

Black Male College Achievers and Resistant Responses to Racist Stereotypes at Predominantly White Colleges and Universities

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In this article, Shaun R. Harper investigates how Black undergraduate men respond to and resist the internalization of racist stereotypes at predominantly White colleges and universities. Prior studies consistently show that racial stereotypes are commonplace on many campuses, that their effects are usually psychologically and academically hazardous, and that Black undergraduate men are often among the most stereotyped populations in higher education and society. The threat of confirming stereotypes has been shown to undermine academic performance and persistence for Blacks and other minoritized students. To learn more about those who succeed in postsecondary contexts where they are routinely stereotyped, Harper conducted interviews with Black male achievers at thirty predominantly White colleges and universities. His findings show that these undergraduate men were frequently confronted with stereotypes but succeeded in resisting them through their campus leadership roles, their engagement in student organizations, and their use of a three-step strategic redirection process. Communication and confrontation skills acquired through out-of-class engagement enabled participants to effectively resist the harmful threat of racial stereotypes encountered in classrooms.

Most research on Black undergraduates has been conducted at predominantly White colleges and universities. Sedlacek (1987) published a comprehensive synthesis of two decades of research on Black students attending these institutions. Scholars have since continued to offer much-needed empirical insights into the access, equity, and campus climate challenges these and other minoritized students face on campuses where they are racially underrepresented.¹ In fact, Fries-Britt (1998) contends that “those who seek to under-

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stand the experiences of Black students on White campuses in the United States [had] far more information available to them at the close of the twentieth century than could have ever been imagined at the beginning” (p. 556). Problematic, however, is the near-exclusive emphasis this literature places on underachievement and barriers to Black student achievement, persistence, and attainment.

Numerous researchers have called attention to the underrepresentation, social isolation, cultural incongruence, academic hurdles, and racism that Black students endure on predominantly White campuses (Allen, 1992; D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Fries-Britt, 1998, 2004; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001, 2002; Gossett, Cuyjet, & Cockriel, 1996; Griffin, 2006; Harper, 2013; Love, 1993; Patton, 2006; Sedlacek, 1987; Strayhorn, 2009). While important implications for policy and practice have been generated from these studies, much remains to be known about how students manage to excel and persist despite these challenges. That is, most published evidence on Blacks at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) makes clear why so many of these students fail, but reveals far too little about what can be learned from those who craft productive responses to racism and other environmental forces that undermine success (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper, 2013).

On the one hand, the continued illumination of institutional practices and policies that yield inequitable outcomes and marginalize Black students is extremely important. For example, Harper (2006a) found that Black male undergraduates were least retained among both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups in higher education. Moreover, Harper and Harris (2012) found that across four cohorts of Black male undergraduates at public four-year colleges and universities, 33 percent earned bachelor’s degrees within six years at the institutions where they started, compared to 48 percent of students overall. Reportedly, Black men are among the most stereotyped in society in general (Celious & Oyserman, 2001; Parham & McDavis, 1987; White & Cones, 1999) and on predominantly White college and university campuses in particular (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Cokley, 2003; Cuyjet, 2006; Davis, 1999; Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2009; Harper et al., 2011; Harper & Nichols, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). Few would argue against the significance of studying and documenting the institutional factors that lead to such high attrition rates among Black male collegians.

On the other hand, it seems just as necessary to investigate how the one-third who persisted through graduation managed to do so, especially given what the literature says about the racism, stereotypes, and low expectations that threaten their success and sense of belonging at PWIs. As such, this article focuses on the ways in which Black male achievers, defined here as academically high-performing and actively engaged student leaders, craft productive responses to racist stereotypes. Although Black students are often left to circumvent a host of challenges on predominately White campuses,

here I emphasize racial stereotypes, since the previously cited scholars have deemed them among the more critical issues that complicate the achievement of Black undergraduate men at PWIs.² Understanding how these students successfully navigate stereotype-laden interactions could be instructive to those who simultaneously endeavor to increase resilience and persistence among this population while also fostering less racially oppressive campus environments.

Literature Review

The often-adversarial relationship between Black undergraduates and PWIs has been well documented in higher education literature. In their comparative study of thirty-four Black students at a PWI and at a historically Black university, Fries-Britt and Turner (2002) found that students on the predominantly White campus encountered one major problem from which their peers at the other institution found immunity: constant confrontations with racial stereotypes. Participants at the PWI indicated that energies that could have been invested into academics were spent on wrestling with stereotypes. Feagin et al. (1996) describe the racialized experiences of Black students at a large, predominantly White research university, including racist confrontations with White students and insulting remarks from White instructors and staff. Apparently, these issues are not new for Blacks and other minoritized students, as Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991) synthesis of twenty years of research on college students concludes: "It is equally clear that the academic, social, and psychological worlds inhabited by most nonwhite students on predominantly white campuses are substantially different in almost every respect from those of their white peers" (p. 644).

Davis et al.'s (2004) study on the experiences of Black students at a PWI in the southeastern United States furnishes some additional examples of the stereotypes with which these students often contend. For instance, one participant shared a story about how a professor erroneously assumed she was academically ineligible to compete for a scholarship in the department, even though she actually had a 4.0 grade point average (GPA). Others told of how their White peers rendered them invisible in study groups because they assumed Blacks had nothing to contribute, how several White professors perceived them to be inferior, and how they had to prove their intellectual aptitude more often than did their White classmates. Furthermore, students in the study described the tokenism they endured, as well as the frequency with which they were forced to dispel stereotypes about Black culture. Being asked if all Blacks enjoy fried chicken was one example a participant offered.

Similar to those in Davis et al.'s (2004) study, high-achieving Black collegians in Fries-Britt and Turner's (2001) study identified and reflected on the following problems they faced on their predominantly White campus: nega-

tive comments and stereotypes from White instructors and peers about the Black community, being forced to validate their intellectual competence in the classroom, and inappropriate comments about their personal appearance. Participants noted that an assumption was often made that Black students were admitted to the institution because of affirmative action, not academic talent, which is a key finding reported in other published research (e.g., Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007; Harper & Griffin, 2011; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Given this, every participant in Fries-Britt and Turner's study felt tremendous pressure to prove her or his intellectual competence and belongingness. Similarly, 88 percent of Black achievers in Strayhorn's (2009) quantitative study also reported feeling this burden of proof. Lewis, Chesler, and Forman (2000) describe the paradox of being expected to "blend in" at PWIs, even though Black students' experiences are often differently colored by racial stereotypes concerning their aptitude and expected behaviors.

