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Black college women's lived memories of racialization in predominantly white educational spaces: I'm Black, I´m a migrant, I'm a woman, so what?

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ABSTRACT

Research on experiences of gender and racial discrimination among young, racialized college women in Europe is scarce, particularly in Spain where Black women have traditionally had a minority presence in universities. As a result of processes of social mobility, these women are now occupying higher education spaces to an unprecedented extent, where they are becoming increasingly visible. These women's experiences of gender and racial discrimination throughout the education cycle are invisible. The aim of this article is to explore the personal experiences of racialization and discrimination among Black female college students in southern Spain. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted and analysed to shed light on the experiences of young Black female students in predominantly white educational institutions. The stories of these women show that gender and race intersect and are constructed simultaneously through interactions with their mostly white peers. These women display responses of significant resilience.

Introduction

This case study, framed within Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Joseph-Salisbury 2019; Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Tate 1997), explores the nuanced educational journeys of Black women college students in southern Europe, specifically in Spain, where 367,250 Afro-descendant residents live (Instituto Nacional de Estadística [INE] 2019). Despite this Afro-descendant presence, Spain lacks ethnic and racial statistics, prompting an examination of the intersectionality of race and gender in educational contexts.

Termed 'Black women' following Edwards (1990), this study addresses the experiences of African, African-descendant, and Latin women, including Afro-Latinas. It refers to the life stories of those Black women college students that have reached university despite suffering discrimination in the previous educational stages. Specifically, it is located at a

public university in Andalusia and spans primary, secondary, and university stages, offering a retrospective analysis from childhood to young adulthood.

This research contributes to the examination of educational experiences among disadvantaged women in Spain, aligning with literature showing that gender and race intertwine through processes of inequality and racism (Showunmi and Tomlin 2022). While racism and sexism in educational contexts have been widely explored (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000), few studies delve into the lived realities of racialization and discrimination among Black college women in predominantly white educational institutions (C. S. Haynes 2019; Farinde-Wu, Butler, and Allen-Handy 2022). Prior studies in Spain have primarily focused on white middle-class students, neglecting the unique experiences of Black women (Ariño Villarroya 2014; Megías Bas 2019), and have emphasized how ethnic background often results in exclusion, leading families to seek alternative institutions, worsening the Spanish educational system's inclusivity deficiencies (Hernández-Castilla 2020).

Conducted at a public university in Andalusia, the study spans three educational stages (primary, secondary, and university) to retrospectively analyse interviewees' experiences from childhood to young adulthood. Data collection focuses on the changing process of racialization (Ali et al. 2010), shedding light on the social conditions of Black women in Spanish universities aged 19–31. The study examines racialization and gendering in education stages. It examines how interviewees respond to multiple embodiments, and shape the meaning of their educational experiences (Mirza 2015), challenging the traditional view of an 'enlightened individual' as a detached mind (Kirby 1993).

The study comprises five sections. Firstly, a literature review establishes a theoretical framework on Black women and girls' experiences in education, covering racial socialization, embodiment, responses to racialization, and intersectionality. The subsequent sections focus on applying Critical Race Theory and intersectional analysis, detailing methods and data, categorizing results based on lived experiences, and discussing findings within the theoretical framework. The findings reveal the construction of Black women as a specific disadvantaged group across educational stages, emphasizing their resilience while underscoring the need for universities and educational systems to shoulder responsibility for addressing the vulnerability of Black girls in schools.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

Literature review

Black women and girls' experiences in education

Schools serve as crucial public spaces for socialization (Berger and Luckmann 1966) where 'Black bodies are expelled from the white social body' (Ahmed 2002, 59), that is, are racialized. We define racialization, drawing from Foucault (1979) and Goldberg (1993), as the construction of power dynamics centred on the body and subjectivation processes, resulting in diverse forms of exclusion but also serving as a site for resistance.

In the educational settings, stigmatizing and racist expressions occur, fostering physical and symbolic distances among individuals and groups (Kaplan 2015). Racist ideology, as noted by Mills and Goldstick (1989), racializes all intergroup differences. Social structures and institutions contribute to this interconnected process, involving sexism and

classism, with whiteness playing a pivotal role in racial inequality, as discussed by Ahmed (2002, 2007). Those affected by these processes experience hierarchical relations and oppressions, embodying racialization. Discrimination becomes a tangible manifestation of these power dynamics, exacerbating the inequalities inherent in racialization.

