why I behave in a way that they may perceive to be more masculine. Why do I greet them with a "dap," a "head nod," or a "what's good" in addition to the dap. In the summer of 2021, I was approached by a Black man who attempted to greet me with a hug, and I greeted him back with a "dap." He stopped, stared, and asked "Why you dapping me up? You a lady, you supposed to give me a hug or somethin'." This experience left me pondering, what is wrong with greeting you in a way that I choose to? This led me to explore the negative interactions and reactions Black individuals have towards Black women when they perceive the Black woman to be out of their conceived notion of the heteronormative norms of women. I am also interested in exploring the psychosocial effects that Black people's negative interactions and reactions have on Black women.

Various of these interactions led me to ask why do other Black people sometimes react that way towards me? Do they react the same to other Black women from urban areas? Do other Black women experience the same thing? Reflecting on these questions probed me to ask myself what were the effects on me? Did these interactions affect my sense of self, my sense of who I am as a woman, or whether I am appropriately lady-like when I exhibit behaviors they find out of order? By asking myself these questions, I also began to wonder whether other Black women had similar questions. Self navigation and experiences led me to this topic, and is why I am deeply connected and interested in this.

I am interested in whether and why Black women from urban areas are perhaps perceived this way and why they receive negative reactions. From this interest, I would like to focus on the experiences of Black women that stem from these reactions and the short and long term effects of them. To explore this topic, I have conducted semi-structured interviews with Black women from the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem. Black women from the Bronx, Brooklyn and Harlem may be perceived as outside of the gender schema of women and may be considered more masculine than New York women in other areas/neighborhoods. These interviews will focus on the feelings after others have expressed they have transgressed gender norms.

In addition, I would like to dive into the relational dynamics between Black women and Black men to understand their dynamics more deeply. Understanding such dynamics may create the conditions for improving the relationships between Black women and men in the context of the gender politics of Black male female relations. bell hooks describes the relational dynamic between Black men and women as highly sexual in "it's a dick thing." Here, she describes how the hypersexualization of Black people by whites projected itself onto Black men in particular. hooks states that in the patriarchy, "there is an imperative to fuck" (hooks, 2004, p. 70). She continues to say that "sex has been all the more addictive for Black males because sexuality is the primary place where they are told they will find fulfillment" (2004, p. 74). This gives the viewpoint that Black men see Black women as part of a quest for freedom, something to conquer, rather than a person. There is an assumption that sex will solve the emotional issues such as lonliness and pain, but that is not true. When Black women are seen as objects to use as a scapegoat for other's emotions, this disregards the actual emotions of Black women and sensuality that comes with being human, and limits their capabilities for relationships to nurture.

Black women often times experience negative interactions and reactions when they are perceived outside of what is deemed the heteronormative expectations of women (Cooper, 2017). Black women who are located in urban cities such as New York City, may be socialized to engage in behaviors and styles of interacting that go beyond traditional feminine norms. These behaviors include such things as direct, assertive communication (Finley 2017). Such styles of interacting may be perceived as more masculine. When Black women perform what Black people recognize as masculine, the response tends to be negative, and consequently can take an adverse toll on Black women's experience of self (e.g., perception of self-as appropriately female, perception of self as desireable in heteronormative relationships, perceptions of self as worthy of respect and allyship).

Drawing from theoretical frameworks of socialization informs the foundation of my study. Specifically, gender socialization was formally recognized as foundational in the development of gender schema theory by Sandra Bem in 1981. Gender Schema theory describes how sex-linked characteristics are maintained and pursued through and by different members of a culture, and goes on to describe how the concept and creation of self is based on sex typing (1981). Due to the culture(s) we are a part of, we learn, maintain, and transmit heteronormative gender norms. We can connect this to how we are perceived and expected to behave in society and how Black women are perceived and expected to behave in our respective cultures.

Irrespective of the intra-group pressure and/or messaging to conform to gender schemas, Black women are perceived to have a sort of "incessant resilience, independence, and strength that guides meaning making, cognition, and behavior related to Black womanhood" (Abrams et al., 2014). This framework will provide a basis for what Abrams et al refers to as the Strong Black Woman gender schema which creates a dual expectation in which: Black women are

perceived to be strong, but not necessarily expected to portray this "strongness" in public

dialogical settings with other Black people.

A second component of key theory informing this research is relational theory. A scholar

whose work is key to the paradigm of relational theory, Kenneth J. Gergen states that "As

persons generate meaning together, they link past histories of relationships with the present to

create the future; when two persons meet, they link...personal histories in the unfolding of their

relationship" (Gergen and Walter, 1998, p. 115). As we construct our relationships with others,

We are also constructing ourselves. This assertion applies to Black women who are on the

receiving end of overt sanctions or judgements from others about how they are expressing

themselves within and beyond the gender schemas others hold. When other people express their

negative perceptions of Black women's performance of gender, the result can be. Black women's

internalization of those negative responses. They may in turn change their gender performance or

expression, or even change their personalities. This is reinforced by Gergen and Walter when

they state "life stories are not records of events as they occurred, but constructions of a life

according to communal standards….it is by virtue of participating in these communal traditions

that we come to be recognized as an individual" (1998, p. 120-121). The way in which we are

recognized as individuals through interpersonal communication matters, and shapes our

construction of self. This research is interested in whether, and how Black women experience

this process of being shaped by the perceptions of other Black people specifically as relational

interactions shape gender performances.

To interrogate these dynamics, this research focuses on the following primary question:

What does it mean to be and act in accord with "feminine" gender norms and how does this

affect Black women? Messages refers to verbal or non-verbal communication about one's gender

behavior. Transgression refers to behaviors deemed by others as outside of the heteronormative gender schema for Black women. The sub questions for this research study include:

- In what contexts do Black women experience behaviors from other Black persons that they are transgressing social norms? (e.g. Private settings? Public settings? etc.)

- How do Black women experience and perceive messages of transgression from other Black persons?

- Do Black women experience differences in the messages or delivery of messages from Black men than those experienced from Black women? If so, how do these messages impact the psychosocial state of Black Women?

Following the introduction to this study and the sharing of my primary and secondary research questions, this study includes several additional sections. First, there is the literature review that is a review of the literature culminating in the sharing of the theoretical framework for this study. This serves the purpose of sharing the existing bodies of scholarly work to engage in dialogue with other researchers and writers. Second, there is a discussion of the research design for this study and its rationale. Third, I provide an interview findings section that presents the voices of women I spoke with and highlights their perspective on gender schema. Fourth, the analysis section discusses insights that emerge from the interviews and highlights implications of the women's experiences. interview data[2]. Finally, I will share concluding remarks and state suggestions for further research.

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[2] I will use the word "data" that is used in the social sciences, particularly my field of study: Communication, alternatively with the word "findings." The choice of using the word "findings" is to create awareness that my information comes from human participants and not objectified "data."

Literature Review:

Gender Schema Theory vs. The Strong Black Woman Archetype

The basis for gender and associations with gender comes from sex typing (Bem, 1981). Sandra Bem named such sex typing as Gender Schema Theory. Bem noted that the distinction between male and female serves as the foundation for how most cultures are structurally organized. Moreover, this form of structuring begins with the socialization of children and continues throughout the formative years of life. As Bem states: "not only are boys and girls expected to acquire sex-specific skills, they are also expected to have or to acquire sex-specific concepts and personality attributes, to be masculine or feminine as defined by that particular culture" (Barry et al., 1957, p. 331).

While gender schema theory is widely applicable across many cultures, Black children are socialized in particular ways distinct to Black culture. There are different expectations considering that theories prove that Black men should be strong and not be sensual, while Black women are taught to be strong, not strong, sensual, and when to be those things. The process in which societies transmute and execute this knowledge of feminine and masculine is known as the process of sex typing (Bem, 1981). This research I am conducting is concerned with how Black women experience sex typing. Minimal research portrays Black women and sex typing, particularly sex typing that associated with specific urban locale—NYC. In her work, Bem consistently stresses that to view society as a separation of "male" and "female," it starts with a categorization and perception of self. This shows itself when "individuals who have a generalized readiness to process information should be able to encode schema consistent information quickly" (Bem, 1981, p. 355).

In the formation of self, children begin to view the two sexes as not only different in degree, but different in "kind." They view these differences in the length of hair, in clothing, and in toys given to children. Children begin to evaluate themselves and create themselves based on the gender schema taught to them. This can create attachment to things that they believe represent their gender. For example, boys might form an attachment to toys they associate with the male gender such as cars or action figures. "The child also learns to evaluate his or her adequacy as a person in terms of the gender schema, to match his or her preferences, attitudes, behaviors, and personal attributes against the prototypes stored within it" (Bem, 1981, p. 355). Exemplifying sex typed behavior within the gender schema forces a perceived gender-based difference of the self concept. We see this with concepts such as "boys are to be strong and girls weak" (Bem, 1981, p. 355).

Bem's work is situated within normative white contexts. The initial foundation of work on gender schemas was situated within "the honourable, white, heteronormative nuclear family [that] stood at the top of this hierarchy of respectability, and this cult of domesticity dictated clearly defined roles for man, woman and child" (MacClintock, 1995). We see this hierarchy of respectability play out in the United States with the separation of feminist ideology and antiracist politics. Black women are often excluded from the execution of both feminism and antiracism. Many Black women scholars theorize the dual exclusion of Black women because of feminism's historical focus on white women and because of resistance to racial oppression commonly taking up the cause of Black men. The renowned text that captures this exclusion is: But Some of Us Are Brave: All the Women are White, All the Men are Black, by Gloria Hull (1982).

An interviewee of Elliott-Cooper stated that "By virtue of being black women, we have had to reckon with various forms of oppression at a time" (Elliott-Cooper, 2019, p. 548).

Kimberlé Crenshaw explains that this simultaneity of oppression with the concept of intersectionality. Intersectional identity, she writes, "is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). This concept of intersectionality further influences the perception that both Black people and non-Black people have relative to Black women. Perceptions of Black women date earlier than the colonial periods. For example, in British colonization the British viewed Black women in the Caribbean as "sexually deviant, and therefore suitable for both the reproduction of enslaved labour and the sexual desires of their owner" (Elliott-Cooper, 2019, p. 544).

The concept of "Strong Black women" originated during slavery (Abrams et al., 2014) because whites had portrayed Black women as physically and psychologically stronger than white women. As a result, African American enslaved women socialized African American girls to be "strong" so that they could face the "brutal and violent life on the plantations" (L.M. West et al., 2016). Socialization to withstand oppression was necessary for survival. This gender schema particular to Black women–consists of "emotional regulation, caretaking of African American families, and being economically independent, which are traits that may counteract the negative stereotypical images of African American women" (Nelson et al., 2016, as cited in Liao et al., 2019, p. 85).

The dominant culture's idea of being a "Strong Black woman" is based on the "mammy" and "superwoman" stereotypes. The mammy is described as "a large, asexual black woman whose primary role is to serve and tend to the needs of those around her" (Collins, 2000, as cited in Castelin, 2019, p. 1). The mammy assures that things get done and cares for the needs of others, but not necessarily the needs of herself. On a related note, the superwoman stereotype is

described as a woman who has a strong desire to be successful and does not show weakness (Castelin, 2019). The superwoman does it all and does not stop nor show frustration. White British colonials' perceptions of Black women influenced later perceptions of Black women as "promiscuous, uncaring and physically strong, in stark contrast to their white, more genteel, family-oriented counterparts" (Elliott-Cooper, 2019, p. 545). These stereotypical constructions of Black women eliminate the complexities of authentic Black women's identities and gender performances. For example, the controlling images (Mullings, 1997) of Black women projected onto them by the dominating class, were intended to justify their labor and sexual exploitation. Such controlling images and ideas about Black women precluded them being perceived as gentle and caring or having other human qualities that did not justify their enslavement.

Such ideas from colonizing power elites became narratives that Black people themselves internalized to some extent. While it would be unfair and inaccurate to blame Black people for the persistence of stereotypical images of Black women, there is evidence of the value that Black women place on qualities of strength, fortitude, and courage. For example, in interviews that Elliot-Cooper conducted, Black women viewed themselves as strong. "I think people see that we are women of strength, particularly because we are black and the struggles that we have been through. They admire us because we don't give up, we cannot afford to give up" (Elliott-Cooper, 2019, p. 547). There is a dialectical relationship between the history of colonization which cast Black women as inhumanly strong to justify the work they were subjected to and the pride that Black culture takes in the strength of Black women to persevere. This dialectical relationship acknowledges that within Black culture there is an expectation of Black women's sufferings and struggles deriving from being both Black and woman have resulted in internalization of strength passed down from one generation to another (Walker, 1984).

The Strong Black Woman motif is based on two converging stereotypes of what Black women are expected to be. The Superwoman schema overlaps with the Strong Black Woman schema. This then creates the agenda that Black women must be both-and—Black women must be both strong and self-reliant all the while caring for others with no regard for themselves. Another construct that also affects Black women is John Henryism and it is noted as a "high-effort coping style that is used to deal with the psychosocial threats, such as financial difficulties or discrimination, that African Americans often experience" (Bennett et al., 2007; James, 1994, as cited in Castelin, 2019, p. 12).

Thus when considering Black women of a lower socioeconomic status, they would exemplify more John Henryism or the strong Black woman schema, due to the fact that they are dealing with multiple points of discrimination at once. Black women that have a low-income background would then be facing discrimination towards being woman, being Black, being a Black woman, being low-income, being a low-income woman, and being a low-income Black woman. This point shows how the fact that Black women experience different aspects that identify them as intersectional, can impact how they are viewed and also how they view themselves.

In situations as multilayered as socioeconomic status, race and gender, many Black women use the strong Black woman schema as a coping mechanism to give them the strength to "deal with the unique and shared challenges that they face" (Abrams et al., 2014; Nelson et al., 2016). While Black women are perhaps perceived to be loud, strong, caring, and a "superwoman," they use their superwoman-ness to cope with the discrimination and struggles that come with their inherited intersecting identities.