Few studies cited thus far focus specifically on male collegians, as data in most of the literature on Black students' racialized experiences at PWIs have not been disaggregated by sex (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2013; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Specifically regarding Black undergraduate men, common misconceptions are that they lack intellectual prowess, are always in need of remediation, and are more interested in athletic accomplishments than academic achievement (e.g., Brown, 1999; Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2009, 2013; Harper & Davis, 2012; Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003). Actively engaged student leaders (specifically, resident assistants) on the six PWIs in Harper et al.'s (2011) study said their White supervisors often questioned their competence to perform duties associated with their roles; as a consequence, they experienced more surveillance, and their work was more harshly scrutinized. Black male students in Smith, Allen & Danley's (2007) study reported experiencing racial "battle fatigue," or the exhaustion from constantly fighting racism and racist institutional norms, due to the racist stereotypes they had to routinely dispel (e.g., that they were not criminals, that not every Black man on campus was an athlete). This glimpse into the experiences and stereotypes many Black male students face may help explain, at least in part, their academic performance challenges and high attrition rates at PWIs.

The literature on Black students' racialized experiences has focused mostly on documenting challenges associated with the stereotypes they face; considerably less attention has been devoted to understanding how they respond to and resist racist encounters on campus. Participants in Griffin's (2006) study attempted to dispel stereotypes by performing exceptionally well in the classroom. Specifically, they were aware of assumptions faculty and peers had about their academic attitude and therefore felt pressure to work harder to prove they were smart. One participant noted, "They don't think that Black people are intelligent at all . . . so it's important for me to prove that, you know, I can do everything that you can do" (p. 393). This is consistent with Fries-Britt's

(1998) and Fries-Britt and Griffin's (2007) findings concerning the "proving process" that many Black achievers endure at PWIs.

Moore et al. (2003) describe the "prove-them-wrong syndrome," a condition that affected the Black male engineering students they studied. Participants in their study assumed the burden of working hard to prove to White peers and professors in their department that they were good at math and science, were academically capable, and deserved to be at the institution. Despite their willingness to engage in stereotype-disproving efforts, minoritized students may not succeed at getting Whites to see them differently, and they may exhaust themselves trying to do so (Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002). Beyond disproving efforts, little else about how Black students respond to the threat of racist stereotypes has been documented.

Theoretical Framework

I ground this study in the theoretical concept of *Stereotype Threat*. According to Steele (1997), an achievement "threat" is posed when a member of a socially stigmatized group encounters stereotypes advanced by those outside the group.

It is the social-psychological threat that arises when one is in a situation or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically, or with the prospect of conforming to the stereotype. (p. 614)

Consequently, negative performance outcomes accrue as students fear exemplifying or confirming negative misperceptions (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999; Steele, 1992, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Most studies of stereotype threat have been clinical and experimental, often conducted in laboratory settings.

Some students remain unconscious of racial stereotypes and their hazardous effects, while others become cognizant at an early age. Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) submit that negative stereotypes about Blacks are reinforced in the media, and students are likely to deal with these misperceptions at all levels and in all aspects of their lives prior to and after enrolling in college: "News reports consistently show Blacks as being the perpetrators of violent criminal activity such as gang- or drug-related crimes. These negative stereotypes in the larger society often carry over into the domain of the academic environment" (p. 422). McKown and Weinstein (2003) found that Latino and Black students become aware of and begin to internalize negative stereotypes regarding their academic capabilities as early as age six.

Students with strong academic identities—or those whom Steele (1997) would characterize as "highly domain identified"—are most susceptible to

the negative effects of stereotype threat. Regarding the brightest and most academically capable students, Taylor and Antony (2000) posit: "Their high degree of self-identification with this domain creates added internal pressure to be perceived in a positive light and to be successful. Thus, stereotype threat has the greatest effect on students who represent the academic vanguard of their group" (p. 187). In the context of postsecondary education, Black male achievers would be among this group.

It is important to note that fears associated with poor performance are not usually attributable to self-inflicted internal doubts in clinical settings but, instead, are ignited in racially stressful environments. This stress is reinforced in assessment situations where stereotypes are covertly or overtly advanced, which yields particularly negative outcomes for Black students (Sackett, Hardison, & Cullen, 2004; Taylor & Antony, 2000).

Affective and Psychoemotional Responses to Stereotypes

When confronted with the threat of confirming racist stereotypes, students respond in various ways. For instance, some researchers (e.g., Osborne, 2001; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995) have found that anxiety is one common response to stereotype threat. Lowering self-expectations for academic achievement is another way in which students react to stereotypes (Aronson, 2002; Stangor, Carr, & Kiang, 1998). Disidentification—a protective process through which self-worth and school achievement are gradually disconnected, either purposely or subconsciously—occurs as Black students contend with the effects of stereotype threat (Steele, 1992, 1997). According to Fries-Britt and Turner (2001), race-based stereotypes erode high-achieving Black students' confidence in their academic abilities; over time students become less confident of the academic talents with which they entered the predominantly White university. Minoritized students also often become uncomfortable when professors and peers, either knowingly or unconsciously, use negative stereotypes in the classroom (Davis et al., 2004; Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). These feelings can and often do lead to academic withdrawal and the self-suppression of contributions to class discussions. For example, Bean (1990) suggests:

If faculty members are prejudiced and assume, for example, that Black students are inferior to White students, Black students who are high-achievers will be especially frustrated. Thus, some Black students with high grades may not feel that their work is really accepted, and may withdraw from school. (p. 167)

In addition to their hazardous effects on achievement, racial stereotypes also affect how minoritized students feel about the colleges and universities they attend. Many participants in Feagin et al.'s (1996) study reported high degrees of dissatisfaction with their institution because of the stereotypes with which they were often forced to contend. Hurtado (1992), as well as Harper and Hurtado (2007), found that Black students were most critical of campus

racial climates at their institutions and reported the highest levels of tension and social dissatisfaction among students of color and White undergraduates. In a study of undergraduate students' attitudes toward diversity at a large PWI, Helm, Sedlacek, and Prieto (1998) noted that a significant number of Black students perceived their instructors to be racist and were disappointed with the overall educational experiences they had been afforded. Similarly, Lewis et al. (2000) found that stereotypes led students of color to disconnect socially from their White peers. And in their study, Cabrera, Nora, Terenzini, Pascarella, and Hagedorn (1999) found that stereotypes and perceptions of racism, both inside and outside the classroom, were negatively related to persistence. Put differently, one behavioral response to stereotypes is dropping out of or transferring from the institution at which the stereotypes were experienced. This trend is both alarming and potentially illuminating given the dismal college completion rates among Black male students.

