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Beyond Their Homeland: Understanding The Experiences of Black Women in Japan

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By

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Introduction

Black in Japan is an hour long documentary, easily found on Youtube, that centers the experiences of seven Black individuals in Japan who discuss the positive and negative aspects of their relative experience (Yoshizuki, and Yoshizuki, 2015). The interviewees rang in age, gender, occupation, and nationality, which was nice, because they touch on how aspects of their identity influence their experience in Japan. It was a nice and an informative documentary and I regret not watching it before I went to Japan, for the first time, in the summer of 2018.

Several of the interviewees discuss their experiences of being a foreigner or a minority in Japan. A couple of the interviewees feel that they can not stay in Japan because of the way Japanese people single them out. For example, one of the interviewees, Alyse, talks about the staring she received because she is a foreigner and how that made her feel as an individual. All of the interviewees discuss how their race affected them in Japan. Brittany perceives that Black is celebrated in Japan. She is thrilled at the fact that Japanese people try to learn more about Black people. Due to their race, several of the interviewees explain the positive treatment they get in Japan. It was marvelous to see a balance. While a few were okay with being in Japan, others expressed, with a smile or a laugh, their love for Japan.

As I watched the documentary, I paid close attention to how the Black women describe their experiences in Japan. They discuss interactions where their race, gender or nationality/ethnicity is the main focal point of an interaction. In a lot of ways, my research expands on what the Black women in the documentary discuss. This research illustrates the various experiences of Black women in Japan and how perception plays a role in an individual's sense of belonging.

When Andre, another interviewee within the documentary, says Japan is a hit or a miss, depending on the experiences a foreigner has, I felt that I found a statement that, in some ways, encapsulates the experiences of Black women in Japan. Japan is a hit or a miss. Depending on the perception that an individual Black woman has of her experience in Japan and how she emotionally responds, Japan can be a paradise, a nightmare or a mixture of both.

This research is designed to give voice to Black women who are currently in or have been to Japan. I want this research to start a discussion about how Black women conceptualize the role their various identities play as they travel to East Asia. As they travel around the world, and live in countries that have a different or non-existent relationship to the Black diaspora, it is important to think about how certain aspects of identities, such as race, gender, and nationality, play a role within the interaction they have with others as well as how they perceive that interaction. In order to understand how Black women conceptualize the role of their various identities, I am exploring how Black women perceive the role of stigma and stereotypes, coming from the American context, in complicating the interactions they have with Japanese individuals and other foreigners. Through understanding the dynamics that stereotypes and stigma bring within an interaction, this research is going to illustrate how Black women conceptualize their sense of community.

In order to understand the experiences of my interviewees, we must talk about the historical context. What was Japan's relationship to Black individuals within the Black diaspora during the 1800s and 1900s? After discussing the history, the next section describes the existing literature that focuses on blackness in Japan and the role of hip hop.

Following the literature review is where I begin discussing my study. I describe the presence of a Facebook group, Black Women in Japan (BWIJ) and how I recruited my participants. Then I describe how my interviewees conceptualize their foreign identity in Japan. I use this subsection to introduce how stigma and tropes/stereotypes play a major role in the interactions that Black women encounter in Japan. I then shift to how my interviewees perceive the interactions they have in their daily life by exploring incidents where Japanese people stare or become frightened of my interviewees. This section predominately illustrates the role of race in the interactions that my interviewees encounter. The next section illuminates the role of gender in the interactions that my interviewees encounter, with the dating subsection discussing how race and gender intersect with each other. The last section is where I discuss how all of the interactions and experiences described in the previous sections affect my interviewees' sense of acceptance in the Japanese and foreign community. I finally conclude this research by addressing how my interviewees felt a sense of empowerment and also with suggestions for further research.

Historical Context

The historical relationship of Africans Americans with Japanese society needs to be explained in order to understand the present dynamic between these two groups. After coming out of isolation in 1853, Japan had to quickly force itself to modernize in order to catch up with the West. Though there were changes that occurred during the Tokugawa period that directly influenced the next period, the Meiji period is known for its reconstruction of Japan. Not only did Japan revamp its political system, a new system that was changing during the end of the

Tokugawa period, but it also reconstructed its national identity (Bellah, 1957; Russell, 1991; Eisenstadt, 1996). Japan's nationhood became what is known today by the consolidation of the feudal domains into prefectures that then became a single territory (Wetherall, 2009, 14).