While the Strong Black Woman schema may be a form of socialization for resilience, or may serve as an effective coping mechanism, it can also be experienced as a burden and a barrier. While, Black women commonly use the Strong Black Woman Schema to give them the strength that they believe that they need, there are downsides to overuse. The Strong Black Woman Schema may become a barrier to accessing one's vulnerability, or engaging in help-seeking (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

In addition, using the Strong Black Woman schema to counteract racial stereotypes can lead to potentially negative psychological effects. One result of the Strong Black Woman schema is maladaptive perfectionism (MP). It usually involves "unrealistically high standards, perceived pressure from others to be perfect, being overly concerned with mistakes, and a perceived discrepancy betweens one's performance and personal standards" (Slaney et al., 2001). Black women that have high MP beliefs generally tend to equate perfect performance with their self worth, have greater stress, and lead to withdrawal from others due to their fear of being perceived through the unrealistic expectations of others (Liao et al., 2019). These expectations can come from significant others, family members, but also from racial discriminiation. Knowing that they are likely to be perceived stereotypically in negative ways can cause Black women to use various coping mechanisms to manage the accompanying psychological and emotional distress. Coping mechanisms such as self-compassion, collective coping, and spiritual coping (Liao et al., 2019) vary in effectiveness depending upon how the Black woman uses them. If Black women chose to use the coping mechanisms in ways that ultimately deprive them of the very benefits they seek, the outcomes will be counter productive to the healing they need.

Theoretical Framework: Seeking Situated Theories of Socialization

Black women from New York City have a particular and location-specific experience when it comes to experiencing race and gender in their neighborhoods. Black women and young girls from urban areas behave and present themselves in ways that would both gain them respect and protect them. This approach to self-presentation influences their "situated survival strategies." Nikki Jones defines situated survival strategies as "patterned forms of interpersonal interaction, and routine or ritualized activities oriented around a concern for securing...personal well-being" (Jones, 2010, p. 52-53). Such strategies are specific to their respective locations and the socialization of those who live and are shaped by the cultures of those locations. Therefore, socialization processes are critical to informing the present study.

In this research, I focus on Black women from a specific "situated context." This research chooses as its focus the urban areas of New York City– more precisely–these locales include: the Bronx, Harlem, and Brooklyn. Since I, myself, am from NYC, I have a personal familiarity with, aka "insider knowledge" of the stereotypes of women from these areas. As someone with lived experience of the cultural socialization processes inherent to the areas of Bronx, Harlem, and Brooklyn, I understand the difference and distinctions of this socialization compared to other New York locales such as Westchester, NY. I am also able to compare my understanding of how my socialization and that of other Black women has themes, dynamics, and patterns that I experience as different from other regions of the United States, and from non-urban settings, or urban settings in other parts of the country.

In this study, I draw upon this personal knowledge and my social location to consciously lay claim to my "connected knowing" (Belenky et al., 1996) and to value lived experience as a valid form of knowledge production that also informs this study. As I consciously reflect on my

experiences, I share the observations that Black women from New York City are socialized to be tough due to the conditions of their own neighborhoods.

The research design for this study draws upon the Strong Black Woman Schema, and relational theory discussed in the literature review. Considering that both Bem (1981) and Gergen's (1998) work fails to acknowledge the cultural differences Black women encounter, this study seeks to make a contribution toward bringing Black women more fully into the conversation that both of these theories present. Tatum states the problem that my research seeks to address when stating: "Relational theory has done little to address issues of race" (Tatum, 1993, p. 1) To resolve this issue, (at least in part) Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) emerged. RCT is the subsect of Relational Theory that focuses more on women and how women develop and form relationships. This applies to this study as this study is focusing on how the perceptions throughout these connections impact women emotionally. Such women as Judith V. Jordan and Jean Baker Miller have highlighted Relational-Cultural Theory as "women that grow through and toward connection…We suggest that we all need relationships throughout the lifespan and that it is through building good connections that we achieve a sense of well-being and safety." (Jordan, 2008, p. 2) Jordan explains that there are five "good things" that lead to our self growth and and growth in fostering relationships. The following list paraphrases Jordan's thinking about the advantageous/beneficial outcomes:

(1) A sense of enthusiasm and/or energy (2) clarity about yourself, the other, and the relationship between both (3) a sense of personal worth/value (4) the capability to be creative, productive, and proactive, and (5) the desire for more connection and connections

 Individuality is a hindrance to our growth. Even when someone expresses disconformity to their connection and understanding of one another is a hindrance to their individual growth, and the growth of their connection. With this, comes the five "bad things" which are the opposite of the positive outcome. The following list paraphrases Jordan's thinking about the disadvantageous outcomes:

> (1) a drop in energy/enthusiasm (2) a decreased sense of worth (3) less clarity and more confusion about themselves, the other, and their relationships with others (4) less productivity and creativity, and (5) withdrawal from all relationships (Jordan, 2008, p. 3).

Relational-Cultural Theory helps us understand that women (and all people) need positive relationships and connections to thrive. When there is a misunderstanding, or an expression of disconformity, it hinders the growth of the Black woman in the relationship, and of the connection itself.

When thinking about how Black people view Black women, everything aforementioned impacts it. Gender schema, Relational and Relational-Cultural Theory, Black women perceptions of self, and Black women's intersectional identities of race and gender–all influence how Black peoples carry ideologies and beliefs about what behavior is appropriate for Black women. These theories and realizations of self impact and influence how Black women, Black people, and people as a whole communicate with one another and foster or undermine constructive relationships.

Research Design: Keeping Black Women's Voices at the Center

To investigate the primary research question, the following section highlights the voices of Black women and their thoughts on both verbal and non-verbal messages from others of the same race. Thus this study explores gender schemas situated within Black culture, urban contexts of New York City. It looks at whether and how such schemas impact the psychosocial state of Black women from the specific settings of New York that serve as the context for this research. Being raised in New York City, and more specifically the Bronx, there is a sense of toughness New Yorkers must have. As former Governor Cuomo would say, we need to be "New York Tough" (Cuomo, 2020). Although this toughness is not something I can name, it is something that is felt amongst the New Yorkers. Even on *Twitter* and *Instagram*, there are memes that state "Bronx women are the strongest men in New York." Black women and young girls from urban areas behave and present themselves in ways that would gain them respect. This affects the way that urban Black women and girls "do gender," "do race," and "do class" (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137). This and other literature guide me to explore the topic of whether Black women socialized in urban areas (i.e. New York City) experience negative interactions and reactions when they are perceived outside of what is deemed the heteronormative expectations of women.

Restatement of the Research Question(s)

What does it mean to be and act in accord with "feminine" gender norms and how does this affect Black women?

The sub questions for this research study include:

- In what contexts do Black women experience behaviors from other Black persons that they are transgressing social norms? (e.g. Private settings? Public settings? etc.)

- How do Black women experience and perceive messages of transgression from other Black persons?

- Do Black women experience differences in the messages or delivery of messages from Black men than those experienced from Black women? How do these messages impact the psychosocial state of Black Women?

For the purposes of this study, messages is operationally defined to mean verbal or non-verbal communication about one's gender behavior. Transgression is operationally defined as behavior deemed by others as outside of the heteronormative gender schema for Black women.

Study Population and Approach to Data Collection

Based on my own social location, experiences and observations, I am narrowing my study population to urban Black women and have selected New York City as the City of origin. I made this choice so that I would begin a study of this kind working with a context I know well and with Black women that I have insider knowledge of given my own lived experience. Although negative interactions and reactions on the basis of heteronormative gender norm transgression can come from Black men, women, and others that are non-Black and can have a cumulative effect on Black women (Jordan, 2008), I am narrowing the scope of my study to make it more feasible and to begin "close to home." Literally, I want to focus on how the Black women in this study experience and perceive other Black people messaging them about the appropriateness and acceptability of their gendered behavior. Starting close to home means beginning with the Black women participants' culture of origin, that is, intra-group Black relations.

This study uses interview methodology. This study provides an interview protocol to conduct six to eight interviews with Black women located in the Bronx, Harlem, and Brooklyn. In this study, interviews will be conducted with eight to ten Black women spanning three boroughs in New York City. These boroughs include the Bronx, Brooklyn, and the Harlem neighborhood in Manhattan. These locales were selected to provide an urban area with a predominantly Black population, and a common regional base for all participants. The age range for these participants will be between the ages of 18-22. No children or individuals under the age of 18 will be included in the study. This allows for a variety of life experiences to be considered, including but not limited to pre-adolescent, adolescent, young adult, and present. During the phase of interview data collection, interviewees may reside in their respective college campuses or still reside in their communities of origin in New York City.

I recruited participants through personal relationships. I know various individuals that suit the demographic of being a Black woman between the ages of 18-22 that live in the Bronx, Harlem (in Manhattan), or Brooklyn. I personally reached out to them via email to explain the research at hand, and when they expressed interest, we proceeded with scheduling an interview. Interviewing participants known by the researchers is commonly recommended when interviewing persons from minoritized groups on sensitive subjects in which a trusting relationship between interviewer and interviewees might enhance interviewees' feelings of safety and openness relative to the topic (Reinharz et al., 1992). This approach is also recommended for exploratory research in early phases of a study prior to extending the study to a larger group of participants. This research project is considered exploratory–and may form the basis for a more extensive study of this topic by me or by other scholars. If the process of reaching out to personal contacts does not lead to the amount of participants that I need, I will recruit through the social

media platform Instagram. I will create a flier to share on my Instagram, with the hopes that potential participants fitting the demographic will reach out to me regarding their interest. If they do, then we will continue a conversation via email and proceed with scheduling a meeting to share further information and potentially secure their informed consent. This study is open to a diverse selection of participants across a range of social identities (e.g., sexualities, socio-economic class), but does not seek out additional participants such as men or other ethnic/racial groups. The study intends to contribute to equity by taking a broad topic that has been studied (gender transgressions, gender schemas, gender roles) and applying it to a particular race-gender demographic for the benefit of generating knowledge. If potential participants identify as a Black woman between the ages of 18-22 from the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Manhattan (Harlem), other aspects of their identities, such as religion, ethnicity, and sexuality, may enhance the study.

Rationale and Approach

There is a dearth of research on how the negative reactions of Black men to gender schema transgressions impact Black women socially and psychologically. As there is not much concrete data for my topic, my data as to the effects on Black women that negative Black male perceptions have, will come from my interviews with Black women. Grounded theory, originally theorized by Glaser and Strauss, explains how theory can be generated from data inductively. Traditional grounded theory's (GT) goal is to "generate a conceptual theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour that is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Tie, Birks, and Francis, 2019).

Grounded theory is critical when studying minoritized populations. In this case, it is important for me to hear from Black women in their own voice(s), making meaning of their own experiences prior to applying pre-established theory to what they share. A guiding value underlying Glaser and Strauss' perspective on founded theory methodology stipulates that the data that arises from my interviews should be the ground or foundation for any ensuing theory. Such a principle empowers and centers on the experiences of the group being studied and shares the power between researcher and researched more equitably (McDougal III, 2014). This value is aligned with the field of Black Studies and underlying values of the field that aim to ensure that Black peoples participate in the construction of meaning about their lives and experiences (Kershaw, 1989).

In addition to grounded theory, the concept of "kitchen table talks" guides this research study. Kohl and McCutCheon state that Kitchen Table Talks

> "create an environment for the researcher and the participants a space for sharing their experiences, which mirrors the traditional ways that women share intangible knowledge. This relaxed environment is designed to feel informal and participant driven but allows for knowledge to be co-constructed by the participant and researcher" (Kohl and McCutCheon, 2014, as cited in Coleman, 2021, p. 50)

This allows for an extra level of comfortability that the participants may have with myself as a researcher, due to our similar backgrounds of being Black women from NYC. I can understand the slang terms that they use as well as their non-verbal messages.

When Black women perceive that others feel they have transgressed from the expected gender norms for Black women, I think it can take a prodigious toll on the women themselves. If indeed, Black women who are located in urban cities such as New York City are socialized to

express and perform gender in liberated ways that go beyond traditional feminine norms, this could create a conflict for Black women. They may be sanctioned or otherwise discouraged from the very expressions and performances of gender they have learned.

Ethics and Respect for Interviewees

The responses collected through the interviews will remain confidential, however, the research does not intend to offer anonymity. To provide confidentiality, participants' names will not be included in any written components of this research. Only the responses of participants will be used. During the debriefing at the end of the interview process, I will ask each interviewee whether they would like to select a pseudonym that I can use to refer to them as I discuss the findings in my written work. The video interviews will be voice-recorded through the Zoom platform, and will be transcribed through Zoom as well. The interviews recorded and further data collected will be stored in a password-protected personal computer. Upon completion of this project, all the data that is stored will be destroyed to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Ensuring their confidentiality is essential to their participation because it can prevent potential harm that can come from exposing their personal identity.

Informed Consent

The informed consent form is a written document that was shared with the potential participants via email. Afterwards, they returned a signed consent form with their signature, and we moved forward with securing an interview day and time. The informed consent form shares with the potential participant the topic and purpose of the study, as well as shares that their

participation is completely voluntary and that their identities will be kept confidential. For the exact language used in the informed consent form, refer to Appendix A.

Risk to Participants

A potential risk to the participants this study considered was that of emotional distress. Interview discussions of how people have perceived Black women's behaviors through the lens of gender norms can potentially elicit stress-inducing conversations or stress related memories for the interviewees. Stress might arise through the participant remembering or discussing a previously traumatic event or an experience that they have not healed from. The potential risk of emotional distress cannot be completely avoided because the interviewees will share what they feel is most fitting for the interview questions. Some interviewees may share memories or experiences that could be stress-inducing. Despite this risk being inevitable, steps were taken to minimize it by including a Distress Language Protocol (DPL) that could be used at any moment during the interview.

The Distress Language Protocol provides a script that I as the interviewer could refer to at any time when I observed interviewees giving signals of reticence. Upon observing such things as: longer than usual pauses, expressions of displeasure or discomfort, nervousness (e.g. wringing hands, tapping feet), the DPL provides me with a prompt where I can inquire with interviewees about whether the question is troubling or uncomfortable. The DPL also prompts me to remind them that each interview question is voluntary, and that the overall process of participating is voluntary for them as participants.

The language used in the DPL is purposely structured to not highlight their emotional distress, and to move away from the topic that is causing it. This is because talking about trauma is not the point of the research. Refer to Appendix B to see the exact language used in the DPL.