Although much of the research on stereotype threat focuses on deficits, some evidence points to possible coping strategies that result in more positive outcomes. For example, a significant number of the Black respondents in Morgan and Mehta's (2004) study dismissed negative results in assessment situations and continued to identify with academic achievement. As such, the researchers noted that some students who experienced stereotype threat increased their efforts to do well academically, while others withdrew entirely. Furthermore, Thompson and Fretz (1991) identify communalism as a mediating factor among Black college students. Accordingly, those whose identities are closely tied to their ethnic group and who identify strongly with Black culture "may be more resourceful and assertive in coping with predominantly White environments . . . thereby uniting with community members in the face of adversity rather than withdrawing in isolation or engaging in self-blame" (p. 439). Fries-Britt and Turner (2001) note, however, that some Black students may liken participation in Black social networks to self-segregation and choose not to affiliate themselves with race-specific groups; thus, the communal coping strategy described by Thompson and Fretz may not appeal to all students.

While the nexus of environmental incompatibility, negative in-class and out-of-class experiences, academic and social disengagement, and attrition among Black students has been previously studied, little is known about other behavioral responses to stereotypes among Black undergraduates, particularly men who are highly domain identified and academically high performing, actively engaged in classrooms and campus activities, and most likely to persist through baccalaureate degree attainment, hence the focus of this study.

Methods

Insights from published research on stereotype threat, as well as other literature on Black students at PWIs, led me to explore the following research

questions: How do Black male college achievers experience racial stereotypes? What are these students' behavioral responses to stereotypes they encounter on predominantly White campuses? What mechanisms and mediating factors shape Black male college achievers' behavioral responses to racist stereotypes?

Data Source and Sampling

In this article I use data from the National Black Male College Achievement Study, the largest-ever qualitative research study of Black male undergraduates. My primary aims with this project were to understand how Black men successfully navigate their way to and through higher education. With the support of seven research grants, I designed this study as well as collected and analyzed all data; there were no collaborators in the research process. The size and scope of this study (for more detail, see Harper, 2012) yielded a data set out of which numerous research questions could be pursued, theories and concepts could be used to interpret various findings, and papers on assorted aspects of achievement could be written. For instance, data from the national study have been used to explain how Black male achievers access expensive, highly selective private colleges and universities (Harper & Griffin, 2011); overcome academically turbulent first-year college transition experiences (Harper & Newman, in press); succeed in culturally conservative, predominantly Black institutional contexts (Harper & Gasman, 2008); and teach their same-race peers to survive racially toxic, predominantly White campus environments (Harper, 2013).

Sampling

I used criterion sampling to identify potential participants. According to Patton (2002), criterion sampling is the strict inclusion of participants who satisfy some specific, predetermined set of qualifiers; it is especially useful for in-depth qualitative interviews, as the accuracy of participants' shared experiences is more easily ascertained, thus enhancing the quality of data collected. Decades of research on undergraduate students clearly indicate that those who are actively engaged in educationally purposeful activities on college and university campuses are more satisfied with their experiences, have a higher likelihood of navigating institutional obstacles with success, and come to enjoy a more robust set of educational outcomes than do their peers who approach the college experience more passively (Kuh, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Specifically regarding Black male collegians, Harper (2006b) asserts:

[Engagement] indisputably makes the difference in African American men's short-term gains and long-term outcomes. It is clear that African American males who are actively involved in campus activities and hold leadership positions in student organizations have better experiences and gain more from college than their uninvolved same-race male peers. (p. 90)

Based on this research, I sought Black male undergraduates who had earned cumulative GPAs above 3.0, established lengthy records of leadership and engagement in multiple student organizations, developed meaningful relationships with campus administrators and faculty outside the classroom, participated in enriching educational experiences (e.g., study abroad programs, internships, service learning, and summer research programs), and earned numerous merit-based scholarships and honors in recognition of their college achievements. Administrators such as presidents, provosts, and deans of students, as well as senior student leaders, helped identify 221 men who satisfied these criteria. All but two of these nominees agreed and ultimately participated in the larger study. In the end, I collected data from 219 students at 42 colleges and universities in 20 different states. Six institution types are represented in the study: private liberal arts colleges, public research universities, highly selective private research universities, and comprehensive state universities, as well as public and private historically Black colleges and universities. Given the focus on racial stereotypes experienced by Black men in contexts where they are minoritized and racially underrepresented, this article only includes data from the 143 participants enrolled at the 30 PWIs (see table 1). Conversations about racial stereotypes encountered on their college campuses did not occur in my interviews with 76 participants attending the 12 historically Black institutions.

Based on my review of the research, it is conceivable that much can be learned about how actively engaged high achievers simultaneously craft responses to stereotypes, position themselves as leaders in predominantly White institutional contexts, and persist toward baccalaureate degree completion. To date, no other published studies on stereotype threat have included a sample of academically high-achieving Black male students who are actively engaged on campus.

Data Collection

I visited all thirty campuses and conducted two- to three-hour, face-to-face individual interviews with each of the Black male achievers nominated for this study. When necessary, I conducted follow-up interviews via telephone and asked participants to clarify or elaborate on points they offered in the earlier interview. I used a semistructured interview technique that simultaneously permitted data collection and authentic participant reflection (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Although I used standard questions and protocols in the interviews, discussions often became conversational, allowing participants to reflect on experiences they deemed most significant. One interview question was especially relevant to the three key research questions: “Tell me about the stereotypes you have encountered since you arrived at this college/university.” Only 2 of the 143 participants could not recall at least one instance in which they were confronted with racial stereotypes. After allow-

TABLE 1 *Predominantly White institutions in the National Black Male College Achievement Study*

<i>Institution type</i>	<i>College/University</i>
Public research universities	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Indiana University–Bloomington University of Michigan–Ann Arbor Michigan State University The Ohio State University Purdue University
Highly selective private research universities	Brown University Columbia University Harvard University University of Pennsylvania Princeton University Stanford University
Private liberal arts colleges	Amherst College Claremont McKenna College DePauw University Haverford College Lafayette College Occidental College Pomona College Saint John’s University (MN) Swarthmore College Vassar College Wabash College Williams College
Comprehensive state universities	Brooklyn College, City University of New York California State Polytechnic University, Pomona California State University, Long Beach Lock Haven University Towson University Valdosta State University

Note: There were twelve historically Black colleges and universities in the national study that were not included in the analysis for this article.

ing them to reflect on their encounters with stereotypes, I then asked participants to describe ways in which they crafted productive responses to those stereotypes. I also gained insights into the participants’ experiences with racist remarks and misconceptions from their reflections during other points in the interviews.