After creating a national identity, Japan began accomplishing their goal of imperializing other countries, modeling after the West. Not only did Japan adopt aspects of the West's modernity and imperialist tactics, but they also adopted understandings about race and where certain groups fit in the racial hierarchy (Russell, 1991). The existing racial hierarchy in the West has affected the way Japanese people view themselves and how they view others, such as Black and White people. The racial hierarchy was often understood between two polarizing races, which were Black and White. East Asians, such as the Japanese, are believed to fall within the binary, signifying that they are not quite equal to Whites, but not as low as Blacks (Russell, 1991; Lye 2008). Knowing where they belonged was important to Japanese people because they felt behind compared to the rest of the world. This placement enabled them to develop a "comforting national identity" (Hughes, 2003, p. 336).

This national identity enabled Japan to build a strong military under the guise of patriotism. Once their military was strong enough, Japan fought other countries, with one of the goals being to display their strength. The American governmental leaders were shocked when Japan, a non-white country, was able to defeat Russia in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. Russia was also shocked, for they thought that they could easily win against the Japanese who they described as "Monkeys" (Gallicchio, 2000, 6). Some African Americans leaders and scholars were especially happy for Japan. The victory was marked as a signal of a possible chance at tearing down White Supremacy. Several of the African American leaders, such as W.E.B Du

Bois and James Weldon Johnson, thought that non-white races shared a common interest in overthrowing White Supremacy, due to the harm (racism, and imperialism) it has caused to non-white people world-wide (Gallicchio, 2000; Horne, 2008).

One reason African American leaders supported the idea that non-white races should form an alliance is due to the emergence of racial theories that supported white supreority during the pre-WW2 period. These racial theories were used to subjugate non-white individuals (Gallichio, 2000). Thus, when Japan won against Russia, Japan received support from several prominent African American leaders.

Some of America's governmental leaders were also supportive of Japan. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, thought that if Japan was able to "carve out a sphere of influence in Korea and Manchuria, an area of minor economic interest to the United States, it would redirect Japanese expansion away from the western Pacific" (Gallichio, 2000, 13). Japan was then able to continue imperializing different countries in Asia, under the banner of Pan-asianism. This caused Africans American leaders, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, to continue to support Japan because they believed that they could gain lessons from a non-white Japan and saw Pan-asianism as anti-white supremacy (Gallichio, 2000; Horne, 2008; Onishi, 2013).

However, as Japan continued to imperialize nations in the East, Western countries, such as America and Great Britain, became wary of its imperializing power, and sought to reduce it. This angered the Japanese government, who then made it their mission to strike down White Supremacy. The Japanese government did not like the fact that the European powers tried to stop them from imperializing certain countries in Asia while the West still had control over other smaller countries (Gallichio, 2000; Horne, 2008).

The goal of Japan's leaders was to become a world superpower, and become an equal to the Western nations. However, Japanese leaders perceived that the West did not see them as an equal. That was why they were pleased to receive support from prominent African American leaders and disguise their hidden motive under the banner of anti-White Supremacy (Gallichio, 2000; Horne, 2008).

Japan's prominent leaders used America's segregationist laws and the lynching of African American individuals as a way to illustrate America's hypocrisy toward Japan's treatment of its colonies. Japan entered World War II with one of the subgoals of eliminating White Supremacy or, at least, receiving recognition that Japan was equal to the West. After World War II, however, Japan lost the support of African American leaders, who were disheartened by Japan's defeat (Horne, 2008).

When the US occupation of Japan occured, Japan had many Black individuals in the countries who were military. However, there was a large portion of Black men in Japan during this time as compared to Black women, due to the nature of the military's gender make-up. Yasuhiro Okada (2012) has detailed the complex feelings or attitudes that Black women had when they were in Japan after World War II. During the US Occupation Black women were present in Japan because they were the spouses of military men or had some ties to the military. When they came, Black women were unsure of how to interpret their experiences because they were living in ways they had not before (Okada, 2012).

On the one hand, Black women felt empowered. They were accomstomed to facing discrimination, since America was still under segregated laws and Black people were not treated equally. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is the landmark law that made it illegal to discriminate on

the bases on Race, Gender, Religion and National Origin. Yet, in Japan, Black women were able to experience opportunities they would not have in the US. For example, the ability to go places without restrictions, have maids, interact with individuals who were not within their racial group. They were able to have enriching cultural exchanges due to their daily interaction with Japanese people. Black women were able to "define, assert, and perform alternative racial identities, gender roles and class positions to achieve their own empowerment within the 'trans-pacific' boundaries they encountered as 'occupiers'" (Okada, 2012, p. 72).