To offset the potential risks that may come from participating in this research study as an interviewee, we must consider the potential benefits that can result from this study. The potential benefits of this project include such things as:

- The opportunity to reflect and gain insight about race-gender experiences.

- The opportunity to engage in meaning making about experiences that were confusing, baffling, or even disturbing.

- The opportunity to unpack and deconstruct experiences that may not be commonly talked about or systematically approached for review and deeper understanding.

- The opportunity to consider the complexities of navigating gender roles and others' expectations, or unresolved feelings one has about specific events/incidents in interactions or within the socialization process. There may be indirect benefits of becoming more clear about gender navigation.

- The opportunity to read the results of the research and contribute to production of knowledge.

- Despite the potential benefits, the potential risks remain. To provide additional support for interviewees that might need it, in the informed consent form I have included a list of Black women therapists/psychologists located in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and the Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan (See Appendix A).

All the clinicians mentioned accept various health insurances, including (but not limited to) medicaid/medicare. This is particularly relevant to conducting research with minoritized populations because racial/ethnic minorities are often disproportionately economically disadvantaged, more than white people (Bureau, U. S. C, 2019). This is a consideration for those interviewees that may be of low-income and do not have access to other health insurances. All of

these therapists also offer teletherapy, due to COVID-19 and the rising cases of the COVID-19 Omicron variant in New York City. This information is provided in the informed consent process.

Debriefing

The participants of the study were debriefed orally at the end of their interview. For this particular study, I made the choice to utilize oral debriefing. In addition a one-page handout was given to each of the study participants which included: a list of professional counselors they could reach out to if they felt they needed further support following the interview; and, a list of several readings on the subject matter that might be of interest to their continued development. The debriefing occurred at the end of the interview. The rationale for and end of interview debriefing includes the following: Checking in with the interviewee to see how they feel about the interview. Asking whether they feel unresolved or uncomfortable about any part of the interview. Whether they are experiencing any reactions to the interview or not–the debriefing provides an opportunity to share: the list of professional counselors and the accessible readings/resources on the subject matter. Lastly, the debriefing will be an opportunity to provide the interviewees with my contact information and the contact information of my research supervisor, Dr. Toni King.

The debriefing process helps ensure that the participants are not feeling uneasy about the interview process, and letting them know that if they have further questions, they can contact myself or my advisor. It also allows the opportunity to remind them of the professional counselors that they can consult as a resource for their feelings and thoughts considering this

interview and study, as well as other personal considerations. Refer to Appendix C to see the exact language used in the debriefing form.

Approach to Data Analysis

The participants' findings were coded for feelings that emerged following interactions where they were judged on their gender behavior. From this, I will specifically code their responses for:

1) Interviewee references to messaging about gender behavior.

2) Interviewee references to feelings about messaging pertaining to their gender behavior

3) Interviewee references to values they were socialized to see as the norm for gender behavior for themselves

Next, in keeping with Grounded Theory, I will look through the data I have coded to group content from categories 1 through 3 above into related ideas. I will look at the ideas in each category and develop a descriptive theme. Without applying theory to guide the coding process, I aim to follow the tenets of grounded theory to look at the data in ways more likely to ensure that the voices of my study participants are heard. Centering their voices as Black women is vital to my data collection and analysis to affirm that their stories are true and valid and will not be changed. The themes that arise will be the foundation for any subsequent theorizing.

Interview Findings: Kitchen Table Conversations

I completed six in depth interviews where the method of kitchen table talks was incorporated. This method allowed for a sense of comfortability that the interviewee felt, that allowed for deeper conversation and connection. In this section, the interviews illuminated experiences of school teachers, mentors, and family members expressing their thoughts on the interviewees' gender performance. This includes the three primary themes of biculturality, desirability, and the strong Black woman schema. The findings are presented first in a table that presents the most striking themes from the data collected. The names of my interviewees are: Niobe, Price, Samantha, Iman, Kayla, and Seluna.

- Niobe is a 20 year old college student from Nigeria, raised in Brooklyn.
- Price is a 21 year old college student who is Ghanean-American. She was born and raised in Harlem.
- Samantha is a 22 year old, Afro-Dominican college student raised in the Bronx.
- Iman is a 22 year old recent graduate, who is of Ghanean descent. She was born and raised in the Bronx, but currently resides in Harlem.
- Kayla is a 22 year old Afro-Dominican, raised in the Bronx, who now attends university outside of New York state.
- Seluna is a 22 year old, Afro-Dominican graduate student, raised and currently living in Harlem.

Description of the interview Process. They each lasted for 45 minutes to an hour and a half, each interview. There was an easy camaraderie from the warm-up questions designed to help participants ease into the questions throughout the interview protocol. Conversations were animated, lively, humorous and even poignant in terms of the stories participants told. Some of

their prior relationships with me created an ease of conversation between interviewees and myself. We not only had a prior relationship, but there was already a foundation of trust between us which facilitated discussion of some of the personal topics that were the focus of this study.

At the same time, in spite of the connection and our similarities of identity, I intentionally maintained a professional relationship with each interviewee. For example, if we broached topics that I want to discuss on a more informal level, I did not insert my thoughts into the interview process. Rather, I closed out the interview and debriefing process before further discussion at the informal level.

Findings. When revisiting the main research question for this study, the findings from my six interviewees directly relate to the main question. The main research question is restated as follows:

What are the emotional outcomes on Black Women when they are perceived to transgress racialized heteronormative gender schema intra-group Black contexts across genders? What are the effects when Black Women receive nonverbal messages from other Black persons?

It is clear from this exploratory study that research participants feel specific pressures relating to three primary areas. Using grounded theory, I found recurring ideas deriving from the interview data relating to psychosocial effects. Rather than applying a predetermined theory, I worked in accord with grounded theories principle of staying close to the data that has been generated. In this way, I kept the voices of my research participants at the center of the research–which is a valued methodological aim when studying marginalized groups (Reinharz, 19).

Three major themes emerged from the data. Each theme is represented in Table 1: (See Table 1: Major Interview Themes). In addition there were several sub questions for this research study as follows:

- In what contexts do Black women experience behaviors from other Black persons that they are transgressing social norms? (e.g. Private settings? Public settings? etc.)

- How do Black women experience and perceive messages of transgression from other Black persons?

- Do Black women experience differences in the messages or delivery of messages from Black men than those experienced from Black women? How do these messages impact the psychosocial state of Black Women?

In this section, I will share findings relating to the major question of the study and its sub question. Table 1, organizes the major themes and illustrates the kind of participant comment that is reflective of that theme.

Table 1
Major Interview Themes

Themes	Number of Participants	Illustrating Quote
Biculturality	6	*"Hmm, I definitely forgot to mention both of my parents are from Ghana, West Africa. So like, even though I was raised in America. It's like a mixture of both. I will definitely say [I'm most proud of] that part of me like, being able to travel back to where both my parents are from while still being able to, you know, hold on to my American culture, bringing my West African culture to be proud of both, and exists within both." - Price*
Heteronormative Gaze of Desirablitity	5	*"Growing up in the Bronx, I feel like different aspects, so like when it comes to desirability we weren't really cared for. When it comes to like, popularity or whatever like that wasn't really a thing, especially for like darker girls." - Iman*
Strong Black Woman Schema	5	*"I would like to see the end of the strong black woman trope. And that, because not all black women are like strong. Some, like I remember sitting on Twitter and reading that she said, I'm weak. She said I'm not a strong black woman don't address me as that I'm really weak …it's just like either like you're a woman or a black woman, you know, and I feel like that's just always what 16:58:43 it is. And that strong black woman trope of just not showing enough emotion, but you don't show, like emotion at all I just, just contradicting so much." - Niobe*

Data Analysis:

As shown in the previous section, the three primary themes emerging from the data are: 1) Biculturality, 2) Strong Black Woman, and 3) The Heteronormative Gaze of Desirability. The Interviewees reflected upon and commented about these themes in their responses to interview questions. In addition, they discussed how they felt in ways that confirm that they experience psycho-social effects when others perceive them to have trangressed hetero-gender norms. All of the interviewees have received negative messages from family members such as mothers, fathers, aunts, and grandparents. As I share and discuss this data, I have italicized and indented the voices of interview participants. When text is not italicized, it is my voice as the interviewer. Additionally, the quotes from the participants are longer than the quotes for research for the social sciences. This is intentional–to keep the context and realness of the data and experiences shared, most quotes had to be included from beginning to end. Through the entire quotes it is present how the kitchen table talks were used throughout the interviews and how that brought genuine comfortability from the participants. Keeping the context is also essential for keeping the voices of these Black women participants at the central focus of this research.

Another aspect of the study that I sought to explore is whether and how the interviewees felt that the locale of New York City as a geographic location with a specific culture, shaped their socialization and encourage a kind of strength that was culturally normative, but that simultaneously was often read by others as gender transgressive. I cannot present all of my findings at this time given the volume of data each in-depth interview produced. As I share the most salient themes from the study, I will make an effort to include information that portrays how interviewees connected their thoughts to New York City. While it is true that the majority of the participants spoke briefly or at length about how the messages they received were specific to

the New York City area, I do not focus on this part of my findings in this analysis. In this section

I maintain my focus on the three primary themes from the study.

Theme of Biculturality: "Ladies eat with a fork"

For the sake of this study, biculture refers to the double-consciousness coined by DuBois. LaFromboise defines double-consciousness as the "simultaneous awareness of oneself as being a member and an alien of two or more cultures" (LaFromboise, 1993, p. 395). Other researchers have related this resulting in a "dual pattern of identification and a divided loyalty…leading to an ambivalent attitude" (Stonequist, 1935). This notion of being bicultural is something that was expressed by all interviewees as having experienced. They experience their family's culture being imposed on them, while trying to fit into the culture of young Black women in the United States and more specifically New York City. They have experienced and expressed psychological effects on them when others communicate to them that they are not aligned with accepted gender norms. This leads to self doubt and questioning their positionality in both of their respective cultures–their ethnic or immigrant culture as well as their new culture as a U.S. woman of color. The result from these negative messages when those perceiving them believe that they have transgressed from the norms of a woman in their respective cultures, have been self doubt about their womanhood. One pronounced sub theme that exemplifies Biculturality is that of "cooking/cleaning + mothering" within biculture, Niobe shared her thought process of when she pondered her knowledge of cooking in regards to her West African culture. She shared:

> *"And I feel like coming into college now, with friends that know how to cook has been a very very very hard thing for me. And then when I told my mom that my friends came close she was like, "do you see your friends, learn how to cook!" So it's just like, it's been a hard thing, of like, wanting to cook and learning how to like, just really sitting down and learning, because that's just, like, you know, I'm not a woman if I don't know how to cook…. I need to cook. Now or, this will be something that's going to be very hard for me*

like you know, in terms of finding a partner, like what the hell are they gonna eat? I'm like, but they're gonna have to learn themselves……within myself, I just thought I'm not woman enough if I do not learn [how to cook], you know, and that was never the case, until like recently." - Niobe

Although she has grown up in a sense with the idea of rebelling against her parents and wanting to be different and focus on being "pretty," her womanhood was not validated just because of her being pretty. Consistently being told by her parents that she needs to learn how to cook and "that's what a woman does," We see how psychologically, Niobe felt like she was not woman enough because she chose to not learn how to cook. That is the psycho-social effect that these perceptions have. Niobe thought about finding a partner in the future and how that would work if she did not know how to cook.

The theme of biculturality becomes prominent here—West African and Caribbean cultures have traditional views on the tasks that a woman should have in a household. The parents and families of the participants reinforce those traditional views through teaching and on occasion forcing them to learn how to cook and clean. It is seen as a rite of passage. In immigrant families, it is seen as important to preserve the traditions, especially the food traditions (Bramble et al., 2013). The daughters in immigrant families are expected to preserve food traditions. When the daughters/women in the family are not learning the cooking methods within that specific culture, they are not seen as following the gender norms in their respective cultures; this applies to Afro-Caribbean and West-African cultures such as the Dominican Republic, Ghana, and Nigeria. Children's books have depicted this and have aided in the socialization of young girls of (Afro) Latin descent.

"In some recent Latin(o) American children's literature, being able to cook and acquire food for the family represents the acquisition of power for female characters…The acquisition of knowledge regarding food and cooking as a right of passage for young women in contemporary children's stories…It is through their relationship to food and the mentorship of their mothers and elders that the young female characters become empowered…In *Las hermanas*, preparation of food is, again, a mark of maturity."

(Keeling, 2011, p. 167-174)

In this analysis of various Latin American children's books, the importance of the gendered labor of cooking is revealed by its centrality in Children's literature. Books such as *Las Hermanas, Prietita y la Llorona,* and *Too Many Tamales* subliminally perpetuate the traditional Latin American/Caribbean and (West) African notions of women and girls "needing" to learn how to cook at a young age to care for themselves and/or their families. Such stories imply that a (Latin) girl has not become a woman if she has not gone through the right of passage, a girl has not matured if she does not know how to prepare food.

All of the interviewees allude to beliefs in the gender division of labor and its appropriateness for women as a social construction conveyed to them at a young age. They also expressed that they experienced some negative outcomes based on this pressure to conform. This negative impact was particularly acute for them as Black or Afro-Caribbean women. These ideals impact the way that they view themselves as women. When they feel they are not living up to the expectations of their ethnic and racial cultural norms, they expressed being in a constant state of self-doubt. They talked about having an internal battle about where they stand with respect to their womanhood.