Black women and girls' experiences in education have been studied from different points of view, analysing stereotypes and essentialism. The stereotypes stem from false interpretations of racial behaviour and contribute to the construction of Blackness as different and inferior (Mirza 2009; A. D. Tomlin 2022; Omi and Winant 2015; Hubain et al. 2016) Hubain et al. (2016, 958) show that, in secondary school, Black bodies are reduced to being 'believably Black' on the lines of 'she needed to wear African clothing and beat a drum'. This process of racialization in educational settings contributes to the devaluation of Black bodies, as institutional practices perpetuate a cycle of misrecognition and hinder their equal participation in social spheres (Fraser 1997). Everyday instances of microaggressions further compound this issue, normalizing discriminatory behaviours and fortifying the privileged status of the majority (López 2003; Essed and Muhr 2018; Essed et al. 2019; McPherson 2020). Tasha Willis (2020) conducts an intersectional analysis of microaggressions toward Black women studying abroad. While Black men have received attention at lower levels of education, Black women have not been studied similarly from an intersectional perspective (Harris and Leonardo 2018, 16). Past experiences in American classrooms, and prolonged exposure to dominant narratives that exclude Black women and girls, can result in negative self-perceptions. These negative self-perceptions are further solidified by the prevailing biases that anticipate underperformance among Black women in academic settings (Haynes, Stewart, and Allen 2016; Assari and Caldwell 2018).

In higher education, Black women face processes of sexualization (hooks 1996). The representation of Black women's bodies in contemporary popular culture often subverts or criticizes images of their sexuality that has formed part of the cultural apparatus of racism since the nineteenth century and is still pervasive today (Gilman 1985; hooks 1996).

Ultimately, primary schools, secondary schools, and universities become arenas where children and young people engage in the simultaneous construction and negotiation of race structures and gender meanings (Hamilton et al. 2019; Showunmi and Tomlin 2022). The concept of 'doing gender' and 'doing race', as articulated by West and Fenstermaker (2002), elucidates how even preschool-aged children consciously employ race and gender categories to include, exclude, or establish dominance over others in their social interactions. This emphasizes the profound impact of educational environments on the early formation of social identities and power dynamics.

Racial socialization

Racial socialization entails the transmission of cultural heritage and strategies, as parents impart behaviours, attitudes, and values to their children to navigate the hostility, (Hughes et al. 2006; Thornhill 2016). Literature identifies four types of racial socialization: preparation for prejudice, fostering distrust toward out-groups, cultural socialization promoting racial pride, and egalitarianism emphasizing values such as hard work and self-acceptance (Hughes et al. 2006). It may also involve selecting or changing schools, contributing to increased segregation influenced by racism (Hernández-Castilla 2020).

Some studies highlight positive effects of racial socialization in terms of academic performance and well-being (Colen et al. 2019; Leath, Butler-Barnes, and Lee-Nelson 2021). Black mothers' critical awareness and close bonds resist damaging beliefs, fostering positive identity development in their children, including the identification of racism in school materials (Trent et al. 2019). Some rarely contemplated everyday resistances of children to racism include modifying appearance, as a strategy for negotiating race, serving as embodied strategies to cope with racism (Twine 2010; Okello et al. 2020). The desire to fit into the predominant group seeks homogeneity, reducing heterogeneity and multiplicity (Lugones 1994). Porter (2016) notes how family influences shape Black undergraduate women's identities with traits of strength, responsibility, hard work, and care for others.

Responses to processes of racialization

Black women employ diverse responses to processes of racialization that involve strategies like consciousness-raising and individual empowerment, identified by Thalhammer et al. (2007) as crucial for becoming courageous resisters. The occurrence of situational courageous resistance at secondary school is elucidated by the identification with a homogeneous 'we' group, which is associated with a social distance from the out-group (Thalhammer et al. 2007). Additionally, the characteristics of socialization, marked by the presence of mistrustful out-group members, contribute to this resistance (Hughes et al. 2006).

McPherson (2020) acknowledged the resilience of Black girls in schools; but was criticized for potentially burdening the oppressed by focusing solely on their resilience, overlooking the persistent racism they endure. Moreover, adaptive resilience behaviours can have detrimental effects on health (Goodkind, Brinkman, and Elliott 2020). Non-normative actions, such as protesting or challenging injustice, often result in negative labels and severe disciplinary consequences (Martin and Smith 2017). Coping through resilience as a response to racism can be exhausting for girls, as they have to face discrimination using their own resources (Robinson 2013). Therefore, it is essential that education systems be held accountable for the well-being of Black girls within school environments (McPherson 2020).