However on the other hand, some were confused on how to act because the roles had changed for many of them. In particular, since some Black women were maids or servants themselves, especially for White people, having servants themselves confused them on how to treat their Japanese maids. Some Black women were annoyed due to the racial disparities constructed by the exploitation in Japan's labor force. Others admitted to being condescending towards their maids because it allowed them to access a power hierarchy where they were normally at the bottom (Okada, 2012).

However, in Japan, Black women were seen as spectacles because there was a small population of them in comparison to Black men. This made Japanese people more aware of Black women. In turn, Black women became more aware of their skin color and their presence in Japan (hyperawareness). Due to this experience, Black women used the opportunity of being aboard to protest racial discrimination in the United States, yet Okada's article lacks an in-depth explanation of how they did so (Okada, 2012).

Double standards also affected Black women in Japan. The sexual politics during that time hindered Black women from having or pursuing interracial relationships with Japanese

men, even though Black men were encouraged to be with Japanese women. In fact, Black men used Japanese women as the epitome of good female qualities in order to delegitimize Black women as spouses. However, Japanese women often got into relationships with Black men for several reasons, according to the article. One reason was that Black men were more visible in the army due to the high number of them. Another reason is that Japanese women were more likely to be with a foreigner because it allowed them to escape gender roles (Okada, 2011; Okada, 2012).

Relevant Literature

In his recent book and in a presentation here at Bard as part of the the Hannah Arendt Conference on Racism and Anti-Semitism, Thomas Chatterton Williams (2019) stated that in France, he, as a Black man, did not feel racialized. He was not discriminated against due to his race. Instead, he felt that the kind of discrimination he saw in France was based on whether or not an individual was a citizen or not. Regardless of the race of the person, they would be treated differently if they were a foreigner.

This aspect of France that Williams illustrates is similar to the discourse I hear about with regards to Japan. In Japan, individuals will be discriminated against for the very fact that they are not Japanese. This understanding helps to explain a portion of the discrimination that occurs in Japan, but it goes much deeper than the Japanese/non-Japanese binary, especially when it comes to Black people and the concept of Blackness. Much of the literature surrounding Black/Japanese relations is looking at the following elements: Japanese identity in relation to the West, global

racial hierarchy, views about Black people influenced by the West, and the relationship between the Japanese and Black nationals during WWII.

Japanese Attitudes Toward Black and White Skin Colors

According to Hiroshi Wagatsuma, in Japan, Blackness always had a negative symbolism attached to it, as it does in many different countries and cultures. In terms of skin color, Whiteness is a valued trait because it symbolizes beauty, especially for women, but there have been slight changes in what Whiteness and Blackness uphold over the years. Before the Meiji Restoration period (1603-1868), white skin was considered a desired trait for women (Wagatsuma, 1967). However, Whiteness did not stay only a woman's quality. During the beginning of the 19th century, Japanese men also tried to attain Whiteness, in order to appeal to female audiences.

In art, before the Meiji period, Westerners were often depicted with a pale color, or a color that was closer to an actual skin complexion while Japanese women were depicted with a white that was almost ghostly and translucent. Wagatsuma (1967) highlights that the depiction of Black people was almost like a caricature as they were depicted with a blackish-grey color. Japanese artists, during the early point of contact with Westerners, tried to distinguish themselves as well as preserve the beauty of their white skin. The depiction they gave to Black people was influenced by their understanding of Blackness, as well as by the West's racialization of Africans (Wagatsuma, 1967).

Suzuko Morikawa (2001) states that Japan did not have negative stereotypes about Africans who were with the Europeans during the 16th and 17th centuries. Instead, furthering

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Wagatsuma's point, Morikawa claims that Westerners, particularly the Portugese and the Dutch, inscribed negative attitudes about the Africans to the Japanese who went on to internalize them (Morikawa, 2001). However, during the Meiji period, Japanese people tried, more consciously, to imitate the West and its concept of beauty. They idolized the white skin of the Westerners, a shift from the way in which Japanese artists saw themselves in the previous decades. Due to the view that the West was seen as superior, the Japanese disdained the black skin of African Americans. This idolization of the White West continued until the 1930s, during the time Japan was imperializing and tension between Japan and the United States of America was growing.

In regards to Black skin, Wagatsuma argues, Japanese people held negative attitudes about Black people, even during the US Occupation of Japan. Though there were Japanese women who married or had relations with Black soldiers, Black people were not treated equally to White people (Wagatsuma, 1967) Black people's relationship with the Japanese people has been rocky and inconsistent because of the influence of the West. In fact, Japan's national identity "was constructed in the shadow of Western Black-White binarism" (Corynetz, 2015). Japan had to formulate its understanding of itself between the two racial groups; being under "Colored" in comparison to White people, but "Pale" in comparison to Black people (Cornyetz, 2015).