Data Analysis

I digitally recorded each interview and had each professionally transcribed; the national study yielded more than 4,500 single-spaced pages of transcript data. I systematically employed techniques prescribed by Moustakas (1994) to analyze the data. I first read hard copies of each transcript, marking comments in the margins regarding my own suppositions and preliminary judgments about the data, a technique Moustakas and other qualitative methodologists call “bracketing.” After bracketing, I identified 166 recurring topics, trends, and patterns and reduced them to simple code words. I then uploaded transcripts to NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software program, for line-by-line coding. Specifically, I applied code words to sentences, concepts, and passages of text in each participant’s transcript. This process resulted in the production of 166 code reports that captured insights into various aspects of the participants’ shared experiences. Additionally, I produced eleven separate reports pertaining to racialized experiences in college (e.g., being presumed to be a student athlete and assumptions of having benefited from preferential treatment in the admissions process) and responses crafted to specific types of stereotypes encountered on campuses. These code reports included statements, illustrative examples, and stories from participants across the thirty PWIs.

Additionally, I wrote a trajectory analysis statement (Harper, 2007) for each participant. Statements included details about how the participant navigated his way to higher education, junctures along his journey when he experienced stereotypes, strategies that proved most effective in responding to racist situations, and so on. These analyses were comprehensive versions of what Moustakas (1994) calls “textural summaries” (*what* the participant experienced) and “structural summaries” (*how* he experienced the phenomenon), which are essential components of the phenomenological data analysis process. I used the eleven racism-/stereotype-related code reports, along with highlighted text from these 143 trajectory statements, to articulate the findings I present later in this article.

Trustworthiness and Methods of Verification

I employed several steps to ensure quality and trustworthiness in this study. First, I established credibility of the research process by conducting member checks and follow-up interviews and by employing what Lincoln and Guba (1986) term “referential adequacy,” storing and making accessible interview audio files, transcripts, analysis records, etc. Second, I created an informant team consisting of a subset of participants from each institution type. This team, which represents over 25 percent of the sample, routinely reads and provides feedback on my written interpretations of their collective experiences (including this article). Third, I solicited feedback from the twenty-three-member advisory board established for the National Black Male College Achievement Study; this group included college presidents, senior adminis-

trators, professors, and education policy scholars. These colleagues acted as a “peer debriefing team” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986); I engaged in substantive conversations with them throughout the research process, shared with them drafts of my work for feedback, and revised my work in response to their helpful suggestions and critiques.

Finally, Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest that being clear about the context in which data were collected and the transferability (not generalizability) of a qualitative study bolster quality. Findings from this study will likely transfer to other private and public research universities, as well as to elite liberal arts colleges that are predominantly White, though probably not to historically Black institutions, ethnically diverse community colleges, or other campuses where Black undergraduates comprise more sizable portions of the undergraduate student body.

Limitations

Despite my efforts to ensure trustworthiness, two methodological shortcomings are readily apparent. First is the use of GPA in the sample selection; only Black male undergraduates with 3.0 GPAs and above were selected to participate. Some researchers have pointed out that some students manage to navigate the complexities of institutional environments despite having below-average grades (e.g., Strange et al., 2002). Also, there were likely other Black men on the thirty campuses I studied whose resistant responses to stereotypes would have been useful and instructive. Unfortunately, these students did not satisfy all the criteria for participation, including the minimum GPA and active engagement in campus activities or leadership in student organizations. Second, given the limited number of administrators asked to nominate Black male achievers on each campus, selection bias likely prohibited certain students from being nominated. Although most administrators conferred with other colleagues before offering a final list of nominees, these nominators identified high-profile student leaders whom they knew well. There very well could have been other achievers on the campuses who were overlooked because they had not interacted or formed relationships with the nominating administrators. To address this, I routinely asked participants at the end of each interview to name other Black undergraduate men on their campuses who fit the profile for my study; rarely did their lists include peers whom nominators failed to identify.

Findings

Before disclosing Black male achievers’ resistant responses to stereotypes, it is important to note some of the stereotypes they were forced to contend with and their corresponding effects on these students’ experiences at PWIs. Participants indicated that stereotypes were most often conveyed through racial

microaggressions.³ Adapted from Sue et al.'s (2007) catalog of microaggressions that people of color in the United States experience, table 2 lists eight examples of racial stereotypes and microaggressions that Black undergraduate men had to routinely contend with on the thirty predominantly White campuses in the National Black Male College Achievement Study.

Immunity Not Granted: The Pervasiveness of Stereotypes

Despite their status as academic achievers and high-profile student leaders, participants vividly recalled numerous instances in which their White peers and professors stereotyped them. "You would think that being vice president of the student body would provide some sort of protection from ignorance, but it doesn't. White people say dumb racist shit to me and ask me inappropriate and ignorant questions about Blacks all the time," Austin,⁴ an Indiana University student noted. A student government executive cabinet member on another campus offered one specific example:

Last semester, two White males stopped me outside of my dorm and asked if they could buy some weed from me. You've gotta be kidding me! Do I look like a drug dealer? I wear suits a few times a week, I am trying to position myself to become [undergraduate student government] president, and I am law school bound. What in the world made them think I sell marijuana? I'm convinced it's because I'm Black, maybe because I was a young Black man in a suit. Of course, I must be a drug dealer if I am dressed this nicely on campus.

Reportedly, White students on many of the campuses in this study often assumed that the achievers and other Black men could dance, knew where and how to find drugs, spoke broken English or used slang, knew the lyrics to rap and hip-hop songs, always came from urban high schools and economically impoverished neighborhoods, and were athletically gifted. By the participants' own admission, some of these characteristics (minus the drugs) were true of some of them some of the time; but it was the certainty inherent in their White peers' comments and questions that they deemed offensive. With a tone of frustration, Jamar indicated, "They just say to me with such certainty, 'Oh, I know you can dance.'" Actually, Jamar admitted in the interview that he could dance well but still found offensive the unfounded assumptions regarding his ability to do so. Having not seen him dance, Jamar's White peers automatically concluded he could because of his race. Similarly, another participant commented, "I am Black but I cannot dance. Whites are shocked by this. They always ask me to dance for them and get 'jiggy with it,' as they would say. Too bad I can never perform the minstrel show they're hoping for." A junior at Harvard said he spent much of his freshman year trying to make sense of "how so many smart White people could make so many stupid assumptions about students of color."