Internalized racism leads to the internalization of oppressive values, stereotypes, and misinformation regarding one's racial or ethnic group (Tatum 1992) and functions as a self-perpetuating instrument of oppression deeply embedded in societal white supremacy, transcending mere consequence. Fordham's research (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Fordham 1988, 1993) reveals how Black girls use silence to navigate racial expectations, addressing challenges like the 'acting white' stereotype, linking academic success with whiteness. Kabeer (2005, 27) highlights the challenge power dynamics and hidden structures perpetuating marginalization within educational practices. Nunn (2018) advocates for empowerment programmes tailored to Black girls, aiming to address degrading social experiences and to counter the balancing of strength and sadness they face due to regular social battles and to foster individual and group-level and institutional changes, grounded in Black Feminism (Collins 2000) to effectively combat gender discrimination and racism. Tactics employed by Black women include aesthetic labour and silence. Aesthetic labour involves modifying appearance to align with prevailing styles in educational settings (Hakim 2011). Mirza (2015) notes that in their transition to adulthood, Black women become aware of structural inequality, relying on tactics like silence while recognizing their limitations in challenging overarching social structures. Meanwhile, silence and normalization are seen as forms of embodied agency and 'aesthetic

labour' to cope with everyday racism, though they may not empower individuals or challenge broader social structures (Molyneux 1998; De Certeau 2000; Lewis et al. 2013).

1. Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

Critical Race Theory (CRT) serves as a vital tool for understanding and addressing racial issues in academic and social contexts. It critically examines power structures and racial dominance, challenging prevailing narratives that perpetuate racial stereotypes. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Fordham (1988, 1993) emphasizes the intricate interplay of racial identity, cultural expectations, and academic achievement among Black girls, urging consideration of intersectional experiences in understanding their educational challenges.

Aligned with CRT, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991, 2001, 2011) considers a intersectionality framework that examines the micro and macro dynamics shaping Black women's lives scrutinizing racial power structures and the supremacy of whiteness. She demonstrates that an intersectional perspective reveals normalized violence against Black women, with slow or violent responses and a lack of public assistance. Crenshaw's intersectionality also shows that legal definitions often overlook the distinct challenges faced by Black women, rendering them legally 'invisible' and without recourse, and emphasizes varying discrimination experiences within distinct social groups. This perspective analyses the simultaneous creation of race, gender, and sexuality identities alongside various forms of oppression and discrimination, and intertwines with other theories such as Black Feminist Thought (Crenshaw 1991; Omi and Winant 2015). These manifestations persist in everyday sexism and racism normalized through practices like jokes, storytelling, and generalizations, discernible in educational, family, and normative institutions (Essed 2002; Collins 2017).

Initially absent in CRT's analytical framework in education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), influenced by Crenshaw (1991), highlight[open-strick]s[close-strick] the need for a CRT perspective to critique the multicultural paradigm, urging a reinterpretation of civil rights laws. Since then, intersectionality becomes integral to education studies and gains significance in education through the integration of CRT (Collins 2000; Collins and Bilge 2016). Arbouin (2018) researches the experiences of graduate students, and Joseph-Salisbury (2019) employs CRT to explore counter-narratives among university students, analysing how these experiences are embedded in white structures, producing inequalities (Doharty, Madriaga, and Joseph-Salisbury 2021; Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury 2018).

Methods and data

Building on Joseph-Salisbury's (2019) use of Critical Race Theory (CRT), this qualitative study delves into the experiences of Black women college students in southern Spain, examining how their narratives identify behaviours and accounts related with their racialization process that reveal the complexity of race in educational spaces.

Research design

CRT challenges traditional methodologies, advocating for transformative theories to combat oppression, poverty, and deprivation (Lincoln 1993, 33). Within CRT, Critical

Race Methodology (CRM) scrutinizes how race intersects with gender, class, and sexuality, shaping power dynamics (Seck et al. 2008; Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000). Black women scholars are pivotal in advancing CRT by centring their experiences, critiquing biased research, and promoting inclusive approaches (Johnson and Joseph-Salisbury 2018). Their work, rooted in feminist frameworks (hooks 2014; Davis 1983; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 1991) challenges dominant narratives and underscores the intersection of race, gender, and memory (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Through CRM and feminist lenses, our study highlights marginalized experiences and university accountability in perpetuating vulnerability (Joseph-Salisbury 2019). We explore microaggressions, intersectionality, and racialized socialization to unveil normalized racist processes (Joseph-Salisbury 2019).