The form of the messages they receive about transgressing the gendered division of labor relative to cooking is that of a reprimanded. They talked about reprimands from both their family members and potential romantic partners. We see this with our other participant Samantha. Samantha shared a moment with her grandmother, who started to yell at her and other women in the room because she did not wash a plate that her (male) cousin used. This is what Samantha shared:

> *"And there's a lot of, there's a lot of examples where my grandpa would be like, no, you're supposed to do this because you're a woman. Even my Grandma, which you would think that she was on my side because she's also a woman but like I said, they're old school Dominican people, like I remember one time, my guy cousin that doesn't even live with us came to eat, and he left the dirty plate in a sink full of nothing, there was no dishes and he just left the plate. So I was like, I made a comment, along the lines of, why did he come here and eat and didn't wash his plate. So my grandma came out the room and started yelling at me, my mom, and my aunt from Florida was visiting. And she was like y'all are three grown women. And you guys are supposed to be washing that plate and you want him to wash it?! I'm like I'm not his wife. I'm nothing to him, I'm just his cousin! Like he could just wash his own plate, why don't you wash it since you want to kiss his ass so bad. So it's just like a lot of people in my family, especially the men and like the older generation of women, they always, they just think that a woman's place at the home is cooking, cleaning, and just like catering to the men. I have a long list of those, even my own father." - Samantha*

Not only is cooking and cleaning enforced by the men in families, but it is reinforced by the women. Cooking and cleaning in turn becomes perceived as an integral part of Black culture,

including Caribbean and West African. Samantha shared that she was frustrated after this. That frustration came from her Grandmother verbally stating and pointing out in a public setting with family that she was transgressing the gender norms of a woman cooking and cleaning for a man. Here, we even see how her grandmother was quick to defend her male cousin. Samantha, as an Afro-Latina, has experienced a different message than her male cousin. The indirect message to her cousin was that a woman is expected to clean up after him, and the direct message to Samantha was that as a woman, as a Black woman, as a Latin woman, she is expected to care for a man, regardless of their status in her life, or her status in theirs.

Seluna had a similar experience at an even younger age. This experience was about comportment in the form of respectable table etiquette for a girl.

> *"My mom's cousin. I was like six…we're all sitting around the dinner table. She's telling me not to eat with a spoon…She was like ladies are supposed to eat with forks. She made my mom bring us there every weekend, so we can learn how to do that so I know how to pick up a fork and guys be so impressed like whatever it was not for ya like this was forced upon me. But, yeah…When I got my period. Um, I got my period and my mom told the whole world, oh well you know how that goes. And, like, because I was still playing with dolls and I didn't want to do certain things they were like, "you know you're a woman now like you gotta do this, you gotta do that, you gotta clean, you gotta know how to cook rice." I'm only 10. Yeah." - Seluna*

At the age of six, Seluna was reprimanded by her aunt for failing to live up to dominant cultural standards of eating with a fork. Interestingly–eating with a fork was not merely good manners for any gender. Rather in the eyes of her aunt–there was an emphasis because of her aunt's ideology that "ladies eat with forks." Socially, in the Dominican Republic, most young kids at that age ate

with a spoon.

This pressure to be ladylike progressed even further when she started menstruating at the age of 10. Her family began to tell her that because now she is a woman (her family believed that menstruating is the start of womanhood), she must begin to cook and clean. Seluna's family's culture of the Dominican Republic clashed with the culture of young girls in the United States and in NYC of being young and playing with dolls.

Psychologically, this led Seluna to feel inadequate as a woman, despite her young age. She associated this to her own tendency to become a people pleaser. Socially, Seluna was forced by her family members to grow up and grow into her womanhood sooner than what she had anticipated. Seluna had to quickly stop being a girl, and become a woman and do the things that the woman from her family believed was correct for a woman from their culture.

In addition to their home cultures, there are some expectations from their NYC culture that some participants felt as though they could not live up to due to their home culture.

> *"My parents are immigrants. So, relating to socio-economic status, I'll say my parents didn't have in their planned notebook of the future of us coming to America but when it came up, you know he took the opportunity. My dad, he had to come to America like two to three years before we did so he had to kind of like struggle for a bit while living at other friends houses and his brothers and growing up, it was kind of hard because, like you know, other friends or classmates, you know they had all you know the Jordans, all that tech stuff but I just wanted to like I have it now because I can, and you know I just wish I had growing up" - Niobe*

As we can see from Niobe's interview quote, she realized the difference between the material things that she owned compared to her peers. Socially, not having the newest/cleanest shoes or

prettiest clothing can lead to other children bullying you. Bullying is defined as "Bullying can be…defined as repeatedly (not just once or twice) harming others. This can be done by physical attack or by hurting others' feelings through words, actions, or social exclusion" (Hazler, 1996). NYC is the home for the cultural phenomenon of sneakers which arose in the Bronx, New York, in the 1970s, around the same time that hip-hop was born (Johnson, 2019). This cultural tie between sneakers and NYC allows people, particularly Black New Yorkers, to "connect through sneakers" (Johnson, 2019). If a young Black girl does not have the sneakers they may need to connect with other Black New Yorkers, a psycho-social effect is feeling isolated from that particular culture. That isolation can be verbally communicated through bullying, or self-inflicted by them withdrawing themselves from those relationships because they already feel out of place.

Missing out on something that seems to be so integral to NYC culture due to another culture you belong to furthers the issues faced due to the double consciousness. In this case, Niobe was unable to construct bicultural competence for herself and effectively navigate between her ethnic culture of origin and the NYC culture of her peers. Consequently, this negatively impacts her psychologically because it hinders her identity development. As noted by LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton, one facet of identity development that plays a key role in bicultural competence is the development of cultural identity, which they note as "the evolution of a sense of self in relation to a culture of origin and who one is within and without that cultural context" (LaFromboise et al., 1993, p. 402). If a Black woman who is experiencing biculturalism is developing in one culture rather than the other, they will experience negative psychological and social effects of bicultural contact, including but not limited to bullying, as aforementioned.

Price and Iman bring their biculturalism to light by sharing that her family is from Ghana, West Africa, and even with traveling between New York City and Ghana, she was able to hold on to and maintain both cultures proudly.

> *"Hmm, I definitely forgot to mention, both of my parents are from Ghana, West Africa. So like, even though I was raised in America. I'm sure Um, I was raised on it, and it's like a mixture of both…I will definitely say that part of me like being able to travel back to where both my parents are from while still being able to, you know, hold on to my American culture, bringing my West African culture to be proud of both, and exists within both." - Price*

> *"Yeah, so I'm a black woman. I'm an African woman. I grew up in the Bronx, I live in Harlem and now I live with my family….I love being black, so I'm very proud about that. I love being black I love being first gen. I love that I can experience my family's culture, and also experience the culture that exists here." - Iman*

Iman states that she loves that she can experience her [Ghanian] family's culture and the various cultures that exist within the Bronx and Harlem. Despite common conceptions of biculturalism leading to psychological distress, there are also some beneficial outcomes to those experiences of being marginalized by biculturalism. Biculturalism is a result of the intermingling from migration and human movement. This further supports discussions of RCT and their benefits, especially when applying it to Black women. This "intermingling," is what Black women grow through, Black women grow through their connections and it aids them in their sense of safety, belonging, and well-being (Jordan, 2008). Being able to navigate the spaces of their multiple cultures allows the participants and other Black women to construct their identities in those cultures all the while feeling accepted and not marginalized for their cultural identities.

Robert E. Park refers to a bicultural person as the "cosmopile," the independent and wiser person (1928). Milton M. Goldberg (1941) and Arnold W. Green (1947) further Park's belief by suggesting that being a "marginal [bicultural] person" is "disconcerting only if the individual internalizes the conflict between the two cultures in which [they] are living." Although Iman, Price, and other participants have expressed their internal conflict between their cultures, they have shown grace for themselves and have allowed themselves to embrace their various cultures and the differences between them. Although Price enjoys being a Ghanian woman and a Harlem woman, she quickly realized the differences between the two cultures particularly through her mother's attempts to enforce the concept of a traditional woman in Ghanian culture.

> *"So, I remember my mom bought me an etiquette book. Oh my gosh. When I was, I don't I think it was like 11, like it was like when mothers are getting like those girl books for their for their girls like the little lectures are like puberty whatever whatever but along with that she gave me an etiquette book and so like in West African culture like women are supposed to appear polite soft acceptable, at service at all times like that's the thing and that wasn't me like from the jump. It wasn't me. I wasn't into that, I didn't really care for it either. But it was ingrained within her so she was trying to ingrain within me at a very young age. And so it was always a thing of like, appearing feminine like obviously back then I didn't know it as that. But now that I'm older, like I see it now as like her trying to push like that femininity like rhetoric, like a woman has appear this way for her to be deemed a woman or lady like or whatever, a girl, whatever that is. I feel like from young My mom has always taught me to appear in a certain way that is digestible to others. What* Would you say that is? *poised, like doesn't talk too much, just enough, like, kind of, I don't know, like actively going against those stereotypes that are bullshit but our*

stereotypes that exist in our society.… I think it fits more with our culture, our Western

culture or cultural traditions that she grew up on. And she does, she was getting to know

Harlem as well so it was kind of like, this is the perfect way to appear in a space where

we don't really know how to navigate yet you're in the middle so you can appear

digestible to all." - Price

Socially, Price wanted to steer away from the culture that her mom was imposing. Psychologically, Price's choice to differentiate from her Ghanian culture put her at risk for being marginalized within her own culture of origin. While she may wish to retain bicultural participation in the culture of Ghanians in America and as a woman growing up in Harlem–she appears to want to choose what fits her as a second generation Ghanian. At the same time, Price's mother was learning the culture of Harlem and used her femininity (what she was conditioned to know) as a safe-haven to navigate the newfound Harlem culture.

Despite the familial-cultural differences between Price who is Ghanian and Kayla who is from the Dominican Republic, Kayla experienced a parallel dynamic.

"Just because like growing up, like I don't know, actually told me the rules to be a

woman, you know, like how to like interact with like men etc. Like to not be too

promiscuous to always go outside, being really clean, having good hygiene. Always

looking arregla (fixed up), like you never want to go outside like where your hair it's not

done, or clothes not looking together. I feel like back then my mom was really like key on

like owning like my like my like my physical appearance and embracing my sensuality,

sexuality, so still yeah sexuality in the sense that like she always try to encourage me to

wear like short skirts or a short pants you know until they know to be feel sexy." - Kayla

From reading the previous quote, one can see that there is still a cultural similarity between

Price and Kayla relative to gender norms. Kayla's Dominican mother always wanted her to look *arregla*, whether that be always having her hair done or looking put together in terms of the clothes she was wearing, her hair, her shoes, and the like. Socially, Kayla had to condition herself to what was deemed presentable for a woman by her mother. This could have other social implications when interacting with potential romantic partners or even in their respective school systems.

Kayla went on to discuss a specific experience she had in elementary school in which a woman teacher asked the classroom, "who kissed Kayla?" and more than half the class raised their hands. Kayla does not remember that teacher asking the students if they had kissed a male student. She said she cared, and so much to the point where when she went to middle school, she did not date anyone. *"So when I was 12 I didn't date anybody.Yeah, I didn't. When I was 12 to 13."* Schools have a way of enforcing gender roles to young girls, especially notions of not being too promiscuous. Psychologically, Kayla felt exposed when the teacher asked the class if any of the students had kissed her. This is a vulnerable moment, that in turn socially impacted Kayla and prevented her from having romantic interests when entering middle school. As we get older, school cultures change, adding another layer of culture to the biculturalism that these Black women are already experiencing.

When going to a predominantly white space/culture (PWIs) such as their current(or former) universities, some interviews in this study have felt socially sanctioned for their biculturalism. Psychologically, they have felt the need to minimize their personalities for the sake of their white peers.

> *"[In the Bronx] I like the fact that I was free, like free of judgment, for like behaving a*
>
> *certain way. I think the Bronx, like some of the stereotypes that are aligned with the*

Bronx, are being loud and goofy. Now, I guess aggressive and assertive and sense like

when I'm at school, for instance, because I attend [redacted] College I feel like I have to

be like a very toned-down version of who I am. In regards to like not being as expressive,

in the same way that I am able to be at home, or like I feel like things are more relaxed a

whole like you can literally go outside like with a bonnet to the bodega (grocery store)

and no one cares, whereas like going outside to school with a bonnet and in a primarily

like white institution like you're definitely getting stares are like the fact that I like I could

listen to like my music–whether it's bachata(style of dance that originated in the

Dominican Republic), or like listening to Pop Smoke (Brooklyn Drill rapper) without

people like telling me to like, quiet, or getting complaints." - Kayla

This adds another layer to the biculturalism experienced by Kayla and adds to the experience of

the other interviewees who also attend PWIs. Black women often feel as if they cannot be

themselves around those who do not have shared lived experiences that validate their

experiences as Black women from New York City. This in turn affects their social interactions

because it causes them to be more isolated and not as expressive with others who they fear will

not understand them. Despite many of them sharing that they have overcome this feeling of the

need to minimize their personalities for the sake of others, it still took a toll that they are now

managing and healing from at the ages of 18-22.

A common assumption about those who are bicultural is that this feeling of

marginalization is undesirable because of the constant longing for belonging in both cultures.

LaFramboise states that "living in two cultures is psychologically undesirable because managing

the complexity of dual reference points generates ambiguity, identity confusion, and

normlessness" (1993, p. 395). The norms that these women once knew from their cultures and

neighborhoods in NYC, do not exist in PWIs such as their universities. This creates psychological unrest because they feel as though they need to hide who they are due to the new culture that they are a part of.

This research study also found that life post graduation continued to impact the various cultures that these Black women exist within. In many of the respective cultures of the participants, many women did not pursue higher education due to financial reasons or reasons such as believing that it is not the role of a woman, and that a woman should stay at home. Iman states this when she says "*A lot of women, especially like Muslim like West African women don't have access to higher education, or like they never get the chance to like even leave the city to get an education if they do.*" Upon graduation, Iman wanted to move out of her family's home and live on her own. Her extended family disagreed and have verbally chastised her for even considering moving out on her own.