It is important to understand the Japanese quest for a cohesive national identity because how they understand themselves in relation to the West affects how they see other groups of people, like African Americans. World War II and the import of hip hop culture were the two most influential moments that arguably supported a positive outlook of Black people.

Fetishizing Blackness in Hip Hop Culture

Nina Cornyetz (2015) discusses how hip hop culture and Blackness is viewed by young Japanese people today. Hip Hop has become a global phenomenon due to its large fan base, generating a huge profit for major production companies and popular artists. In Japan, not only has the genre gained popularity, but so has the style and mannerisms associated with it. By listening to this genre of music, many Hip-Hop lovers in Japan try to embody or adopt several characteristics associated with the musical genre; from the usage of the N-word to throwing up random gang-like hand gestures, many fans try to mimic their favorite rapper(s). However, it is very important to note that due to the increase in popularity of Hip-Hop culture, and by extension Black culture, this genre of music has become a commodity, an object to be sold for profit. Nina Cornyetz (1994) makes the argument that, as the enjoyment of hip hop and rap increases, Blackness becomes fetishized by the younger Japanese generation for a couple of reasons.

Hip-Hop culture enables young Japanese men to attain a temporary sense of masculinity. This kind of masculinity is in friction with Japan's national masculinity which is drenched in certain expectations of men. Japanese adult men are expected to go into the labor force and become workers who provide for their families, which often means becoming a salaryman and working within a good company. Young Japanese men use Hip-Hop culture as a way to deflect from these gendered societal expectations, even if it is temporary.

According to Nina Cornyetz, because Japan, as a nation, feels that their masculinity is lost, Japanese men use hip hop culture as a way to regain their masculinity. With hip hop culture, they are able to redefine themselves, through the image of Black men, even though they change once they enter the workforce (Cornyetz, 1994). The main reason for that is the perceived phallic

power of Black men. Black men are perceived to have huge phalluses which attracts both young

Japanese men and women. Young Japanese women engage sexually and romantically with Black

men as a way to be passive-aggressive to Japanese men and rebel against society. This is similar

to the Japanese women in the earlier generations who dated Black men in order to protest the

status quo during the US Occupation. Interestingly, Black men would use Japanese women as a

way to punish Black women for being too independent, because they view Japanese women as

docile and better partners than Black women (Okada, 2012).

Hip-hop is fetishized by Japanese men because the genre of music provides them the

opportunity to perform a masculinity they see as cool. This leads to darkening their skin, using

slang and hand signs and doing other stereotypical activities. The use of blackface in Japan has

been about appreciation and desire as opposed to mockery and ridicule within American Black

face (Cornyetz, 1994). Cornyetz, however, does not define fetishization nor does the article make

the linkage between the definition and the actions of the Japanese young people, particularly

young men who emulate Black men.

So, what is fetishization? David Chidester, a scholar of comparative religion

(Juergensmeyer (ed.) 2006), discusses the development of concepts of the word fetish among

early social scientists and evolutionary anthropologists. "Fetish" was an adaptation from a

Portuguese word, used to describe the Africana belief system that enabled African people to put

value in things like bones, rocks, etc. According to the Portuguese, worshipping things that did

not have a trading value was irrational. Due to the fact that African people gave these objects a

mystical element, the Portuguese called the objects *feitico*. So fetish objects were essentially

objects that held magical significance. What the origin highlights is how African people took

objects and made them more than what they were in the eyes of the Portuguese. Objects, such as bones and rocks, had beyond wordly qualities, but not trading value for the Portuguese, who wanted to trade and had an intention of converting African people to Christianity. From the viewpoint of the Portuguese, considering their own belief system, African people's devotion to untradeable objects was irrational.

Though the word fetish developed a sexual connotation, the underlying meaning still remains the same since the first time it was used (having a devotion to an object that is irrational). As we will see, some of the Black women interviewed for this thesis feel as though they are fetishized by some Japanese men or that the fetishization in hip hop enables Japanese people to view them in a sexual way. In other words, Japanese men are perceived to have an irrational interest in Black women which stems from their interest in Hip-Hop. Thus, some perceive that their black body has made them have negative experiences.

The role of Hip Hop is immense within the interactions Black women encounter in Japan. Due to the constant oversexualization or sexual portrayal of Black women in this musical genre, some of the Black women perceive that the encounters they have with men in Japan stems from a generalized and irrational image. Even if they do not perceive an interaction in a negative way, the image that is perpetuated in Hip Hop is in the back of their mind.