Participant selection

The study targeted Black women university students due to evidence indicating systemic racism in education negatively affects their learning experiences, potentially leading to their disproportionate exclusion from school (Houston 2018; C. Tomlin, Showunmi, and Mocombe 2019). Despite these obstacles, the selected participants successfully navigated educational stages, reaching university, employing diverse strategies to overcome barriers. Their narratives shed light on effective anti-racism actions in education. The recruitment involved two strategies: selecting students for a book chapter on Spain's crisis and approaching women on campus for interviews. Snowball sampling was used for participant selection, ensuring confidentiality through name and place changes (Manzanera-Ruiz and Gama 2023).

Research participants

Twelve Black women college students, aged 19–31, participated from a public university in the Andalusian Region, southern Spain. One had a year's experience at a private university in the same city, minimally impacting her experience. All shared experiences of racialized body discrimination and inequality, with no significant differences among interviewees. Black college students in Spain are currently a minority, and detailed racial composition information from Spanish universities is lacking (see Table 1).

Table 1. Research participants.

	Alias	Age	Origin	Academic year
1	Sara	26	Colombia	4th
2	Mayte	31	Equatorial Guinea	4th
3	Reme	22	Guinea Bissau	4th
4	Raquel	23	Guinea Bissau	2nd
5	Ana	24	African descent (adoption status)	4th
6	Beatriz	20	Guinea Bissau	1st
7	Paula	21	Equatorial Guinea	1st
8	Felisa	18	Morocco	1st
9	Carolina	29	Uganda	Postgraduate
10	Maria	20	Guinea Bissau	1st
11	Angustias	30	Kenya	3rd
12	Flor	23	Dominican Republic	4th

Data collection and analysis

The study collected data through semi-structured interviews, capturing the details of the object of study and manifesting the value of a micro perspective. The initial protocol was modified, revising and adding new questions. The first protocol was designed in three parts: primary schooling; secondary school period and college. The analysis of the data collected was carried out by grouping the themes by categories, following the main theoretical concepts and comparing the codes that emerged in the interview transcripts.

In this context, the reconstruction of interviewees' memories traces discourse, practices, and spaces shaping their past, specifically in educational processes from primary school to college, rendering it present and meaningful (Kidron 2009). Oral narrative research, employed by black women researchers (Johnson-Bailey 2004; Madison 1998; Nelson 1996; Vaz 1997), serves as a primary methodology. The ethnographic focus on narratives of lived experience complements Black Feminist Thought in several important ways: (1) it favours the voices of Black women as interpreters of their own experience; (2) it thematizes the specialized knowledge of Black women's standpoint; and (3) it contributes to the overall empowerment of Black women as self-defining actors. The second protocol delved deeper into key issues identified in initial interviews, focusing on the naturalization of racism, aggressions, disaffection with authorities, relatives' reactions, and racial socialization.

Ethical considerations

Ethical consent was secured from both reference contact and participant, with guidance from the former. Participants were briefed on interview purpose, recording, and anonymity. Basic data were collected without specifying degree or faculty. Communication was solely in Spanish for confidentiality. To reinforce anonymity, only the basic information for our analysis is shown, without identifying which university degree or which of the 27 faculties at the university they attend.

Results

The data obtained from the participants' responses to the study questions have been categorized into four groups according to the lived experiences in primary school; secondary school; high school and university.