> *"When I recently graduated, I very much wanted to move out on my own. And like, not really from my immediate family but when it came to my extended family it was like a big no no it's like, Oh, you're a woman like you need a be right back home after, you shouldn't be living by yourself, but you have to be living with your parents basically until you're married. And I was like, no. And this whole thing of like, yeah, you pretty much can't live your life unless you're married. And, yes, I was getting a lot of comments about that… so it's like a whole thing of like, oh, like you're doing something that's like typically masculine like the only people who really leave the home." - Iman*

Culturally, her West African family believes that for her to move out she should be married. For young women in the United States, marriage is not seen as a priority especially once graduating college. Being independent upon graduation is a part of the culture of the United States, and we

can see the clash of Iman's cultures through this experience. Socially, this can hinder Iman's personal growth as a young adult and her independence after graduation. This can impact her social platonic relationships because she may not be able to spend time with friends in her own home with other family members around. Psychologically, Iman may compare herself to other young (Black) women her age and feel as though she is not enough, and can lead to feelings of a decreased sense of self worth and heightened sense of imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome was first coined in the 1970s by psychologists Dr. Pauline Rose Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes, when they asserted that "despite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise" (Clance and Imes, 1978, p. 241). Although this particular experience that Iman shared does not relate directly to the definition of imposter syndrome defined by Clance and Imes, when women compare themselves to others that they believe to be authentic academics, professionals, or in their livelihoods, women notice differences and begin to feel like counterfeits. As stated by Callie W. Edwards, "this feeling activates the dangerous cycle of women attempting to forecast others' perception of them and then performing behaviors based on those assumed perceptions" (Edwards, 2019, p. 19). This can be applied to Black women such as Iman. When Black women attempt to compare themselves to peers and other Black women their age, and consciously change themselves to adhere to what and how others behave, they can feel inadequate. Feelings of not being enough can take a psychological toll and result in social withdrawal. presumptions. This can take a psychological toll. As the theory of RCT argues, a balance of relationships is still needed between the self, familial, platonic, and romantic relationships and overall growth.

Identifying as Afro-Latina when the main Dominican culture denies identifying with

Blackness requires unlearning and relearning. This bicultural theme is evident through Seluna's interview. She shared that some of her Black-Dominican family members refuse to acknowledge their Black ancestry and how much this infuriates her. She also invests in trying to change their minds and educate them. She states "*I know, I'm Dominican and to educate them [family], it's hard. But I'll say this, my father, he tried his best to be the best that he could be and he's really learning and I love him for that because there's some Dominicans who just refuse to know the heritage and my father be here yelling at people like "No, she's right! You know the history books? Literally read the books!"* Biculturalism comes with its own set of expectations from two or more cultures. Interviewees feel the weight of differing gendered expectations. These multiple expectations spanning their home cultures, United States culture, NYC culture, and Black American culture continue to impose their own set of expectations on Black women. A quote from Price's interview is illustrative of these polycultural demands:

> *"So I just feel like there's this constant expectation for black people to be doing something great at all times and that's the only way they could be celebrated. Like extraordinary, the smartest, the brightest, the flyest,, the top in everything, like there's no space to lack as a black person, especially in a predominantly white space, like, why can't I just exist as I am?" - Price*

Price feels that as a Black person and woman, she must always overdo everything to get praise or recognition. She feels as though there is no room to be average or subpar as a Black person in the U.S. Psychologically, this leaves Price to feel that she is not enough, that her work efforts are not enough when she believes herself to be putting her maximum effort. She feels like she consistently needs to overextend herself to be acknowledged in Black and white spaces. When looking at Samantha's responses, she highlighted a small difference between her culture and the

culture in NYC that had a long lasting impact. In fact, it was related to a shared experience we had when we turned 17. As the researcher, I often noted in the stories of my participants some overlap in issues we faced relating to this research. In addition, I actually knew some of the participants personally, and we had common situations stemming from navigating similar social circles in the NYC area.

Returning to the data and this example of biculturality between city and ethnic cultures, Samanthat shares as follows:

"Okay, this might be you probably have heard this before, but like my parents and like a lot of adults in my family will be like, "Oh, you can wear the color red." Do you remember from my 17th birthday that I wore a red dress? That was the end of the world. I don't know why, and in a lot of cultures, parents just think that red is a promiscuous color. And like "just worried that it's like you're calling the attention of men."But yeah, just like little things like that that is like "you're coming off as a whore or like that's a color for prostitutes" Yeah, my dad blacked on me. He ain't talk to me for a week. He's been asking me for a week. He's like "I can't believe you're wearing that dress." It wasn't even revealing as you remember, "I'm feeling disrespectful to you" so just, just a lot of comments along that line and it just didn't really make sense to me." - Samantha

When Samantha states "*Yeah, my dad blacked on me,*" "blacking" on someone is NYC slang for lashing out on, yelling, shouting, "going off on" someone (Chris, 2009). In Samantha's culture of the Dominican Republic, red is seen as a promiscuous color. She was reprimanded and talked at by her father who told her she was appearing as a "whore" for wearing the color red for her 17th birthday dinner. Being bicultural comes into play because as a young teen in NYC, we are not concerned with the negative connotations behind the colors that we wear–if it makes us look and

feel good about ourselves, we will wear it. Socially, her father publicly ignored her and did not talk to Samantha for a week. Psychologically, Samantha's father ignoring her can lead her to assume that there is a fault within their relationship that she is responsible for creating. This can prompt specific disadvantages to Samantha based on the RCT framework (Jordan, 2008): RCT denotes five disadvantageous outcomes that relational disconfirmation produces including: less clarity and more confusion about herself, her father, and her relationship with her father. Ultimately, withdrawal from familial relationships could be the price paid for such disconfirmation.

Biculturality adds layers to the way that Black women from NYC are perceived. These perceptions through the various cultures these Black women are a part of influence the gendered expectations. The multiple forms of socialization and their expectations consequently impact Black women psycho-socially in the way that their perceive themselves and their mannerisms, as well as constrict their social interactions with Black people and people in general.

The Heteronormative Gaze of Desirability: "you look so feminine in your pictures …"

A second major theme arising from this study is that of The Heteronormative Gaze of Desirability. For the sake of brevity, I will shorten this theme to the word "desirability." With respect to this theme, many of the Black women interviewed brought up the topic of pretty privilege in relation to colorism and how they are perceived. Pretty privilege can be understood as physical attractiveness in relation to hegemonic beauty standards, which are very white. In the western hemisphere and western culture, whiteness is seen as the standard for beauty. This is rooted in colonialism of countries like Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal and others colonizing countries in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. The British viewed Black women in the Caribbean as "sexually deviant, and therefore suitable for both the reproduction of enslaved labour and the sexual desires of their owner" (Beckles, 1999; Marshall, 2005; Morgan, 2004; Morrissey, 1989). This dynamic further progressed to whites viewing Black women as "promiscuous, uncaring and physically strong, in stark contrast to their white, more genteel, family-oriented counterparts" (Elliott-Cooper 2019, p. 545). Black women have consistently been denied their femininity and their beauty by the Eurocentric gaze. The denial of desirability influences generations past and present to present themselves in ways that are white adjacent. In contemporary times, some of the younger generations such as millennials and Generation Z go to great lengths to comply with the mainstream practices or ways of being that approximate whiteness. Colorism is a by-product of the urge to approximate whiteness and gain the privileges and systemic rewards of the dominant white society.

The features idealized in colorist ideology are *white feminine* features— "skin color, certainly, but also thin/slender body type and long and straight hair. Moreover, Afrocentric features are perceived to be masculine, so Black women who present with more Afrocentric

features are by default less feminine (and less attractive) in this structure" (Rosario et al., 2021, p. 504).

Black women have reported that an overwhelming preference for light skin still persists and deeply impacts the way that they think about themselves and others (Awad et al., 2015). Some of the participants shared similar sentiments about dressing in ways that they perceived to be more feminine and the responses they received when they were perceived to be more feminine. Niobe shared an experience where she was using the online dating app, Tinder. Tinder is a dating application for smartphones that is often seen as an application that promotes and facilitates hookup culture (Sumter, 2017). On Tinder, people can "match" solely based on physical experience and a short bio(graphy). Users can swipe right (saying "like") or swipe left (saying "pass") based solely on their physical appearance and a short bio(graphy).

In Niobe's interview, she discusses a compelling example of the theme of Desirability. She describes a Tinder match with someone who expressed a judgment about her voice when he stated that "you look so feminine in your pictures. I didn't expect you to sound like that."

> *"Yeah, I'll always remember when I was on Tinder freshman year, I never told anybody this, I was on Tinder, and I did like a voice message right he was like "not how I expected you to talk." And I was like, What do you mean he was like, all your pictures and, like you, you look like, feminine. You know, and he was like your voice is kind of like he was like, he was like, "are you from NY?" I was like "yeah" he was like, "OK, that makes sense." I was like, damn did it again! I wish I could just talk like a girl. Like ugh why am I talking like this! I even ask friends like, "Do I talk like a man?" And they say "no you literally sound like a girl." And I was like, are you sure, because you can tell me right now you guys, you don't understand I will shape shift into a girl from Alabama," - Niobe*

Niobe's sharing this can be understood as her not perceiving herself as attractive because of how she speaks. Black women from New York City, more specifically the Bronx, Harlem, and Brooklyn, are commonly perceived as more masculine through their behaviors and speech mannerisms. The previous comments by Niobe show that she felt as though people perceived her as more masculine due to her New York City accent.

Psychologically, this interaction impacted Niobe in a negative way–Niobe shared that she has consciously tried to adjust the way that she speaks and suppress her New York accent because she felt as though it made her more masculine. Socially, men have verbally stated to her that they "expected her to sound feminine." This brings the question of what does "appropriate" femininity sound like? In Niobe's experience of the TInder match interaction, feminine did not sound like her. Feminine did not sound like a New York accent.

As a result of these kinds of messages, Niobe began to doubt herself and her femininity. This compares similarly to interviewees Iman and Price. Price shared intentionally changing the way she dressed to be seen as more "feminine." She was experimenting with this to see how the Black men on her campus would treat her. Price explained:

> *"And I've noticed that in my old, like, I'm not old but from like 19 to 21, which I am 21 now, I've noticed how like men approach you or socialize with you in different ways if you're wearing certain things. And I find it so funny.* Do you have like a particular experience based on that that you'd like to share? *Okay, I feel like men only started finding me attractive. Like attractive in ways that they would date me when I started switching it up. Like,* what do you mean by switching it up, the clothes you were wearing, or? *Yeah, well, the clothes I was wearing, the hairstyle I was wearing, I noticed that I received different treatment. And it was like a social experiment for me, at this point, it*

was like, all right, if I'm wearing an oversized shirt goes that like goes up, covers my ass

a little, and I'm wearing baggy pants and like throw on some bands and call it a day or

some dunks and call it a day. Yeah, I would get compliments like "that fit is fire. that's

cool" whatever. Let's say I come out in a crop top and shorts or whatever, all of a sudden

it's like oh, "I didn't know she had an ass, I didn't know she had this, I didn't know." And

this is like it's so funny to me because, like I've had guys be like oh shit, I didn't know you

had an ass, I didn't know you had blah blah and this is like, what if I want you not to

know? What if I didn't want that to be a known thing? So I've noticed that. And, again,

like it's really really funny to me, because it's just like, why do I get more attention this

way than I do this way, so you feel like you got more attention when we were dressed

more feminine more attention from men when you were just more feminine, you know,

and that attention was like romantic attention? *Yup. My conclusions, well overall again I*

found it really really funny because the age I'm at, male attention–I don't care for it. I

mock it, like it's something I make fun of. So, I feel like yeah it was a social experiment

and I've came to the conclusion that men will treat you better if you appear more

feminine, because I feel like over time there seems to be like this like obsessiveness with

like appearing feminine, like hyper femininity, appearing submissive, and all this, for the

sake of a man feeling like man. So I'm noticing how that's affecting socializing with

men." - Price

Regarding the theme of Desirability, some Black women feel that they need to be hyper feminine

in order to be deemed attractive to men and Black men. When Price dressed in a way that she

believed was more feminine, she got more attention from men for her appearance or physical

features including hips, buttocks, and breasts. Prior to this, Price shared that in high school she

was seen as more masculine for the way that she dressed, but only dressed in that particular style because she had difficulty finding clothes that fit her well. While other high schoolers were shopping at places like American Eagle, Hollister and Fashion Nova, she was shopping at Zara for pants that went past her ankles. Price concluded that if she wanted romantic attention from others, and particularly other Black people, she needed to wear clothes that she thought were more feminine–crop tops, shorts, skirts, dresses, and tank tops. Socially, she was ignored and denied romantic attention if she was not dressed in that form of femininity.

Other participants including (but not limited to) Iman, Seluna, and Niobe shared similar sentiments about pretty privilege. Niobe said:

"I just wanted to look pretty. You know, my definition of pretty was like one of those light skinned girls on Instagram, you know that, and it was just so hard growing up dark skin, and specifically if you recognize that at such a young age." - Niobe

The internalized colorism that we as a Black community have psychologically impacts Black women in a negative way. Many of the participants shared that although they love being Black and love their dark skin, they did not always feel that way. They all felt insecure about their skin tones in public and private settings. They felt unattractive and not desired. People perceiving the Black women participants had preconceived notions of femininity, and felt as though these Black women did not fit that, despite the racial background of the perceiver. As a young girl, psychologically Niobe had ingrained in her head that what was pretty was "thin, light-skin." Socially, Niobe felt as though she wasn't pretty as a dark skinned woman. Especially having this mentality at a young age can take a toll in the long run. There needs to be internal healing done. Colorist-historical trauma response permeate the physiological, psychological, social, socioeconomic, and political responses of these African American(s) (Crutchfield et al., 2020)

and Black women must use positive coping mechanisms in ways that will benefit them to heal from colorist-historical trauma.

Seluna also talked about the theme of pretty privilege when she shared:

"I had a situation where like I tried to comfort a friend, where she was in a situation like this (perception(s) being expressed in a negative manner) but she felt like I didn't get it because I was too pretty and I didn't know what that meant. But then looking back and growing up I just realized like damn, it's hard being a dark-skinned woman. So when she said that it was not even about how I looked, it was about my skin color. And it sucks that every time you walk into the room you're the first person they look at, you givin' them a stank face then they looking at your friends and that's weird." - Seluna

Although Seluna does not identify as dark-skinned, she came to the realization of what her friend meant by calling her "too pretty." Her friend used "pretty" and light-skin interchangeably. Seluna understood that their experiences as Black women are different because they are still perceived by their skin tone, but at the moment did not understand what being "pretty" had to do with anything, if they shared a similar experience. Socially, we can surmise that Seluna felt isolated. Seluna is also an Afro-Latina and even discussed that her Latin identity also played a role into her pretty privilege and how people perceived her Blackness. In her own neighborhood of Harlem, her Black neighbors would say things like "*Stop talking that Spanish shit here bro.*" Although Seluna is Black and Latina, the Black people within her community wanted her to choose one identity over the other. Despite being perceived as "pretty" to her lighter skin complexion, people within her Harlem community have expressed what she perceived to be negative verbal messages about one of her identities. The concept of being "foreign", or exotic from a different country, is fetishized (Ramusack et al., 1999), especially within the Black

community. Despite this, a neighbor perceived her as less than due to her speaking another language. We can assume that they felt offended that they did not understand her. This impacts her desirability because when we understand how Latin women are fetishized within other ethnic and racial groups, this interaction negates those stereotypes of being desired as a Latin woman by potential partners of a different familial culture.