<u>My Study</u>

Given this background context, I want to understand how Black women experience their identities today, as they are navigating social life in Japan. I was made aware of a Facebook

group (Black Women in Japan, BWIJ) that is dedicated to the experiences of Black women in Japan, and I decided to use this group as the basis of my study.

In order to understand how Black women perceive Japanese people's perceptions of them, I used the Black women in Japan Facebook group to find my interviewees. I interviewed twenty-two Black women who are living in, or have ties to, Japan. I used Skype, an online resource, to conduct my interviews. The duration of the interviews varied between thirty minutes to one hour and twenty minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, with open-ended questions.

Given the complex legacy of racial markers and identity in Japanese culture and society, I anticipated that my interviewees would describe interactions where their racial or gender identity became salient and stigmatized. I also wondered whether there were times when aspects of their identities were empowering. As I discuss further below, I found both. However, one thing that I realized was that stereotypes about Black people, coming out of U.S. society, history, and culture, weighed heavily in the minds of Black women as they were navigating Japanese society. These stereotypes seemed to contribute to the stigmatization of Black women, as they perceived it in their interactions. Erving Goffman's theory of stigma (1963) helps to explain the fetishization that Black women experience in Japan, particularly when Goffman's theory is supplemented with the theoretical perspectives offered by Patricia Hill Collins (1990).

Facebook Group

The Facebook group called Black Women in Japan (BWIJ) was created on November 14, 2014. The description of the group is as follows: "A friendship group for Black women from

the African continent and diaspora who live in Japan. Ladies from eighteen and up are welcome to chat here about life in Japan and share resources." There are 2,963 members, and 6 administrators for the group. Members post about their experiences in Japan (positive and negative), sell products, ask for advice and engage in other Facebook related activities like sharing videos and memes. The members range in age, occupation and marital status. Not everyone in the group is currently in Japan, but all of them have some relationship with Japan. A small number of members have never been to Japan, but are trying to go soon. I joined the group before I departed to Japan for the first time in the summer of 2018.

There are some members who are Black *hâfus* (a Japanese term for biracial individuals). Some of the members are mothers to *hâfu* children and there some who are married to Japanese men.

The Black Diaspora in Japan

In order to understand the different kinds of identities that are at play when my interviewees engage with Japanese society, it is important to detail the demographics of the Black women interviewed. The majority of the women currently live in an urban environment (15 out of 22). There are five women who live in suburban parts of Japan, and two who live in rural/town areas.

In terms of occupation or reason for being in Japan, the majority of the women are teachers, particularly of English. Two are models, while another two work within a bar/restaurant establishment. There are two women who are in Japan for educational purposes, one who is studying abroad and another who is completing her Master's degree.

In terms of ethnicity, and nationality[1], the majority of the women are from America. Three of the women are ethnically African. One of the ethnically African women was born and raised in the United Kingdom. Five of the Black women are from the Caribbean.

Foreign Identity

Tinesha, Alexandra, Yvette, Valeria and Trisha all agree that that Japan is very xenophobic. Tinesha is a twenty-one year old who was born in America to Nigerian parents. By the time our interview happened, she was already back in America, but she used our conversation as an opportunity to reflect on her experience. Trisha is a twenty-three year old woman who is working in the fashion industry as a freelance model. She lives in Tokyo, but has been to Japan during undergrad for a study abroad opportunity.

According to the interviewees, many Japanese people seem discriminatory towards individuals who are not from Japan. The interviewees expressed, whether indirectly or directly, their perception that Japan's national identity is built on homogeneity in culture and physical characteristics which makes foreigners stand out and sometimes be marked as undesired. Due to this, when they have interactions with Japanese individuals, the interviewees have expressed that they are most aware of their identity as a foreigner.

Alexandra explains that when Japanese people first see her, they notice that she is a foreigner (not Japanese) first. Alexandra is a thirty-three year old American woman who currently lives in Osaka. She has been in Japan for nine years. She created a facebook group that

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[1] Nationality refers to the nation a person is a citizen of. Ethnicity refers to a person's cultural group. An example is that a Black person's nationality could be American, but their ethnicity could be Haitian. This is an important highlight because some of the interviewees' race may cause others to assume their nationality and ethnicity when it may not be accurate. For example, a Black person assumed to be from only America, Jamaica or Africa (Africa is a continent, not a country). Black people are ethnically diverse, and so is our nationhood.

focuses on Black artists and gives them a space where they can exchange resources with each other. She was also featured in a documentary; she talked about her experiences as a Black person in Japan, and continued that discussion with me throughout the interview. She states that her racial identity comes second when Japanese people ask something in relation to her physical or cultural attributes, such as hair or hip hop. Though Alexandra perceives that Japanese people notice she is simply non-Japanese, it is possible that Japanese people may classify her a foreigner because of her race.