Perhaps the most pervasive stereotype confronting participants, especially those attending the public research universities, was the presumption that

TABLE 2 *Examples of racial microaggressions, with participant interpretation of meanings*

<i>Microaggression reported by participants</i>	<i>Participant interpretation of microaggression</i>
"What sport do you play?"	Black men are on campus for sports, not school All Black men are athletically gifted The only way Black men access college is through sports
"You got weed?"	Black men are drug dealers and/or users Black men know how and where to find drugs
"You got that new Weezy?"	Black men are knowledgeable about hip-hop music, trends, and jargon
"Teach me how to Dougie."	Blacks are wonderful entertainers Black men are gifted dance instructors
"How'd you get in here?"	Blacks are only admitted through affirmative action target programs with lower admissions standards Black men do not deserve to be at highly selective institutions Black men are not competitive college applicants
"You wrote this?"	Black men who write well must have cheated or plagiarized Black men are intellectually incapable of producing quality academic work Black men are academically dishonest
"Hello, [other Black guy in the class]."	All Black men look alike Key differences between Black men are insignificant
"You from the hood?"	All Blacks are from low-income, high-crime neighborhoods

they were student-athletes. Thirty of the thirty-two achievers at the six Big Ten universities in this study (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio State, and Purdue) reported being mistaken for an athlete. A participant from Ohio State offered the following:

I am 5'5" and I only weigh 135 pounds. You would be surprised at how many Whites walk up to me and congratulate me on a "good game" the Monday after we win a football game. Besides being a Black dude, nothing else about me even remotely suggests I am a football player or any other kind of athlete.

It should be noted that men of varying height, weight, and physical build were represented in the sample. Another participant, Elijah, said, “It is a shame that they think the only Black men qualified to be at a top school like Michigan State are athletes. It is insulting.” Beyond the Big Ten universities, achievers elsewhere also described how they were constantly asked which sport they played. Some had grown accustomed to being congratulated repeatedly on Mondays if the football or basketball team beat its weekend opponent. Others reflected on what they perceived to be a culture of low expectations on their campuses for Black male nonathletes because many of their White peers and professors assumed most played sports and were only marginally interested in academics. “This is a small college. Everybody knows that I don’t play sports, but they keep suggesting I should. I came to Amherst College to be a scholar—why is that so impossible to fathom?”

“Being Black at Brown comes with the assumption that you only got into Brown because you’re Black,” one sophomore explained. This sentiment was shared in most of the interviews. While achievers across the predominantly White campuses reflected on skepticism regarding their intellectual aptitude and academic qualifications, students at the five Ivy League institutions and at Stanford University, the twelve elite liberal arts colleges, and the University of Michigan had to contend most often with stereotypical and racist remarks pertaining to affirmative action. Travis recalled a classroom situation in which a White student tapped him on the shoulder and said, “I guess affirmative action lets Black students into the honors program too, huh?”

Similarly, during a discussion in one of his psychology courses, two of Darrick’s White classmates admitted to thinking he had graduated from a poor, inner-city school in Detroit and therefore did not have the competitive academic credentials that warranted admission to the University of Michigan. While he was a Detroit native, Darrick had not graduated from an inferior high school, and he was the only Presidential Scholar in the class, a prestigious honor reserved for the most academically gifted students at Michigan. Each participant at Michigan shared stories of racist comments and negative stereotypes directed toward him, both inside and outside the classroom; they attributed some of this to the political climate created by the *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003) and *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003) affirmative action cases concerning University of Michigan’s law school. Joshua, a Stanford student who had been offered admission to every college and university to which he applied (approximately twenty), said he had been constantly mistaken for “some poor kid who had been given some sort of unfair advantage over qualified applicants.” In unpacking these experiences, participants attributed them to their race, not explicitly to their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Resistance Through Engagement and Leadership

“I am frustrated by the misperceptions White students have about African American males on Michigan State’s campus,” Danté shared. “I am involved

because I want to do something to dispel these stereotypes.” Stereotypes ignited activism and compelled participants to seek and assume campus leadership positions that would enable them to debunk myths about Blacks and other minoritized students. Participants used out-of-class engagement and student organizations as vehicles to promote positive images of Blacks. They endeavored to show their White peers, faculty, and campus administrators that there were smart Black male students who could represent themselves well and who were interested in learning. One participant who was presently serving as the senior class president at Princeton, noted that “serving in this role allows me to shift people’s frames about Black students and our ability to lead at Princeton.”

Organizational leadership afforded these students access to faculty and key administrators on campus (including presidents, provosts, and deans), which, in turn, enabled them to portray Blacks in a more positive light and to leverage their political capital in support of issues pertinent to students of color. Sean noted, “The chancellor knows there are articulate and very capable Black male leaders on campus.” Through their engagement with administrators and White student leaders on campus, many were able to advance positive perceptions of Black male students that diminished long-standing stereotypes of underpreparedness, disengagement, poor self-representation, and inferiority. This often occurred in the context of committee work, student organization activities, and other situations in which White peers and faculty worked closely with participants and other minoritized students. “The dean kept saying how impressed he was by me,” a Lock Haven junior recalled. He explained that the more time they spent working together on committees, the more respected he felt by his dean. “Before he got a chance to really see what I could do, I honestly felt like he looked at me like he looks at other minorities here, which isn’t good.”

Participants were also committed to advancing positive perceptions of Black students as a way to break down racial stereotypes. A University of Illinois student said, “My goal is to get twice as many African American male student leaders here as there are Black male athletes at the U of I. This kind of 2:1 ratio will help change people’s perceptions of African American males here.” Two other participants from Illinois, Jamar and Kevin, spoke at length about the 4.0 Club they cofounded. “We just registered the student organization so we could have study halls for African American students to study together and support each other academically because the African American students’ GPAs are considerably lower than the campus average.” Members of the 4.0 Club frequently gathered at the campus library, participated in occasional all-night study sessions, and provided recognition and incentives for members who actually achieved 4.0 GPAs at the end of each semester. According to Jamar and Kevin, this was just one way they could help address academic self-representation issues among Black students (men and women) on their campus. Kevin specifically noted that as more Black students earned higher GPAs, some of the stereotypes that faculty held about them would subside.