In further exploring the theme of Desirability, Kayla said:

"I think, you know, even like thinking about my own identity. I feel like it is a bit different because even though I'm of Afro descent, I feel like when you're like Latina, you get away with more things that other like, African American, or like, you know, Jamaican, but when you're from a spanish speaking country, I feel like you don't get the same treatment because I feel like for me. Like, if I ever like talk loud or like sassy or whatever, like no one was like stop acting like a man you know no one ever told me that are like the one was like ever like, yo, no one changed their behavior to exert their masculinity onto me because they felt threatened by me. Like no one has like no one has ever done that to me like, whereas I know, and I have seen how other people have changed their behavior or like how other people reacted to my friends who are not Dominican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban etc. or who are not like Hispanic but who are Black. And I feel like colorism is another thing that plays a big role too, like I'm light skin like I feel like I'm treated vastly different. I'm privileged in that sense. And like I don't think I get the same reactions for example, like I feel like I don't get the same reactions And actually that's those are all like things should be considered like even like my own experiences are like, definitely different when you're also not only focusing on just gender and race, but also focusing on feature and be focusing on colorism." - Kayla

Kayla unambiguously talks about her intersectional identity as a light-skin Afro-Latina to talk about colorism and blatantly states it as so. This ties in and explains Seluna's experience with her friend as well. Psychologically, Kayla recognizes how being of both Black and Latin descent complicates how people view her because they view her as Latin before they perceive her as Afro-Latin. She highlights that Black women that aren't from Spanish speaking countries are treated differently and intensely less privileged, than non-Spanish speaking Black women. Socially, this puts Afro-Latin women in a perplexing situation of feeling like they need to choose between being Black or being Latina. In Seluna's, Kayla's, and Samatha's case, they cannot separate the two. People perceive them to be Black when it's beneficial to them, and perceive them as Latin when it is in their favor to not perceive them as Black. This adds another complex layer to the cultural issues that these Black women have been facing — feeling like they must choose between their Black identity, their ethnic identity, their New York identity, and a sense of not belonging to either of their cultures. While colorism and beauty standards are not directly tied with committing a gender transgression, these expectations of beauty are an adjacent dynamic to gender performance and how it is perceived.

Samantha articulates dynamics of Desirability as follows:

"*I know that it definitely angers Black women, just because, and like I'm speaking for myself, but more darker skinned women. Like, I'm talking about skin complexion. I feel like it definitely angers them just because there's already this stereotype that Black women are angry and they're just always mad or they're always like yelling or always have an attitude. So it's like, I know that if I had that stereotype put on me and if someone is telling me how to act as a woman or like I'm acting this way, that shit would infuriate me to be honest because it's just like, I already have this this pressure from society on me*

and like the stereotype. And this is how people think I am so another, another type of

societal pressure is just insane to be honest." - Samantha

Samantha describes herself as a light-skinned woman. She expressed here that she understands

the different ways that Black women are treated and desired for based on their skin tones. Black

women with darker skin are viewed as angry, or as the Sapphire stereotype. When Black women

are already perceived as being mean, malicious, or angry, it does not allow the Black woman the

space to express themselves as they are. This affects them socially because due to the

preconceived perceptions, people and potential romantic partners refrain from creating

relationships with them. Psychologically, the Black women may feel the need to minimize their

personalities to one that is quiet and closed off, and that can take a mental toll because they are

not sharing their true emotions and thoughts with others.

To conclude this section, a return to consideration of psycho-social effects of the theme of

Desirability is important. Considering the age of the participants, the majority of their romantic

relationships would be with partners near the same age of 18-22. It is worth noting that for

participants attending College, that Black fraternity men in Black Greek Lettered Organizations

(BGLOs) base their courting of women and thus relationship status on their perception of the

(Black) woman. In "Sophisticated Practitioners: Black Fraternity Men's Treatment of Women,"

through interviewing Black fraternity college aged men, Rashawn Ray came to the conclusion

that the "more attractive women are, the more likely fraternity men are to pursue a committed

relationship. If the woman is not 'committed relationship material,' they may still pursue her

sexually" (2012, p. 651). If the men do not perceive the (Black) woman as attractive, they would

not pursue her romantically but rather pursue her sexually. If the "romantic and sexual

encounters [are] followed by limited social interactions [it] may affect women's self-esteem and

elicit feelings of unworthiness" (2012, p. 655). If the psychological effects are lower self-esteem and feelings of unworthiness when Black women receive nonverbal messages such as limited interactions with potential romantic partners when they have transgressed from the concept of desirability for Black women (Cooper, 2019), a downward spiral might ensue that impacts their interpersonal relations, their cultural capital on the social scene (e.g., popularity), and even their development of self. RCT founding scholar Judith Jordan explains that when disconformity hinders our potential for connection, barriers to growth and development can occur. The disadvantages of disconfirmation within the context of social relations can be: a drop in energy, decreased sense of worth, less clarity about self and the relationship, less creativity, and withdrawal from all relationships (2008). One can extrapolate that when the disconfirming messages arise from those closest to us and/or within a significant identity group we belong to such as our ethnic culture or our same race–the negative psycho-social consequences can be magnified.

Strong Black Woman Theme: "It's your mom so you kind of learn from them"

The third major theme arising from the interview data is the Strong Black Woman Theme. This theme and its surrounding dynamics is sufficiently pervasive that it has been theorized as a gender schema itself. As previously defined, Strong Black Woman (SBW) Schema refers to ideologies and accompanying perceptions pertaining to what is deemed a "Strong Black Woman." The schema is based on the mammy and superwoman stereotypes. The superwoman stereotype is defined as a woman who "has a strong desire to be successful and does not show weakness" (Wallace, 1979, as cited in Castelin, 2019, p. 1). The superwoman stereotype contributes to the SBW Schema and how Black women perceive that they must be both strong and self-reliant while caring for others while disregarding themselves, their feelings, and their needs. Abrams and Nelson have stated that Black women often use the SBW Schema to manage and handle the particularly unique and shared challenges that they face (2014; 2016). Black women often use their preconceived superwoman-ness they use their superwoman-ness to cope with the discrimination and struggles that come with their inherit intersecting identities, whether that be the various cultures that they are a part of or their socio-economic status. Interestingly, many Black women use the SBW schema not because they have that supposed strength already, but because they hope that presenting themselves as a "Strong Black Woman" will give them the strength that they need.

Despite this belief, the majority of the participants expressed that they are exasperated by the SBW trope. Feeling the need to live up to being emotionally regulated, the main caretaker [of their families], and being economically independent is physically and emotionally exhausting. One example of this exhaustion relates to Price questioning, "*why can't I just exist as I am?"* This leads us to believe that psychosocially, Price feels that how she behaves is not enough to

fulfill the expectations of the perceivers, regardless of race and gender. Socially and culturally, Black women are taught from a young age to be "strong." Samantha shares another feature of the SBW by acknowledging that she compartmentalizes her feelings–a coping strategy to keep functioning despite how one feels. Not surprisingly, Samantha believes that she resembles her mother by using this SBW coping mechanism. She explains:

> *"As I get older now I realize that I kinda am like my mom, which is scary even though we avoid very hard being like our mothers. Um, just in terms of like "don't be too emotional, like why are you crying, like you have no reason to cry; no one died. My mom is just like that as a person like, she tends to keep things to herself as a woman and just deal with it herself and I find myself doing that as well like I'm just like…I don't have to tell anyone my problems like I don't need pity from anybody like I'm just, it's kind of, it's your mom so you kind of learn from them, it's hard to like let that trait go." - Samantha*

Although Samantha did not define it, her mother exemplified traits predominantly shown in the SBW schema; she did not express herself as emotional and consistently refused to share her feelings. Psychosocially, internalizing and compartmentalizing feelings leads to Black women facing internal struggles on their own, which then negatively impacts their relationships because they may isolate and disconnect themselves from others, especially during times of stress (Watson-Singleton, 2017). Niobe expresses her frustration with the SBW schema and views the ideas this schema perpetuates as contradictory to other stereotypes of Black women.

> *"So, I've always you know the whole trope of like being a strong black woman…I'm not a strong black woman don't address me as that, I'm really weak. That's just like you guys say that women are emotional, you just contradicting! I can't fit into, like, you know, being this. I don't know, it's just like either you're a woman or a Black woman, you know,*

and I feel like that's just always what it is. And that strong black woman trope of just not showing enough emotion, but you don't show emotion at all is just contradicting so much." - Niobe

Niobe feels as though this trope of being a SBW and being perceived as one does not suit her. In fact, it frustrates her because it shows how cultures consistently construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct what is socially acceptable.

Scholars theorize that the SBW schema was created as an alternative to the negative stereotypes of Black women in the culture of the United States (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2005; Harris-Lacewell, 2004). U.S. culture portrays women as emotional beings while paradoxically portraying Black women as stigmatized emotional beings. That is, the emotions of Black women are perceived as the more negative emotions such as anger associated with dysfunctionally aggressive behavior. The trope of the "Angry Black woman" is projected onto Black women and associated closely with the Sapphire stereotype. The Strong Black Woman schema can impact the interpersonal relationships that Black women have with others and themselves by setting others up to fear Black women and anticipate an aggressive anger from them. Having this unwarranted stereotype hanging over Black women and intruding into their relationships can lead to adverse psycho-social outcomes. Effects can undermine relationships and ultimately may lead to a decreased sense of worth, confusion, and withdrawal from their relationships. Attempting to live up to the SBW that their cultures and selves expect them to be is draining and leads them to crave emotional intimacy. The Black women that participated in this study do not want to be trapped in a demand to be eternally strong, resilient, or brave. They want to be free to feel the full range of human emotions such as feeling vulnerable, needing affection, and wanting

to be shown grace. They just want to exist as themselves without having to deal with perceptions projected onto them. Price talks about it this way when she says:

> *"I kind of went through this thing where I'm like I don't want to be strong anymore, I don't want to be resilient anymore. I would truly just want to have like I want to hug at this point. That's it. But, um, I don't know, my strength as a black woman? I guess existing at this point. Existing every day, especially at the school I go to, I'm pretty sure you can relate existing as a black woman out of PWI every day it can be hell sometimes Yeah, like, truly." - Price*

Performing the schema of the SBW becomes a chore when it is expected of Black women at all times to the exclusion of other performances of and expressions of self. Here is Iman's description:

> *This might be [a] general [expectation] for Black women is just like having to be like, brave or strong, or like this expectation that we can triumph through every adversity…Which oftentimes just like leads to there not being enough grace, or like allows black women to like fully feel their emotions, and like react and like live in their emotions before having to heal, or something like that, you know, I feel like often black women aren't allowed to do that…you hope that like the people that you're in community with can have some level of grace, with you…But yeah, I think it sucks just like knowing that generally it's like looked down upon to like fully feel how you want to feel, whether that's like publicly, or like in private.* Do you think part of that is a result of where you're from plus where you grew up? *Yeah, I think so. - Iman*

Iman relates these notions of Strong Black women to being from the Bronx. According to Iman and other interviewees, there is a general stereotype that Black Bronx women are dirty,

ghetto/ratchet, poor, or a "treesh." A treesh is defined by internet users as a New York woman perceived as promiscuous and for whom the slang term "thot/hoe" is used. It is a slang word used in New York City (ytry_, 2019). Study participants for this research also commonly relate that growing up in NYC and the Bronx, they must have a hard exterior to survive. This locale specific socialization to toughness is what Nikki Jones defines as a situated survival strategy (SSS). SSS refers to "patterned forms of interpersonal interaction, and routine or ritualized activities oriented around a concern for securing...personal well-being" (Jones, 2010, p. 52-53). Iman described this when she said "*Girls in the Bronx don't take no shit.*" Bronx women and NYC women are tough, but they must also present themselves as such to be able to survive and get their needs met.

Discussion: "Your Lungs are Only Built for One"

To whom this may concern; you have been living for families, for friends, for

lovers. But your lungs are only built for one. Don't suffocate yourself trying to

constantly breathe life into other people (@wetheurban, 27 March 2022).

This is a quote I found on instagram that echoes the sentiments shared with me by my interviews.

The message is that although we as Black women may feel the pressure to live up to others'

expectations of us, our lungs are only built for one. All that we do cannot be sufficient for

everyone, and it must be sufficient for yourself first. All of the participants expressed how people

perceiving and discussing their gendered behavior has impacted them emotionally and socially.

The voices of the Black women illuminate wanting to change their personalities, their physical

appearance, their mannerisms, and their behaviors. We see an example of this when Niobe had

the interaction with a man on Tinder, she went to her friends and asked them if she sounded like

a man, and told them "*I will shape shift into a girl from Alabama.*" Many of the messages that

the Black women that were interviewed were verbal messages, therefore the question of "What

are the effects when Black women receive nonverbal messages from other Black persons?" was

not answered. Despite this, messages from other Black persons seem to impact Black women

more and have a lasting effect. We see this especially when we compare the participants'

experiences at PWIs and their experiences with their family and friends from NYC or that are

Black.

  Interestingly, although the questions as shown in the Interview Protocol in Appendix B

focused on perceptions from people regardless of gender, but the participants mainly shared

experiences in which Black men had expressed to them that they transgressed the racialized

heteronormative gender schema. The Black men in those experiences were either peers from

elementary school through the present college level, or male romantic interests. Compared to the messages these Black women experienced from other Black women, the messages from Black men seemed to impact Black women's psycho-social state more negatively. Granted, there were some experiences in which they (the participants) were unphased. On the other hand, the majority of participants tended to question many aspects of themselves and their self-expression or presentation of self when they experienced messages from male peers.