Yvette expresses that Japan has an in-vs-out group mentality, automatically othering foreigners within the Japanese society simply because they are not Japanese. Yvette is a thirty-one year old woman who is currently about an hour and a half away from Tokyo. She is from Atlanta, Georgia. Currently, she works at an Eikaiwa. She was my first interviewee to identify as queer.

Foreigners are not members of a larger cultural apparatus. To elaborate, what it means to be Japanese is internally understood within the consciousness of the Japanese. Foreigners do not have that access, no matter how much they try to assimilate, because they are fundamentally different from the rest of the population. To conceptualize their experience, some of them perceive the foreignness is coming before the type of foreigner they are. They perceive that by not being Japanese, they are constantly singled out and othered. Though this feeling of not belonging exists in the mindsets of other interviewees, only a select few believe that they felt that they were othered due to Japan's xenophobia or simply because their physical attributes are different.

Though Henrietta does not mention xenophobia specifically she states that she is most aware of her foreign identity. Henrietta is a twenty-six year old American who is currently in Tokyo. She is a part of the JET program, working as a High School English Teacher for 3 years. When she first came to Japan, she was excited to be in the country, but over time, her perception of Japan shifted. This is due to a culmination of experiences she has undergone in Japan. Part of her experience involves Japanese individuals calling out the fact that she is a foreigner. When she was in the rural places, she often heard people say "*Ah, gaijin. Gaijin-san"* (Japanese word for foreigner) more so than when she is in Tokyo. Being called out has made her aware of her foreignness.

However, there are two phenomena happening at the same time. On the one hand, Japan's xenophobia to those who are not Japanese. On the other hand, several of the other interviewees mentioned that Japanese people have a preference for certain kinds of foreigners. Though, historically, Japan has had a peculiar relationship with the West, the interviewees expressed that White Westerners, or lighter skinned foreigners, are generally more accepted than other kinds of foreigners. Japanese people's interest in hip hop, which generates an interest in Black people, complicates what the interviewees describe about Japan's treatment of them.

When asked about the presence of Black people in media or in advertisements, all of the interviewees state that they only see themselves represented in foreign brands, but even that is limited. Japanese people, particularly women, and White foreigners are what they see. When they see a *hâfu* - a mixed Japanese child (similar to the term biracial) - they normally see a lighter skinned, more ambiguous individual. According to some of the interviewees, the only

reason why people like Rui Murakami, and Naomi Osaka, two Black *hâfu* who are famous

Japanese athletes, is because of the success and recognition they are bringing to Japan.

However, several of the interviewees express that their blackness is being ignored in

order for the Japanese society to accept them. Valeria and Cassandra claim that foreigners as a

whole are not liked and welcomed fully by the entire country, but if an individual is lighter

skinned, they typically will have a better experience.

Valeria is a twenty-five year old woman from Barbados. She is a student in a Master's

program in Hokkaido. She is currently not working due to her focusing on her studies. Cassandra

is a thirty-five year old American woman living in the Nagasaki prefecture. She used to live in

South Korea due to being in the military. Due to being of lighter skin, they both explain that they

have a better experience in Japan as compared to individuals who are darker skinned.

Teanna expresses a similar point, stating that Black women are treated like men,

specifically women who are dark-skinned. Dark skinned women are typically seen as more

aggressive, thus Japanese individuals are rough with them[2]. The type of Black woman that is

known to Japanese people are of darker complexion than women like Cassandra. Teanna is a

thirty-six year old woman, who is from America, currently living in Saitama. She has been

coming and going to and from Japan for seven years. She works as a technical recruiter.

What this particular finding illustrates is the possible role of stigma in creating a

separation within the foreign community in terms of the likelihood of being accepted.

Dark-skinned individuals, dark-skinned Black people, tend to be stigmatized as dirty, criminals

and violent in American society, and due to the media, this image circulates in Japan. If this type

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[2] Being "rougher" meant being treated like a guy friend. Thus, Black women, especially those who are of
dark-skinned, are not treated how "a woman should be treated".

of stigmatization is in the consciousness of some of the interviewees, then when they have interactions with Japanese individuals, stigmatization could influence the kind of meaning they extrapolate. That meaning then, in turn, influences how they perceive their ability to be accepted within the larger cultural apparatus.