Participants on other campuses also described a variety of academic and nonacademic initiatives through which they sought to dispel stereotypes. Many universities in this study had student organizations for Black undergraduate men—Harvard Black Men’s Forum, Brothers Keeper at Indiana University, Black Men United at the University of Pennsylvania, Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) at Cal State Long Beach, and the Princeton Black Men’s Awareness Group, to name a few. Groups such as these were less common at the private liberal arts colleges in the study because there usually were too few Black men on those campuses. In addition to engaging and supporting fellow members, introducing each other to various institutional resources and leadership opportunities, and meeting to discuss books and issues that plague Black men in higher education and society, members of these groups also crafted collective responses to stereotypes and other campus climate issues. “We actually spend time talking about productive ways to address these stereotypes . . . I have learned strategies for confronting stereotypes from other brothers in the group that I would not have considered on my own,” Raymond contended. Black men’s groups on other campuses served similar purposes. “Were it not for SAAB, I probably wouldn’t have survived at this institution,” a Cal State Long Beach student insisted.

When asked what compelled them to confront stereotypes through activism, most participants acknowledged Black male student leaders who preceded them. Specifically, when they were first-year students, actively involved upperclassmen reached out and encouraged these young men to get involved, mostly in Black student organizations. These student leaders also modeled productive responses to stereotypes through activism and engagement. An older Black male achiever who he was in a class with and who was especially outspoken on racial issues, for example, inspired Matthew. And during his first semester, Christopher learned from his Black resident assistant, Terrence, what it took to be successful:

He told me that I would learn a lot if I got involved. He also gave me some examples of how he dealt with stereotypes in his classes. I was impressed by his confidence and I listened to his advice. It paid off. I handle myself the same way in my classes now and it works. I have Terrence to thank for that.

Because they had benefited from such good advice, the achievers felt a sense of responsibility to become good role models and to encourage younger Black men to get involved. “Some student leaders I look up to have graduated, and I felt that somebody needed to fill their shoes. Giving back was the least that I could do to pay homage to those brothas’ and keep their legacy alive.”

While most participants began their out-of-class involvement in predominantly Black student organizations and their leadership remained primarily situated within racially homogeneous groups, many also engaged in, to varying degrees, mainstream and predominantly White student organizations. A few students in the sample reported that their leadership and engagement

were solely limited, intentionally, to mainstream student organizations. Those who chose to be exclusively involved in predominantly Black organizations did so because they were primarily interested in being affiliated with groups that responded directly to Black students' needs and concerns, including the eradication of stereotypes. Comparatively, achievers who participated in predominantly White and mainstream student organizations often did so because they saw a gross underrepresentation of Black students in those clubs and wanted to be among the first to offer a "Black voice" to an almost exclusively White membership. Cameron, a junior, remarked:

I have chosen majority over minority organizations because in them I have more of a chance to represent African Americans more positively to students who hold the worst perceptions about us. They see me and then they probably say to themselves and to their White friends, "You know, African Americans are not as bad as I had assumed."

Although they sometimes chose demographically different organizations, participants seemed to share a common goal: to represent Black students more positively and to advance the Black communities on their campuses through activism, collectivism, and leadership.

While they were not afforded complete immunity from racial microaggressions in classrooms, several participants acknowledged how professors stereotyped them less often as they became more publicly visible student leaders. Ross, for example, was aware that his status as a student leader on campus, particularly within the College of Business, afforded him substantive opportunities for personal engagement with faculty outside of class. In many instances, these were the same professors from whom he took classes. He surmised that because they were familiar with his leadership abilities, were aware of his contributions to his department and the college, and had observed his performance in roles outside the classroom, professors were less inclined to perceive him as academically inferior.

Other participants noted that as they became more actively involved in clubs and organizations, faculty and administrators made fewer erroneous assumptions about them. Professors usually served as advisers to many of the academic clubs and honor societies in which these students were actively engaged and held leadership positions. Achievers cited examples of their professors' microaggressions toward other Black students and stereotypes faculty members communicated about minoritized communities in classrooms. Instead of "suffering in class like the other Black students because the professor hasn't gotten to know them," as Bryson put it, achievers across the thirty studied campuses (most especially at the liberal arts colleges, given their size) were reportedly shielded from stereotypical insults, at least from those made by their professors. In many cases, achievers actually felt they had an advantage over other Black and White students because they had cultivated such meaningful relationships with faculty outside of class. As Shannon remarked:

Because there are so few Black male student leaders at Indiana University, it has been really easy for me to get noticed and leave a good impression on my White teachers and to have awesome relationships with them outside of class. This is something that even most of my White classmates don't have. I am definitely privileged because my teachers know me and don't make ignorant racist comments to me. Now, the way they treat other African American students in class is another story, a sad story.

Another student accused the director of Student Activities and the associate vice president for Student Affairs at his university of being "selectively racist."

It's amazing how their racism is temporarily suspended when they are dealing with me . . . They don't make racial comments about me and other Black male leaders like I know they do about other Black students. They actually take me seriously and don't say or do anything to disrespect my Blackness. I know they make assumptions about other Blacks that are flat out inaccurate, but they know me and they know I am smart. Although I am *very, very* Black in terms of my identity—I am the president of Black Student Union and the NAACP, for crying out loud—they see me as one of those smart Negroes who is different. I guess you could say they are selectively racist, and I benefit from this ignorant selectivity while other students of color suffer.

But while participants believed leadership and active engagement afforded them relief from harmful stereotypes advanced by faculty and administrators, the same could not be said of their experiences with White peers. Lyle reflected, "Before I got active on campus, stereotypes from these White students used to get me down, but I don't let them anymore."

Skillfully Confronting Stereotypes

"People already know that if somebody says something out of bounds in class, I am going to call them on it, that's what a leader does," a Valdosta State University student commented. As they began to garner reputations for themselves as student leaders outside the classroom, the achievers became more conscious of their self-representation and voices in the classroom. That is, they emerged as leaders in their classes and were more empowered to speak up on behalf of other Blacks when troublesome race-based stereotypes arose in class discussions. This behavioral shift is evidenced in Tyron's reflection:

I noticed that I became more aware of stereotypes and racism in my classes after I got involved in Black Student Union. Prior to then, I would just sit among the abused and insulted in my classes. Like some of my other Black class members, I was sometimes aware of the stereotypes, but then I was sometimes oblivious. Since we talk about these issues in BSU meetings, I am more conscious now. I am also much more willing to call out one of my White class members, or even the professor, for that matter, whenever they say something that is culturally inappropriate.