Such questioning of self applied to: their appearance(s) as in their hairstyles, their clothing choice, and their mannerisms, such as how "promiscuous" they presented themselves (whether for a negative or positive reaction), the slang words they used, and even their accents. Psychologically, the Black women felt as if they "were not enough" and needed to fix or correct something about themselves. From people's expression of their perceived transgression of their understood gender schema for Black women, Black women feel the constant pressure of biculturality, the heteronormative gaze of desirability, and the SBW trope to fit within all their cultures, be "pretty," and be strong. This takes an emotional toll that leads to an internal battle of minimizing themselves to please others, but feeling alone due to hiding their true selves, and not being able to express themselves to others. In turn, this affects all social aspects of their lives—Socially, the expression of perceived transgression from others, leads Black women to isolate themselves and deny themselves their need for relationships, whether that be platonic, romantic, or familial.

The data results in Black women needing adequate mentors and positive relationships with the self as well as others in their lives to thrive. RCT supports this by stating that individuality is a hindrance to Black women's growth. When Black women start to isolate themselves, it hinders their growth because it leads to the five bad things (Jordan 2008),

especially less clarity of themselves, their relationships, and withdrawal from said relationships.

When I asked the participants question 17 in the Interview Protocol (Appendix B), the majority

of participants shared that they would like to see the end of the SBW trope and more acceptance

and understanding of the spectrum in which Black women present themselves. Black women

should not be confined to the societal constructs of racialized heteronormative gender schema,

Black women should not be bound to their cultures, the gaze of desirability, or the expectation to

be a Strong Black Woman. We must deconstruct, and reconstruct these concepts to suit us as

Black women. Lastly, many believe that the educational institutions while growing up enforced

these racialized gender schemas, leading them to believe that a change must start there, with the

Department of Education (DOE). They believe that there needs to be supplemental programs that

allow space for community, understanding, and intimacy through connection/relationship(s).

Biculturality

As stated in the Literature Review: Gender Schema Theory vs. The SBW Gender Schema

Theory section of this study, Intersectionality is "greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any

analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular

manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140). This statement by

Crenshaw on intersectionality shows how having multiple identities is greater than just racism

and sexism–to adequately address and centralize Black women's experiences we must include

their intersectionality and all aspects of it. Black people and non-Black people perceive Black

women through their various identities without perceiving their identities as one entity.

Intersectionality includes the double-consciousness (biculture) that was introduced by DuBois.

Double-consciousness has been defined as "simultaneous awareness of oneself as being a

member and an alien of two or more cultures" (LaFromboise, 1993, p. 395). This can create the complexity of feeling divided loyalty to either consciousness, or in this case, culture. This notion of being bicultural is something that was expressed by all interviewees as having experienced.

It is important to note how biculturality affects the lives of Black women because due to being both Black and woman, Black women will always have a double-consciousness comprised of both their race and their gender. In addition to those lenses of perception, there may be other identities involved, as shown through this study's findings about ethnic culture of origin, and specific NYC urban culture. Some other identities that could impact the intersectionality or double-consciousness of Black women could be ethnic identity, city/neighborhood of origin, sexual orientation, and but not limited to, gender identity. Perceptual preconceptions distort one's lens of perception (Radcliffe, 2015), meaning that racialized gender schema socialization impacts how the perceiver views Black women, regardless if they are conscious of how they do so. Analyzing Black women through their biculturality is important because Black women experience bicultural dynamics daily. Many times these dynamics are difficult to articulate and they may remain silent about them unless they are with others who share similar intricacies of identity. Black women need a safe space to discuss their biculturality with people that understand and are willing to learn.

Heteronormative Gaze of Desirability

For Black women, desirability and what they perceive to be "most" desired is better aligned with "white feminine" features–skin color, thin/slender body type, long straight hair (Hunter, 2005; Strings, 2019). This influences how people desire Black women in particular, and relate their desirability to their proximity to whiteness. This means that Black women who have

phenotypically more Afrocentric features are, "by default" less feminine and less attractive, this includes phenotypic features such as nose shape and hair texture (Rosario et al., 2021). Due to colorism in the United States being inextricably linked to skin color, from a young age, darker-skinned Black girls begin to believe that they are not as pretty as their "light-skinned" peers. Messages such as good vs. bad skin and bullying impact Black girls psychologically, where they begin to believe they are not pretty, or not pretty "enough" to be desired by others. These impacts can have lasting effects past the ages of being a young girl. The participants were between the ages of 18-22, and still have unresolved feelings regarding experiences when they were younger, where they felt they were not pretty due to their physical appearance and/or features.

This theme is important to note because the heteronormative gaze of desirability is based on one's proximity to whiteness and it serves the white dominant culture by creating an additional hierarchy not only based on race, but also based on skin tone. This infiltrates the psyche of Black peoples, leading Black men to associate darker skin with being more masculine and lighter skin with being more feminine, and leading Black women to associate the same, in addition to associating lighter skin with being pretty. With these preconceived perceptions of skin tone, people perceive Black women to have transgressed the racialized gender schema simply based on their skin tone and other Afrocentric phenotypic features. This has lasting emotional effects on the self-esteem of Black women, and could lead them to isolate themselves from relationships before the relationships even begin. The majority of participants expressed that, regardless of being light/dark skinned[3], at some point, they had wished something different about their [specifically] afrocentric features.

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[3] It is important to note that the participants being light-skinned or dark-skinned is not based on my perception of them. This is self-identified by the participants themselves.

Strong Black Woman Schema

The Strong Black Woman (SBW) schema, as mentioned in *Literature Review: Gender Schema Theory vs. The SBW Gender Schema Theory*, is a compilation of preconceived stereotypes of Black women stemming from colonization and slavery. This includes the stereotypes of the mammy, superwoman, and opposes the stereotypes of the Sapphire and the Jezebel (Liao et al., 2019). The Sapphire stereotype states that Black women are loud, rude and angry. The Jezebel stereotype is seen as a Black woman that is hypersexualized (West, 1995). The SBW schema and its pressures helps us understand why Black women transgress the racialized gender schemas. SBW schema requires that the Black woman regulate her emotions, be the caretaker of their families, and be economically independent (Liao et al., 2019). The schema requires Black women to regulate their emotions in a way in which they become closed off and do not share their emotions at all. This leads to strain in their relationships because there is no clear communication, others may feel unneeded, the Black woman may withdraw from said relationships, and it may lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, and loneliness amongst Black women (Jordan, 2008; Liao et al., 2019). Black mothers have been socializing their Black daughters to be strong since slavery, in order to withstand oppression based on race and gender. At this time, SBW schema became a strategy of situated survival for the collective Black woman. Nikki Jones defines situated survival strategies as "patterned forms of interpersonal interaction, and routine or ritualized activities oriented around a concern for securing...personal well-being" (Jones, 2010, p. 52-53). Black women needed, and perceive that they still need to be strong to secure their personal well-being. Situated survival strategies are specific to

geographical locations and the socialization of those who live and are shaped by the cultures of those locations.

Black women are always applauded for being strong in situations where others would not be. One example shared by interviewee Niobe was that of the single Black mother. She stated that

> *"I will say you know I felt they put them on a very very very high pedestal, in terms of being a single, Black mom…And it kind of just like, glorified like, being a strong Black single mother…I feel like they put them in a low bar. I feel like they always put Black women at the bottom of the pyramid. But they [single Black mothers] kind of glorified the Black community." - Niobe*

Although Niobe feels that Black women generally aren't cared for within the Black community, they still glorify the concept of being a SBW by glorifying the matriarch, the single Black mothers by saying that "*even though it's hard, but she did it. She don't need no man (Niobe).*" This shows why it is important to know why and how SBW schema affects the lives of Black women. Psychologically, SBW schema can lead to mental health issues (i.e. depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation (Liao et al., 2019)) and poor use of coping mechanisms to combat the internal feelings that come from the effects of SBW schema. Socially, SBW schema generally leads Black women to withdraw from relationships and community, but we see the opposite with Black women from NYC, as shown by the participants. Although they shared that SBW schema has a negative impact on on how people perceive them, the experiences of the participants lead to the conclusion that despite NYC requiring them to be "New York Strong" due to being from the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Harlem, Black women from these areas are socialized to resist the negative reactions when others perceive them to have transgressed racial gender schema.

Although NYC demands that these women exert SBW schema in everything they do, their NYC (Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem) situated survival strategies allows them autonomy. They are modeling to the world their New-York specific survival strategy allows them to choose skills from the controlling pressures of being a SBW, and apply those skills how they best see fit.

Conclusion and Implications

Implications of Survivance: Holding Their Own

When the participants were asked question 17a, " What would you say [as advice] to young girls who have just had an experience of being perceived as "too masculine" or "not feminine enough" or some other message about not being in line with gender expectations?" The participants shared many of the same sentiments. In an effort to represent their heartfelt comments without being repetitive, I have compiled the content into a one statement that represents five of the participants' responses. To center the participants' perspectives, I will list their names prior to sharing compilation. In this way, my intention is to acknowledge them as I conclude the research.

Legacy of Advice:

Price, Samantha, Kayla, Niobe, Iman:

"Be confident in doing you…unapologetically be yourself… It's what makes you unique. You don't want to be like everyone else, just be you. don't let society's standards dictate the person that you want to be and who you are. They have problems of their own and they just projecting. They see a light they can't attain themselves, cuz they feel threatened by the power that we have and because they want to continue to have this hegemony over us. Those people don't need to be in your life if they don't make you feel good, or they don't allow you to express yourself the way you want to."

From their lived experiences and being self aware of the psychological and social effects of those experiences, the six participants share that to withstand the heteronormative gaze of desirability, to maximize the benifits of SBW, as a Black woman, you must do you. You must not minimize yourself for the comfortability of others, for the social constructs created by the dominant white

culture, nor must you tolerate disrespectful messages, people, regardless of their relation to you. We have relationships to grow through them, and sometimes we grow out of them. Be unapologetically you, unapologetically Black, unapologetically woman, and an unapologetically Black woman.

Implications for Further Work:

For the purposes of future study, there would be some changes that I would like to make that I was unable to do during this research process. For one, I would make some changes to the interview protocol and my particular research methods. My focus was on Black women from NYC, more specifically the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem (neighborhood in Manhattan). To understand broader implications and how these concepts impact different Black women similarly and/or differently. I could expand the geographic region of my study to Black women from the other boroughs of NYC of Manhattan (not including the Harlem neighborhood), Queens, and Staten Island. Knowing that these Black women may be socialized differently than the Black women from the regions in this study. Another lense that could add more data and understanding could be to expand the geographic region of this study to other cities beside NYC. These could be cities where the population is predominantly Black or is known to have a high Black population, such as Chicago, IL, Atlanta, GA, or Baltimore, MD. It would also be interesting to see the differences of experiences or shared experiences of Black women from cities/suburbs that do not have a high population of Black people; this could include but is not limited to: Columbus, OH, and states where the Black population is less than or around five percent like Wyoming (2%), Montana (1%), and North Dakota (4%) (Black Population by State 2022). Something else that would be of interest to consider future study would be the different

racialized socialization and gender schemas of Black women in the Southern states of the United

States, where it is known that there is a stark difference in the way that women present

themselves, compared to women from Northern states (Nichols, 1978; Boyd, 2000).

Changing the research methods of how we attained these interviewees can leave a distinct

difference in the results/data. Due to the kitchen table talks (Kohl and McCutCheon, 2014) that

resulted in the data collection to be so vast and enriching, not having multiple

connections–whether personal or on the basis of culture(s)–can impact the data collection

process differently.

In the literal interview protocol, for the future, I would include more questions about

ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity in particular. Including specific questions about

one's ethnicity can lead to more understanding of their culture regardless of the ethnicity of the

researcher. The sexual orientation of a Black woman, and how they present themselves with that,

may impact the way that people perceive them and express those perceptions. In this study,

Black women that identified as transgender were not included–not due to purposely excluding

them, but due to lack of resources/personal connection to Black women that identified as such.

Trans-Black women experience womanhood differently, and the way that people perceive them

may be different than the way that people perceive cisgender Black women. For future purposes,

it would be helpful to include Trans-Black women in the study to understand the broader and

whole implications of Black women's experiences of others' reactions to their gender schema

transgressions.

Finally, I will end by returning to the story I began with from my own social location.

This story became the symbolic interaction that gave rise to my research question—What are the

psycho-social effects on Black Women of intra-group messages that they have transgressed

heteronormative gender schemas for Black women? Relating to my research question is the resonant interaction in which I was on the receiving end of a message about gender transgression: Why You Dapping Me Up? After conducting this research, I conclude from this exploratory study that much research needs to be done that furthers our understanding of ingroup relations and gender schemas. I now see that my research participants and perhaps, I myself, were being guided to:

Stay within the norms of our ethnic cultures of origin, appeal to the gaze of potential heteronormative sexual partners, and be strong, but no so strong that we can engage in behaviors reserved for men. While such behaviors meant to keep us in our place may have initial adverse effects on our sense of self and identity–it is my hope that research done that centers Black women's voices and experiences will validate us in our journey of self growth, Ultimately–we can support each other and find liberation to choose the behaviors that authentically express our identities. Ultimately I hope that research of this kind, leads us to have answers when we receive messages that seek to control. Perhaps the one answer lies within this research: Why you dapping me up? Answer: Because I have grown and developed centered responses, validated by other women with shared experiences to know and claim who we are. Why you [all] dapping me up? Because we validated each other's behaviors through kitchen table discourse. Because we applied RCT through the process of talking with and supporting each other. Why you dapping me up? Because we have studied the issues and engaged in recovery from the psychosocial disadvantages incurred. Why you dapping me up? Because we can.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

1. This research is being conducted by Chelsey Sarante, Black Studies and Communication double major, a senior who is a student researcher at Denison University, through the Black Studies Program. This research is being advised by Dr. Toni King, a Black Studies Professor. The Black Studies Program address is: The Center for Black Studies, 209 Knapp Hall, Denison University, 100 W. College St., Granville, Ohio.