The first experience: keeping distance and racial socialization

Most of the women interviewed described being insulted and suffering racist comments in their first experience where their bodies were inscribed in a Black racialized way. When referring to their experiences in primary school, several interviewees stated that white pupils become racist when they align themselves with other white bodies, which they feel are more similar to their own, and against Black bodies, which they view as being apart from them. For example, at the age of seven, Sara recounts how she suffered an aggression in school:

> I started here at Ave Maria School, and I lasted a month. I came face-to-face with reality there. I had a friend who was also Colombian, Nancy, who was older than me and who slept in the boarding school. One day I came home and said 'Mum, I want to sleep over at Nancy's, we're going to have a pyjama party' and my mum didn't want me to go but I insisted so much that she said 'OK, you can go'. I packed my backpack . . . with all the matching Barbie towels and a cell phone to keep in touch with my mum because she worked so much. That night I stayed at the boarding school and all of sudden, through the window I see like a fire in the courtyard. I went down all happy to see [what was going on] … Some kids had taken my things, my Barbie towel, and had made a fire with them … The next day one of the kids who started it called me names, yelled at me. I still remember it as if it was yesterday, and of course I called my mum … I said 'Mum, a kid insulted me, he called me such and such' … When my mum went to talk [to the school authorities] they told her it was a kid with family problems. I think this is the only time I have seen my mum so angry that she said 'I'm going to smack that kid'. (Sara, 26 years old)

Sara also describes how, in a new school, she joined up with another Black student who was experiencing discrimination to support her:

> Then I went to the Rafael Costa School which was in the north of the city and I think I lasted a year there, too. There were only two of us Black girls. The other girl was from Senegal but she never spoke … And they always laughed at her because she suffered … she had a nasal problem and always had a cold … I always gave her Kleenex. I'll never forget that scene of 'here, have a Kleenex'. (Sara, 26 years old)

Different processes of racial socialization are fostered when confronted with such discrimination. Sara tells how her mother moved her to another school again:

> I lasted a year because the environment wasn't one of learning but of social inclusion in the sense that, let's include them because they're poor, they're excluded but they don't need to learn, just to adapt; and my mother was not very keen on that, so I changed schools and went to San Pedro. (Sara, 26 years old)

In Beatriz's case, she exposes how her mother taught her how racism and discrimination would be a part of her life and the conflicts she would face. Beatriz identified the pressure to perform well in the area of education and career as a necessary survival strategy as a Black woman facing racism:

> It's true that my mother has always prepared me for life from a very young age. I remember her telling me, 'You have to work harder. If there's a job, and both of you are equally qualified, they'll give it to the other person because they're white'. . . . My mother always told me: 'If there's a fight, they'll call someone stupid and you'll be called Black'. (Beatriz, 20 years old)

Mayte reveals how the process of racialization in primary schools homogenizes Black bodies, confusing them. Although she normalizes the issue by claiming that it is not a problem of racism, Mayte's experience is an example of how racial stereotyping debases Black identities:

> I got to fourth grade and was the only Black girl in school. There was another girl who was lighter than me but she obviously had Black parents and they always confused us. She was almost in ESO [middle school] but they always confused us. They called me by her name and they called her Mayte. But I never had any problems with racism there. (Mayte, 31 years old)

Daily institutionalization and normalization of racial oppression is evident in Felisa's experience, where her Black body is interpreted as dirty and to be kept at a distance. The white body's boundaries are reconfigured through affective gestures to disengage from the presence of the Black body in the school context:

'Coffee! Coffee . . . coffee! Your skin is very dirty, don't touch me'. Yeah, they often make those kinds of comments, racist comments. Those kids and their parents are like, 'They're just kids talking!' But you [the parents] really should have put them right from the beginning, because if you don't put them right when they're kids, then later on . . . (Felisa, 18 years old)

Secondary school: normalization of racism and distancing from the bodily social space

Maria experiences fatigue due to her identification with a homogeneous 'we' group in her class during the processes of racialization. The out-group marginalizes language, culture, and history of subordinate groups, imposing distorted portrayals. Maria also faces social distance and mistrustful behaviour from out-group members:

In my class, it's not that they were racist or anything, but you notice the comments. In class they say Africa and everyone looks at you. And like Africa is a country, so you feel identified every time they talk about Africa. On top of that, I was the only Black girl at the school, I was the centre of attention. White people wouldn't come up to me unless they wanted me to talk about Africa or Guinea. They'd ask me, 'Do you eat chicken in Africa?' (Maria, 20 years old).