While he had developed this consciousness and confidence, Tyron believed his African American classmates were not always cognizant of stereotypes or as apt to stand up for themselves. Instead, “they would just sit passively in their seats with their heads hung low, feeling abused and insulted.”

Participants cited ways in which their out-of-class leadership experiences elevated their confidence to address racism, which also affected their confrontation behaviors in the classroom. In addition to the awareness of racism and self-confidence that Tyron described, others in the study grew accustomed to receiving validation from peers, faculty, administrators, and others outside the classroom. One student added:

I speak up for African Americans all the time in meetings with the president and the Board of Trustees. Speaking up for us in class, especially when I feel we have been wronged, comes second nature to me. It is almost like an automatic response trigger.

Thus, when stereotypes arose in classroom situations, they were confident enough in their communication abilities to immediately speak up. Participants recalled several specific stereotypes that emerged in their courses, described how they responded, and credited their ability to articulately dispel those myths to communication and confrontation skills they developed through out-of-class engagement experiences.

Ryan, a senior majoring in engineering at Purdue, believed the out-of-class engagement/response nexus actually helped improve his grades. Prior to becoming a student leader, he withdrew emotionally from the aeronautical technology classes, where he was the only Black student and racial stereotypes were commonplace. However, once he became director of entertainment for a dance marathon, a member of the Student Leadership Advisory Board to the dean of students, and a member of the Society of Minority Managers, and was elected to leadership positions in the Purdue Professional Pilots Association, the National Society of Black Engineers, the Association of Minority Science Students, and Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, his willingness to speak up in class in general, and in response to stereotypes specifically, significantly increased. “I just gained more confidence to say something when people say stereotypic things to me and other students of color in the classroom. That’s leadership.” This, Ryan believed, helped boost his classroom engagement, which subsequently led to an increase in his GPA. Other participants reported a similar relationship between stereotype confrontation, classroom engagement, and higher grades.

Speaking up almost always entailed asking questions that shifted the emotional burden of stereotype sensemaking from the microaggressor to the microaggressor. “Whenever someone asks me something that feels odd, you know, somewhat racist, I ask them to think about the genesis of their racist assumptions,” Keith, a Columbia University junior, noted. Achievers described

a three-step strategic pivoting process to respond to an array of stereotypes, both inside and outside the classroom:

1. A White peer asks a question like, “You got weed?”
2. The achiever responds by calmly asking, “What made you assume I sell, smoke, or know where to find weed?”
3. The achiever waits patiently for the White peer to reflect and answer the question. During this reflective period, the stereotyper (or microaggressor) usually comes to understand on her or his own that the question posed or assumption made was racially problematic.

For example, a Towson University professor asked one participant if he wrote a paper on his own or if he had gotten help from a tutor or someone else. The student responded, “What makes you think I am not smart enough to have written this paper myself?” The faculty member explained it was because she had never met anyone who attended Baltimore public schools who wrote as eloquently. The student said, “Well, I want you to reflect on your generalizations.” Instead of internalizing the professor’s deficit views of him, this participant forced the teacher to grapple with her presuppositions about every student who comes from a public school system that is more than 85 percent Black.

Participants said these three steps often protected them from leaving encounters frustrated and confused about the assumptions White peers and faculty made about them. Some recalled how they felt before they learned this resistant response strategy. For instance, Iyassu, a student at Williams College reflected:

My freshman year, I used to leave those kinds of situations so frustrated, mostly upset at myself for not saying something to the people about their racist assumptions. But I noticed the person who inflicted harm on me experienced no frustration at all. In fact, they didn’t even know they had insulted me. That was unfair to me. I learned to protect myself by making them do the work right there on the spot. I still get a little annoyed, but I don’t leave those confrontations nearly as upset.

Many achievers said they often learned and shared these as well as other response strategies in meetings of ethnic student organizations and in Black culture centers. Their same-race peers and other minoritized students, especially upperclassmen who held leadership roles in ethnic student organizations, taught each other how to resist the internalization of racial microaggressions and respond productively to racist stereotypes.

Discussion and Implications

Participants in this study were undoubtedly threatened by stereotypes they encountered on their predominantly White campuses, but they learned how to resist the harmful internalization of them. Steele (1997) describes “wise

schooling practices” as approaches designed to reduce the threat of negative racial stereotypes. Among such practices are establishing optimistic teacher-student relationships, affirming intellectual competence and belonging, and exposing students to role models who have successfully triumphed over stereotype threat. These practices have been shown to improve academic outcomes for Black students and other minoritized groups, including women in traditionally male-dominant academic disciplines (Steele, 1997; Taylor & Antony, 2000). Albeit self-initiated, participants in this study were actively engaged in many wise schooling-related practices that were neither intentionally designed nor institutionalized. Instead, same-race male peers who served as student leaders either socialized the men I interviewed, or participants in my study stumbled on these approaches through their own engagement. Given that more than two-thirds of all Black men who start college do not graduate within six years (Harper & Harris, 2012), it is clear that the institutionalization of wise schooling practices as well as structured socialization activities constructed around productive and resistant responses to stereotypes are urgently warranted.

Although participants in this study represented the most academically high-performing and actively engaged student leaders on their campuses, they were not exempt from many of the stereotypes described in previous studies (e.g., Feagin et al., 1996; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Solórzano et al., 2000). The achievers perceived their White instructors to be racist toward other Black students but not as much toward them. This is an interesting finding, because it appears that erroneous assumptions White faculty members make about *certain* Black students subside once they see those students in high-profile leadership roles, have meaningful interactions with them outside of class, and observe their intellectual aptitude in venues other than the classroom. Thus, it seems essential to create opportunities for meaningful engagement between White faculty and Black male students. Club and honor society meetings were sites at which this occurred for many participants in this study, but collaborative work on research projects could also help.

More important than faculty-student engagement is the need to challenge professors and regularly create spaces for them to deeply (re)examine their biases and assumptions about Blacks. Achievers in this study were aware of stereotypes and knew some professors and administrators were racist. Yet, unlike Black students in Harper and Hurtado’s (2007) study, they had not developed negative feelings toward the PWIs they attended. Instead, they were empowered to verbally confront stereotypes when they arose and, through leadership and active out-of-class engagement, developed a firm sense of belonging at and pride in their institutions. Self-imposed individual accountability and collective reflections on racial attitudes among professors in a program or department, along with a series of faculty development activities on implicit bias, classroom and campus climates, racial microaggressions, and stereotypes, would likely help educators create learning environments in which

less engaged, less resistant Black students are not so routinely threatened and harmed by racial stereotypes.