Goffman's theory on stigma argues that an individual is stigmatized if they possess a trait that others deem undesirable. Stigmatization can occur later in one's life or an individual can be born with a stigmatized trait (Goffman, 1963). The black body is stigmatized in America due to historical circumstances that made the black body unfavorable. Black people face collective stigma, which means as a group, they face stigmatization due to their racial identity . This is one of the types of stigmas that individuals are born into. Black women, due to being a part of the racial group, face stigmatization, which is perpetuated by the negative stereotypes (e.g., hypersexuality). By being a part of a racial group that has been stigmatized due to slavery and race relations, Black women may interpret situations through stigmatized language[3], because that is a part of their consciousness. The experiences of being stigmatized in America, also inform Black women's perceptions and interpretations of interactions with others, including in foreign countries.

Black women's perception is key in understanding how their identity affects their experiences. As I discuss further below, in certain interactions, stigmatization can become apparent to interviewees, based on how Japanese people seem to respond to Black women. A common scenario described by my interviewees is one where they perceive a Japanese individual

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[3] Many of the interviewees did not use the word stigma, even though some of the situations pointed to stigmatization.

is scared of them. Here, stigmatization has caused the racial identity to become salient and hypervisual due to how the Japanese individual reacts to them.

Sara Baartman, one of two South African women who were exhibited around as a freak show attraction due to having large buttocks during the early 19th century, is a perfect example of how a Black woman's body has been hypervisual, and constantly on display. Stigma follows an individual whether they like it or not, and Patricia Hill Collins illustrates the role of media in producing stereotypes that continue to perpetuate stigmatization. Patricia Hill Collins, a leader in Black Feminist Thought, discusses how controlling images of Black women work to keep them subordinate within American society (Collins, 1990). She has pointed out the ways in which stereotypical images of Black women have been generated from America's racialized history. For this thesis, controlling images will be understood as stereotypes or tropes, and will remain that way for the rest of the paper. In their own way, these stereotypes elicit a particular image of Black women that oversexualizes or others them. In some cases, these stereotypes also force the Black woman to assume roles, such as educator, either for the benefit of the other (i.e., Japanese people) or for their own benefit. The symbolic role, as in not a role within an occupation, of the Black women occurs when a stereotype or trope is perceived to be the foundation for an interaction forcing the interviewee to either reject it (by assuming the role of teacher to educate) or ignore it.

Tropes, such as the "jezebel", which is, as described by Collins (1990), a woman who is sexually available, serve as a useful function within the imagination of the other. Within the dating experiences of the Black women, the stereotype that Black women are sexually promiscuous serves within the fantasies of the Japanese men who are interested in Hip-Hop

culture. Meaning, Japanese men's interest in Black women stems from a larger interest in participating within hip hop culture. Due to this, Black women function as a role within the mindset of these men, which then influences the interaction that takes place. For the interviewees, how they perceive or define the situation also indicates how they are able to respond.

For this paper, stigma is more in the backdrop. To elaborate, due to the effects of tribal stigma, stigmatization had played a role in the consciousness of some of the interviewees, influencing how they responded. However, the interviewees do not necessarily specify stigmatization as a part of their interpretation of the situation. Within some of the interactions, such as staring, the interviewees are unclear on what the true perception the Japanese individual have of them. Due to their own knowledge of Japanese individuals, the interviewees define the situation in a particular way, but they recognize that it could be otherwise.

Stigma, from America, is attached to some of the stereotypes that then get transported to Japan, which is then consumed by Japanese individuals. This affects how some of the Black women perceive they are being treated in a particular situation. Stereotypes prove to have an enormous role in this paper, because many of the experiences that the interviewees underwent featured a stereotype. Entertainment and social media platforms play a role in the spread of stereotypes that other and/or objectify Black women. Hip Hop Culture, in particular, plays a major role in reinforcing several kinds of stereotypes, which are then shared with other countries, through online platforms. Due to the easy transmission of these kinds of stereotypes, Japanese consumers, who are engaging with hip hop and other media, do not have the opportunity to learn about Black women outside of that context. This creates interactions where Black women

struggle to figure out how to properly respond. Sometimes, some of the Black women assume the role of the teacher, while others choose to ignore it. Symbolic interactionism helps to tease apart these experiences and responses in order to illustrate the nuances within the Black women's experiences.