Felisa refers to the importance of her behaviour, expressing that microaggressions, related to the idea that in school Black girls do not know how to behave socially and must be civilized, are also commonplace:

[People told my mum] The problem is you haven't raised your child properly . . . so she learns how to behave, this is Spain, this is Europe, she's not in an African country, she's already used to what she does in her country (Felisa, 18 years old)

The interviewed women shared experiences of trying to fit in, going unnoticed, and altering their physical appearance to avoid negative stereotypes associated with being Black. Paula exemplifies how she used embodiment as a strategy to navigate racism. The dominant group's power within their belief system defines normative experiences of the oppressed and erases language, culture, and history of subordinate groups while imposing misrepresentations:

Before, well, you turn fifteen and say I want to be just like them. Things like when you start to straighten your hair . . . or maybe forget my language and not want to speak it. I felt kind of ashamed. But why? It's your identity and that's it. You work on it … There will be things you don't like, that's normal! But that's it, don't internalise that racism you suffer outside . . . because it'll kill you. (Paula, 21 years old)

During this stage of racial socialization, this behaviour decreases as young women develop their coping mechanisms for dealing with discrimination. Maria, for instance, chose not to discuss racist attacks and violence to avoid worrying her mother:

Most of the time I just keep it to myself, but because I don't see the need to tell anyone. For example, my mother, who is very nervous … her blood pressure might go up, so I prefer not to say anything. (Maria, 20 years old)

At university, the dynamics between Black and white bodies change. According to the interviewees, their bodies are no longer excluded, and the distance between them is reduced. However, negative stereotypes and social labels persist, posing barriers for young Black women in higher education. Despite some awareness of an African context, perceptions of Black individuals

remain stereotyped. Many students expressed concerns about societal perceptions, with some classmates expressing surprise at a Black student pursuing a college degree:

> The first day I got to class, everybody was whispering and looking at me … like, 'What the fuck is she doing here?' And … does she have money to pay for this? I guess, too, because that school is private and it's expensive. They probably think how strange, 'Black women don't go to private schools' … But it wasn't just about the money, in some activities we had to shake hands, and that disgusted some people. Now we get along and they hug me, and I joke and say 'Hey, don't push it' it's a matter of getting used to it. (Raquel, 23 years old)

Higher education: sexual objectification

At university, racialization processes link Black women's bodies to specific abilities based on racial categories. Peers perceive Blackness as associated with sensuality and sexuality, a perception normalized through various experiences on campus and in relationships with classmates:

> Yesterday, for example, I walked into a class and heard 'Look, that Black girl is hot'. It was an 18-year-old kid, I mean, young … He sat down in front of me and said 'Hi!, hi!, how's it going?' and I said 'Fine' and he said 'Are you from here?' and I said 'No, I'm in fourth year'. 'Ah, from fourth year, and what are you doing here?', like trying you know, but he kept looking at me like that with that up and down look, looking at my breasts instead of looking at my face and I was covered up so it's very, very strange if I see that no, there's no connection. (Mayte, 31 years old)

The women interviewed describe the fascination that their bodies awaken in their male classmates:

> I realised here that being Black and being here was going to be a problem in terms of emotional issues because we're very sexualized … The guys are very aware of that . . . because you're Black, you're Latina, you're Colombian so you must be a [sexual] volcano … [When you're] on a date and want to have something more than sex with a person, you shouldn't have to bring up those kinds of things, you should ask me what I think about history, politics or 'hey, remember that in such and such a year such and such a thing happened?' and what I think, right? Go beyond sex. (Sara, 26 years old).

Performativity and adulthood: tactics for coping with inequality

As these women transitioned to adulthood, they became aware of structural inequality and responded by adopting tactics like silence and modifying their appearance to avoid sexualization and criticism. Age and experience contributed to their use of silence as a coping strategy, as described by Raquel's experience of modifying her appearance and behaviour to go unnoticed:

> If I'm going out at night I try to look as masculine as possible. . . . I change the way I walk, I walk a little more like a man … because I've had altercations at night, like, I have to run away, I have to ask for help and nobody does anything. So it's like, if I camouflage myself to be a little bit more manly, nothing's going to happen to me. I've noticed that when I wear my hair natural it draws too much attention to me; and I don't like to be the centre of attention … I usually tend to keep a low profile to not draw too much attention to myself (Raquel, 23 years old)

The interviewees refer to violence and insults as a common experience, highlighting the pervasiveness of racism. Mayte's account demonstrates how silence became a coping habit. She elaborated:

> Here I encountered another struggle. The fact that I'm a woman, an immigrant, and Black meant that I had to deal with it in a different way … My teenage years, until I was 20, 21, were a struggle of me saying 'I want to leave, what am I doing here?' I've spent long nights crying and saying 'But why does all this happen to me?' 'Doesn't it happen to anyone else, where's the karma for all those bad people?' It's been really hard. But let's say that the way I interact, the way I behave, the way I justify certain things has changed. I'm not so submissive anymore. . . I'm Black, I'm a migrant, I'm a woman, so what? And you don't have to make me feel small to help me, just the opposite. (Mayte, 31 years old)

The interviewees in this study share similar experiences of racism, discrimination, and internalized oppression from childhood to the present. They employ tactics to cope with everyday discrimination and violence, but these responses have limited impact on the structural level. Their stories reflect the persistence of naturalized representations of Black women of African descent. The Black women interviewed face stereotypes and exclusion, leading them to embody both exclusion and agency in primary and secondary school to cope with these challenges. Despite this, they demonstrate significant resilience through resistance and support from other Black women, with their mothers playing a crucial role.

Discussion

We discuss five axes in relation to the results and the theoretical framework: Intersectionality; stereotypes and microaggressions; distrustful socialization; racial socialization; and internalized racism, tactics and responses to racism.

I. Intersectionality

Young women's experiences of racialization in education reflect racialized and gendered power imbalances, acknowledged as radical sites of resistance and refutation (Mirza 2006). Intersectionality influences inequitable treatment, with Black women facing issues linked to race, gender, and origin. Felisa's secondary school experiences highlight racial and gender discrimination, while Mayte, highlighting the intersection of immigrant status with gender and race, faces exclusion and bullying (Hernández-Castilla 2020). In higher education, Mayte and Sara contend with racist and sexist representations, aligning with Gilman (1985) and hooks (1996) in contemporary popular culture.

Finally, this inequitable treatment led all interviewees to express disaffection with educational institutions, perceived in Sara's testimony when she talks about her mother's feelings of frustration and anger, who finally moved her to another school after one month because of racism and sexism. This fact reinforces Crenshaw's ideas on intersectional invisibility (1991), as these women are excluded from educational spaces, also evidenced by Nunn (2018).

II. Stereotypes and microaggressions

All the participants spoke about microaggressions and underlying stereotypes throughout the educational stages. In elementary and secondary school, Raquel and Sara expressed how their peers at the private school thought they were poor or did not need to learn, but needed to adapt. Already at university, sexualization is the stereotype expressed by some of the participants. Based on these accounts, essentialism and stereotypes construct Blackness as something different (and often inferior to) other racial

groups, as has been reported in other works (Hubain et al. 2016), and Black bodies are reduced to being 'believably Black' (Hubain et al. 2016). Literature has shown that disparaging stereotypes portray Black women as subordinate savages in need of civilizing (hooks 1996; Ahmed 2002).

Microaggressions are repeated throughout all the educational stages by their peers and are reported by all participants. In elementary school, Sara´s and Felisa´s testimonies show how microaggressions are continuously reiterated, where the dominant group shapes the narratives of the oppressed and establishes their version of normalcy (López 2003; Essed and Muhr 2018; Essed et al. 2019; McPherson 2020).

III. Distrustful socialization

All participants show that marginalization includes a dominant 'we' group keeping distance from them. During secondary education, most participants said that they suffer social distancing from bodies racialized as white. Maria tells how she experienced marginalization for being the only Black girl at school and was self-identified as outside of a 'we' group. She expresses that the out-group members exhibited mistrustful behaviour, which leads to a distrustful socialization (Hughes et al. 2006). Mayte said that social distancing had a detrimental effect, but finally, she adopted a resilient attitude, a courageous attitude (Thalhammer et al. 2007). The experiences of Sara, Beatriz, Mayte, and Felisa show how they embody the process of racialization in primary school, where their bodies are expelled for the fact of being Black and women (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Ahmed 2002).

Racial socialization

In most cases, mothers play a critical role in racial socialization of participants. Although criticized for its simplicity (Thornhill 2016), the identification of the types of racial socialization considered by Hughes et al. (2006) helps us to understand how the experiences of young Black women in universities may align with the life cycles and educational cycles. In Beatriz's case, she describes how her mother prepared her for prejudice, teaching her how racism and discrimination would be a part of her life and the conflicts she would face. In Sara's case, her mother's response entailed mistrust, moving her to another school (Hernández-Castilla 2020). We see egalitarianism Maria's response, who chose not to talk about racist attacks to protect her mother. Sara's story demonstrates these women's identity affirmation, where her mother stands by her after her experience of aggression in school.