Beyond stereotypes and confrontations with White peers, other themes from the published literature on Black students at PWIs (onlyness, disengagement, academic struggle, etc.) were not always reflective of these achievers' experiences.⁵ This is important for three reasons. First, Fries-Britt (1998) suggests that "the disproportionate focus on Black underachievement in the literature not only distorts the image of the community of Black collegians, but also creates, perhaps unintentionally, a lower set of expectations for Black student achievement" (p. 556). My findings confirm that Black students do not compose a monolithic group, but also show there are Black men who have positive experiences, benefit from high expectations, make the most of college, and acquire the confidence and protective communication skills required for achievement (not just survival) in racist environments where oppressive stereotypes are allowed to persist.

Second, qualitative differences between the achievers and other Black students' experiences are noteworthy, as they confirm the value of engagement. Kuh (1993) and Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) highlight myriad gains and outcomes associated with purposeful engagement, both inside and outside the classroom. An additional pair of gains emerged in the present study. Through leadership and active engagement, particularly in predominantly Black student organizations, Black male achievers gained a level of race consciousness and confidence in their communication abilities that enabled them to respond productively to stereotypes. And these gains, participants believed, led to at least one measurable outcome: higher GPAs. Offering structured venues for the articulation of these gains to a wider audience of Black undergraduates, especially first-year students at PWIs, is both appropriate and necessary. For example, race-specific orientation sessions, summer bridge programs, student organization meetings, and Black culture centers are important spaces where such conversations could occur.

Third, Steele (1992, 1997) notes that negative performance outcomes accrue when students fear epitomizing negative stereotypes. The flipside of this finding, as evidenced here, is that positive outcomes can be produced for those who gain the confidence and competencies to boldly confront stereotypes. Participants in this study did not fear confirming stereotypes but instead refused to internalize the microaggressions and racist assumptions that many of their White peers held. These students had been socialized to become stereotype conscious and to productively address the "threat" of stereotypes through leadership, positive self-representation, and a strategic three-step pivoting process. Accordingly, much of this occurred through "peer pedagogies"—students of color teaching each other how to skillfully navigate racist encounters on campus (Harper, 2013). This typically happens through engagement in ethnic student organizations and participation in activities Black culture centers sponsor. Unlike in previous research on stereotype threat (e.g., Aron-

son, 2002; Stangor et al., 1998), participants in this study did not lower their self-expectations or experience disidentification with academic achievement. Clearly, active campus engagement offers a buffer and serves as a mediating factor against the stereotypes that usually erode academic confidence among high-achieving Black students.

The role of predominantly Black student organizations is also noteworthy. Findings here are consistent with Thompson and Fretz's (1991) assertions. These out-of-class engagement venues offer a platform for the exploration of issues that plague Blacks, a forum through which members can craft collective responses to stereotypes, and a place where Black students can learn effective response techniques from their same-race peers. Organizations like Harvard Black Men's Forum, SAAB at Cal State Long Beach, and Black Men United at Penn, for example, helped yield positive gains and outcomes for participants. Therefore, engagement (not necessarily leadership) in predominantly Black student organizations should be encouraged and resources (financial and otherwise) should be invested in these groups. But given the important within-group diversity among Black collegians, not all will find these groups appealing (Amechi et al., 2015; Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Harper & Nichols, 2008). Perhaps interest would increase if the nexus between membership and protective responses to stereotypes was more widely marketed.

Realistically, few undergraduates, especially Black men, will be interested in holding as many memberships and leadership positions as did participants in this study. Therefore, other approaches to helping students respond productively to racism and racial microaggressions are warranted. Exposing them to social and digital media campaigns like "I, Too, Am Harvard" and #BBUM (a Twitter hashtag for Being Black at University of Michigan) could be effective. Moreover, showing Black undergraduate men the Black Bruins video on YouTube, having them individually and collectively anticipate what comes along with being so underrepresented in the student body and overrepresented on revenue-generating intercollegiate sports teams, and having Black male upperclassmen offer strategies for resisting the internalization of racial stereotypes would be worthwhile activities.⁶

Conclusion

In his 1933 book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, Carter G. Woodson famously observed that a young Black boy is repeatedly reminded of his inferiority in every class he takes and every book he reads. Participants in the current study were routinely reminded of their perceived intellectual inferiority and a range of other problematic assumptions that their White peers and faculty on the predominantly White campuses had about them. But they learned how to resist the threat of these stereotypes. While participants assumed responsibility for acquiring the confidence and competencies requisite for success in contexts riddled with stereotypes, they should not have been required to

do so. Fewer responses, resistant or otherwise, would be required if White students and faculty had fewer stereotypes and made fewer racially offensive comments. Given the comprehensive list of racial stereotypes that achievers in this study described and survived, it is clear that consciousness raising and corrective experiences are needed for Whites who, sometimes unintentionally or unknowingly, inflict racial harm on minoritized students at PWIs.

Notes

1. I use *minoritized* instead of *minority* in this article to signify the social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in US social institutions, including colleges and universities. Persons are not born into a minority status, nor are they minoritized in every social milieu (e.g., their families, racially homogeneous friendship groups, or places of religious worship). Instead, they are rendered minorities in particular situations and institutional environments that sustain an overrepresentation of Whiteness.
2. I deliberately interchange the terms *racist stereotypes* and *racial stereotypes* to draw attention to how higher education scholars typically write about race without explicitly naming racism and racist institutional norms, cultures, policies, and practices (see Harper, 2012).
3. Microaggressions are subtle, seemingly innocuous racial insults often experienced by minoritized persons in predominantly White settings (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007). Their cumulative effects are injurious and often undermine psychological, academic, and physiological wellness.
4. All participant names are pseudonyms.
5. Harper et al. (2011) introduce the term *onlyness*, which is “the psychoemotional burden of having to strategically navigate a racially politicized space occupied by few peers, role models, and guardians from one’s same racial or ethnic group” (p. 190).
6. In November 2013, a group of Black undergraduate men at the University of California, Los Angeles posted a video to YouTube in which they speak about various racialized aspects of their experiences on that predominantly White campus. Within a year, the video had been viewed more than 2.2 million times.

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