2. The purpose of this study is to understand Black women's experiences of others who view them as acting outside of the appropriate norms for their gender. This research explores how being seen as not meeting gender expectations affects you, your relationships with others –particularly other Black people–across genders (e.g., male, female, transgender, etc.). There is not much research on Black women's experiences of being messaged by society to behave in ways that fulfill certain gender expectations beyond studies of the stereotypes previously created by society. This study builds on the modest research that does exist by specifically focusing on Black women from specific neighborhoods in New York. I am interested in how a common region of socialization may influence what you have been taught about gender roles. I hope that the data collected will help further understanding of how you and other Black women are affected when you feel others perceive you to transgress (or behave outside of expected norms), and how you feel when you receive messages urging you to conform to societal norms.

3. In order to help complete this research, you and other the participants will be asked to:
    a. Participate in a 60 to 75 minute interview.
        i. Questions will be focused around your perception of gender socialization and expectations as well as how others have expressed their gender perceptions and expectations of you. The questions will also explore how those expectations have made you feel.

4. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to choose to not participate. You're also free to withdraw your participation at any time without consequences. In addition, you're also free to indicate that you do not want to answer a particular question that I ask–feel free to pass and I'll go on to the next question. There are no consequences if you choose to not participate in this study.

5. By participating in this study, you may gain self-insight as well as deeper understanding of social relations. When you understand how others perceive you, you may be able to navigate social relationships more effectively and you might even find it easier to accept and express yourself regardless of others' expectations. In addition, your participation contributes to knowledge about this topic that may be useful for women and for those who work to support women in their lives and development.

6. Before fully deciding to participate in this study, it is important that you understand the potential risks that may come with participating in this research. This research involves discussing personal experiences, your perception of self and how others perceive and relate to you. Sharing these kinds of experiences may lead to some strong feelings, emotional discomfort or even distress. While the questions are intended to pose no more stress than you might experience in daily life–it is possible that the questions could surface greater discomfort, unresolved feelings or troubling memories. If at any point following this interview, you feel that you may need additional emotional support from a certified specialist, here are some therapists and/or psychologists located in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Harlem neighborhoods.

    A) Magdala Nelson, Clinical Social Work/Therapist, LCSW
        Bronx, NY 10452
        (917) 451-7738

    B) Magdala Nelson, Clinical Social Work/Therapist, LCSW (she has two offices)
        Brooklyn, NY 11236
        (917) 451-7738

    C) Tracy Ellis, MHC-LP, EdM, MA
        1441 Broadway, 5th Floor, New York, NY 10018
        (929) 552-2948

7. As a participant in this research, the data and information you share will be kept confidential. Our interview will be voice-recorded and transcribed. The data collected will be stored on a password-protected personal computer. When working on this research, I will take measures to be in control of my computer at all times to ensure that the data remains secure. Only myself as the researcher and my research supervisor, Dr. Toni King, will have access to this information.

Your name will not be associated or attached to any part of this study. When I describe interviewees, I will not use any personal information that identifies who they are to anyone who might see this research. I will not be using the real names of the participants and I will select or give you the option of selecting a pseudonym that I can use instead of your name when I refer to you or quote anything you have shared. If there is a need for me to change details (e.g. your nickname, names of places you've gone to school or worked) or remove information you have shared so that you cannot be identified by quotes or things you have said, I will do that.

After your participation in this study, I will talk you through a debriefing process that re-explains again the purpose of the study. At that time, I will give you a chance to ask questions and get information to send you the findings, once the project is completed.

8. If you have any questions about the research, please contact:

Researcher: Research Supervisor:
Chelsey Sarante   Dr. Toni King
sarant_c1@denison.edu   Associate Professor
Denison University/Black Studies   Director, The Center for Black Studies
                                                      Denison University
                                                      kingt@denison.edu

9. By signing, I indicate that the following are true:

A) I am 18 years of age or older.

B) I understand what this research is about as described earlier by Chelsey Sarante, earlier in this Informed Consent Process.

C). I willingly agree to participate.

Name:_____   Date:_____

Signature:_____

[Please sign a second copy of this form so that you have one for your records. Thank you.]

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Black Women and Transgression of Gender Norms

<u>Interview Questions</u>

Distress Protocol Language (DPL) can be used at any time. A reminder is specifically noted

beginning at Question #7.

1. Please describe your identity in terms of race, socio-economic class and gender as well as

   other aspects of your identity you view as important in your life (i.e., what city do you

   call home, your race/ethnicity, sexuality, religion, etc.)

   a. Relating to socioeconomic status, how was life growing up financially?

   b. How do you define yourself sexually?

   c. What are you most proud of as it relates to your identity?

2. What are some of the qualities you like about yourself (probe one or more: what are you

   most proud of about your identity? What are your strengths? What are some qualities you

   like about yourself as a person?).

**

Distress Protocol Language (DPL)

"I wonder whether the memories or stories that are coming to mind are difficult to share. If that's the case, I'd like to remind you that all the questions for this interview are voluntary, and I'm happy to move on to another question if you'd like. And let me just add that this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

"I'd like to just remind you as you're thinking about the question--that all of the questions are voluntary and I'm happy to move on to the next question, if you're more comfortable with that. And also, this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

3. What are some of the qualities you like about yourself as a woman or you may answer this in terms of what qualities you like about yourself as a Black woman? (e.g., what do you like about yourself? What are your strengths as a Black woman? What are you most proud of?)

4. What did you most like or enjoy growing up as a Black girl in [insert name of neighborhood]?

5. How would you say that the area you grew up influences the way that you express yourself as a woman?

    a. As a Black woman?

    b. If the area you grew up influences the way you express yourself as a woman or as a Black woman–do you see this as distinct or unique compared to women who are not from [insert name of neighborhood]? Explain?

6. Who was most key in shaping your life and socializing you? Who was most key to your socialization as a girl?

**

Distress Protocol Language (DPL)

"I wonder whether the memories or stories that are coming to mind are difficult to share. If that's the case, I'd like to remind you that all the questions for this interview are voluntary, and I'm happy to move on to another question if you'd like. And let me just add that this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

"I'd like to just remind you as you're thinking about the question--that all of the questions are voluntary and I'm happy to move on to the next question, if you're more comfortable with that. And also, this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

7. When you think of those who socialized you, who had the strongest influence on how you express yourself as a woman? [Potentially use DPL here].

   a. Can you tell me about a time when you received a message or lesson about how girls were supposed to behave? Who gave you that message and how?

   b. Can you tell me about a time when you received a message or lesson about how girls during adolescence (clarify as needed with at or during puberty) were supposed to behave? Who gave you that message and how?

8. When you think of the messages you received over time about the appropriate gender behavior for a girl–especially from adolescence on through to womanhood–what are some of the key "messages" or "take-a-ways" you received? Can you give me an example of two or three of those messages? [Potentially use DPL here.]

9. What is one of the major messages about how Black women should express themselves as a woman that the people who raised you would always want you to keep in mind and live up to? Does that message fit with or is differ from how your neighborhood "taught" or influenced you to express yourself? [Potentially use DPL here.]

**
Distress Protocol Language (DPL)
"I wonder whether the memories or stories that are coming to mind are difficult to share. If that's the case, I'd like to remind you that all the questions for this interview are voluntary, and I'm happy to move on to another question if you'd like. And let me just add that this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

"I'd like to just remind you as you're thinking about the question--that all of the questions are voluntary and I'm happy to move on to the next question, if you're more comfortable with that. And also, this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

10. Have there been situations in which you were comfortable with your self-expression as a woman, but someone else felt you were out of line (in terms of appropriate gender behavior for a Black woman)? Can you tell me about one of those situations? Who felt you were out of line? Did you agree with them or did you have a different idea? [Potentially use DPL here.]

11. What behavioral expectations do you think other Black people (men or women) have of you? [Potentially use DPL here.]

    a. How does this make you feel?

    b. Do you think part of that is a result of where you're from + where you grew up?

    c. Do you feel that your race plays a role in how Black people perceive you?

        i. [Potentially use DPL here.]

12. Have you ever gotten a negative reaction from a Black person, who thought something you did was more "masculine," than it should have been or not "feminine" enough? Would you tell me about that? (follow-up with the questions below as needed). [Potentially use DPL here.]

    a. Describe how the person indicated this judgment to you? (e.g., verbally? Non-verbally? etc.).

**

Distress Protocol Language (DPL)

"I wonder whether the memories or stories that are coming to mind are difficult to share. If that's the case, I'd like to remind you that all the questions for this interview are voluntary, and I'm happy to move on to another question if you'd like. And let me just add that this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

"I'd like to just remind you as you're thinking about the question--that all of the questions are voluntary and I'm happy to move on to the next question, if you're more comfortable with that. And also, this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

b. How did this make you feel?

c. What was your response to the person (from Q13) sharing his/her/their perception of you?

d. How did you resolve your feelings? Did your response lead to your feeling satisfied or resolved?

e. Are there any feelings you would consider positive that resulted from this interaction?

    i. [Potentially use DPL here.]

13. If the person was a woman who prompted the negative reaction in your previous story, do you have another example from a male? OR If the person was a male in your previous example, do you have another example with a woman? [Potentially use DPL here.]

a. Describe how the person indicated this judgment to you? (e.g., verbally? Non-verbally? etc.).

b. How did this make you feel?

c. What was your response to the person (from Q13) sharing his/her/their perception of you?

<div align="center">**</div>
<div align="center">Distress Protocol Language (DPL)</div>

"I wonder whether the memories or stories that are coming to mind are difficult to share. If that's the case, I'd like to remind you that all the questions for this interview are voluntary, and I'm happy to move on to another question if you'd like. And let me just add that this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

"I'd like to just remind you as you're thinking about the question--that all of the questions are voluntary and I'm happy to move on to the next question, if you're more comfortable with that. And also, this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

    d.   How did you resolve your feelings? Did your response lead to your feeling

        satisfied or resolved?

    e.   Are there any feelings you would consider positive that resulted from this

        interaction?

        i.   [Potentially use DPL here.]

14. Did you or have you ever changed your behavior based on the kinds of reactions you

    have received from others that indicated you were not behaving in line with gender

    expectations (e.g., "too masculine" or "not feminine enough")? [Potentially use DPL

    here.]

    a.   How does changing your behavior make you feel?

    b.   How does not changing your behavior make you feel?

        i.   [Potentially use DPL here.]

15. Does [insert name of neighborhood] teach you anything that empowers you to claim

    your own gender behavior (i.e., claim the right to express yourself as a woman the way

    you want to)? Can you give an example or explain further? [Potentially use DPL here.]

16. Overall, what do you think are the effects on Black women's behavior when they get

    reactions from others that they are not in line with gender expectations? [Potentially use

    DPL here.]

**

Distress Protocol Language (DPL)

"I wonder whether the memories or stories that are coming to mind are difficult to share. If that's
the case, I'd like to remind you that all the questions for this interview are voluntary, and I'm
happy to move on to another question if you'd like. And let me just add that this entire interview
is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

"I'd like to just remind you as you're thinking about the question--that all of the questions are
voluntary and I'm happy to move on to the next question, if you're more comfortable with that.

And also, this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

17. Do you have any thoughts about how you would like to see society change to accept each woman's expression of gender roles, behaviors, and the like? [Potentially use DPL here.]

    a. What would you say (e.g. advice, or support or validation, etc.) to young girls who have just had an experience of being perceived as "too masculine" or "not feminine enough" or some other message about not being in line with gender expectations?

        i. [Potentially use DPL here.]

18. Is there anything I have not asked you about this subject that you would like to share? Have you shared anything in response to a previous question that you'd like to add to before we wrap-up?

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me about this subject. I appreciate your time and all your responses to my questions. To bring this interview to full closure, I'd like to take a few minutes to debrief this interview with you.

**
Distress Protocol Language (DPL)

"I wonder whether the memories or stories that are coming to mind are difficult to share. If that's the case, I'd like to remind you that all the questions for this interview are voluntary, and I'm happy to move on to another question if you'd like. And let me just add that this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

"I'd like to just remind you as you're thinking about the question--that all of the questions are voluntary and I'm happy to move on to the next question, if you're more comfortable with that. And also, this entire interview is voluntary. Would you like to go on to another question or shall we stop here?"

Appendix C: Debriefing Process

We have now completed the interviews for my research study about Black women's experiences of gender roles and your feelings about others perceptions and expectations. Thank you so much for participating in my study and contributing to knowledge on this research topic. As shared at the beginning of the interview, the purpose of this study is to understand Black women's experiences of negative reactions when others view them as acting outside of the appropriate norms for their gender. This study builds on the existing research by specifically focusing on Black women from specific neighborhoods in New York where you have been socialized in a particular part of the country. As shared during the consent process, this research explores such things as how being seen as not meeting gender expectations affects you, your relationships with others –particularly other Black people–across genders (e.g., male, female, transgender, etc.). I hope that participating in this study leads to self-insight as well as deeper understanding of social relations.

In fact, if this interview has made you even more curious about this topic, here are a few things you may want to read that will give you even more insight: ***Email the sheet with the readings and the list of counselors now.***

This research involved discussing personal experiences, your perception of self and how others perceive and relate to you. Sharing these kinds of experiences may lead to some strong feelings, emotional discomfort or even distress. While the questions were intended to pose no more stress than you might experience in daily life–it is possible that the questions could surface greater discomfort, unresolved feelings or troubling memories. Your copy of the informed consent document lists counseling professionals that you can call upon to talk to them following the interview.

Before we wrap-up for today, I would like to ask you whether there is a name you'd like for me to use when I refer to you in my research paper. If you'd like to select a pseudonym, think about that for a bit and I'm happy to make a note of it now: _____. If there's no name you'd like to suggest, I will choose a pseudonym to refer to you in my research.

Finally, I want to thank you again for taking the time to participate in this research study. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your thoughtful responses to the questions. I appreciate your contribution to this research topic and your help with my senior research study.

If you have any questions now or in the future, please feel free to contact myself, Chelsey Sarante, or my research supervisor, Dr. Toni King.

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                                                            740-587-6594 (The Center for Black Studies)