IV. Internalized racism, tactics and responses

The narratives shared by the participants reveal that internalized racism is deeply ingrained in the lives of these women across various contexts. By recognizing the presence of internalized racism and bringing it to the forefront, they have acquired the skills to navigate and confront its effects. Mayte drew a parallel between her journey of managing and challenging internalized racism and adopting a resilient attitude of 'I'm Black, I'm a migrant, I'm a woman, so what?' (Twine 2010; Tomlin, Showunmi, and Mocombe 2019).

The stories of the interviewees reflect two types of tactical response, the use of silence (Mizra 2015) and modifying their appearance, through which specific ways of embodiment are used (Twine 2010) to cope with the violence inflicted upon them, that require individual preparation and awareness. Both are employed as a way to identify and fit in with the predominant group (Lugones 1994); to minimize the significance of race; and to promote values of self-acceptance, (Hughes et al. 2006).

Conclusions

The particularity of this work is that it refers to the life stories of Black women college students who are a minority and have reached university despite suffering discrimination in the previous educational stages. In their embodiment, race, gender and origin have been intertwined. This work has explored Black college women's lived memories of racialization in predominantly white educational spaces throughout their lives. These experiences have shown how racial identities are constructed among peer groups in primary school, secondary school, and college through a process of racialization that goes beyond skin colour. In these educational spaces, racialization is a process by which their bodies – first as Black girls and then as Black women – are invested with meaning over time.

Black women navigate processes of racialization through a complex interplay of strategies and tactics, shaped by individual, social, and structural factors. Thalhammer's insights on resistance, Fordham's analysis of racial identity, Nunn's advocacy for empowerment programmes, and considerations of aesthetic labour and silence provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Black women in educational contexts. Empowerment programmes, coupled with institutional changes grounded in Black Feminism, emerge as essential components for addressing these challenges effectively.

The Black women interviewed are acutely aware of the differential treatment they experience at school as a result of not only their race but their gender and their origin. As all their accounts reveal, gender and race are constructed simultaneously through processes of inequality and racism (Showunmi and Tomlin 2022) and the concept of embodiment is developed by analysing the race-gender nexus (Mirza 2015). The stories expose the difference that comes from occupying different racial spaces (Kirby 1993). The social process and interactions are demonstrated through which Black women are constructed as a particular disadvantaged group through the various educational stages, and how they generate responses of significant resilience.

The results are consistent with the scientific literature on the experiences of young women who have been Black racialized in these educational spaces. From the age of 8–9 years, Black bodies begin to be expelled from the white social body in interactions with peer groups at school. These initial experiences of discrimination lead to processes of racial socialization through which mothers teach girls to cope with discrimination. Intersectionality plays a pivotal role in shaping the experiences of all interviewees and contributes to the inequitable treatment they face. Black women express various concerns that stem from the complex interplay of their racial, gender, and ethnic identities. In secondary school, the most significant experience is the social distancing between Black and white social bodies, while this social distance diminishes at university and the sexualization of Black women's bodies becomes part of the racialization process.

The accounts presented here show the inscribed bodies of young, Black women college students who have increasingly traumatic experiences and who, through social and family support, adopt two types of individual tactics to cope with the daily violence they suffer. Firstly, when faced with criticism and outside gazes, they engage in aesthetic labour to adapt their style and appearance. Secondly, the women interviewed respond to discrimination and violence with silence and normalization, thus reducing their feelings of frustration. Neither tactic succeeds in transforming the established order through bodily agency, as their bodies are structurally disempowered, but do provide demonstrations of stories of love through the relationships with their mothers and other family members to reclaim another meaning of education.

These individual tactics to counter the normalization of violence against Black women college students highlight the need to collectively address vulnerabilities related to racialization. This will require collective action and a supportive institutional environment, as well as the design and implementation of public policies and regulations aimed at achieving greater levels of structural empowerment. Our study's recommendations for educational research and practice include promoting intersectional awareness, implementing racial socialization programmes, and cultivating safe and supportive spaces within educational settings. Investing in teacher training to support diverse student populations and providing family and community support are also essential steps to address racial and gender disparities and create an inclusive environment. Empowering student voices and advocating for institutional support are key for promoting equity and dismantling systemic barriers for Black girls and women in education.

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