National Identity Outside of America

According to several of the Black women, Japanese individuals often assume that a Black person is from America. This assumption, according to the Black women, influences Japanese individuals to use hip hop as a way to relate to Black people. There are two assumptions at play, that most of the Black people they would encounter are from America, and that all Black individuals participate in Hip Hop culture. Due to this, they are often shocked when the interviewees correct them of their national origin. Some of the interviewees felt that, when they make it known that they are not American, they are given a new set of stereotypes or misconceptions, if Japanese people have any relation to that particular nationality. This particular kind of interaction affects the sense of belonging of several of the Black women who are from the Caribbean or from Africa.

Viera and Gabrielle describe that Japanese people have misconceptions about their own nationalities. Viera is a twenty-eight year old woman who currently lives in Tokyo. She lived in Japan for ten years. Her nationality is Senegalese, and she is super proud of it. She is saddened by the fact that she is not able to meet other individuals who are Senegalese in Japan.

Due to her being the only Black woman where she lived for the first three years of being in Japan, Viera feels like an outsider. Japanese individuals who do engage with her assumes she is American. When she makes it known that her nationality is Senegalese, she notices a shift in

how they act towards her. According to Viera, this reaction of the Japanese people who she is engaging with is attributed to the misconceptions of Africa as a whole. Though she does not describe a particular interaction to illustrate the Japanese individual's reaction, her perception in the interactions is key because it identifies how she is interpreting her belonging in the community. Due to the stigma attached to Africa, she assumes the role of an ambassador of an entire continent in order to correct those misconceptions, even though she is more knowledgeable about her nation, Senegal. However, despite her efforts, she still feels othered, making her feel like she did not belong.

The Caribbean is less known to the Japanese than Africa and America. Out of the entire Caribbean, Jamaica is the most known due to Reggae. Due to this, Gabrielle experiences Japanese individuals attributing stereotypes of Jamaicans to her. Gabrielle is a thirty-two year old Jamaican woman who lives in Tokyo. She also works at an Eikaiwa, teaching English and has been in Japan for five years and a few months.

According to her, the stereotypes about Jamaicans tend to be things like they run fast, and are good at dancing. She believes that this is in part due to Japanese people watching T.V. that misrepresents or over generalize her culture. She notices the friendships she was able to create with Japanese people were built primarily on their interest in her culture.

Gabrielle's experience is an example of Valeria's point which was that Japanese individuals can be superficial. To elaborate, Japanese individuals are perceived to only be interested in an Black individual due the stereotypes that are attributed to them. Due to her perception that the interactions they have with her are on a superficial level, Gabrielle states she does not have any true Japanese friends. Her community is with the Black community, especially

the Black Women in Japan Facebook group, who have helped her to feel less alienated. According to her, her national identity as a Jamaican prompts Japanese, men specifically, to only interact with her due to their interest in the country. To her, Japanese men, who are interested in Jamaica, do not go beyond the superficial level, even when they were able to actually visit the country. Instead, they imitate a few caricatures of the culture that seems fun and exciting.

What do the experiences of Gabrielle and Viera tell us? They illustrate three parts within the cycle of interactions. The first part is that misconceptions, and stereotypes play a role in how Japanese individuals interact with Black people. The second part is that the interviewees perceive those interactions in relation to their identity. The third and final part is that their perception affects their sense of belonging within the community around them. Each of the interviewees perceive similar situations differently, resulting in a difference in their own conception of belonging. The misconceptions of Jamaica and the stigmatization of Africa is a key element in the interactions, because on the one hand, they influence the reason for why and how the Japanese people interact with the interviewees. On the other hand, the stigma and the misconceptions force the interviewees to understand themselves in relation to the image that Japanese people have of them by, for example, rejecting the stigma or the stereotypes.

How the interviewees, such as Gabrielle and Viera, perceive the reason behind the interactions allows them to interpret the Japanese willingness to accept them within their community. The extra layer that is revealed is how interviewees who are neither American or African, fit within this notion of acceptance. Meaning, how does the national or ethnic identity part of the interviewee's self concept affect the ability of the interviewee to find a sense of belonging within the Japanese society? Due to the Black diaspora, not all Black individuals are

from America or Africa, but the misconception in Japan does not acknowledge that. Thus, the interactions that some of the interviewees experiences was predicated on ignorance on the part of the Japanese interviewees. To be clear, the interviewees are not trying to be Japanese, but they are trying to reject the othering that they experience in Japan. The stigma or stereotype associated with their national/ethnic identity affects the way the interviewees navigate Japan and the interactions they come across in the future.

Perception on the Role of Race in Black Women's Interactions

Based on symbolic interactionism, the development and sustaining one's own sense of self is influenced by the interactions with and reactions of others. Understanding the performance of identity, will be, according to this line of theory, influenced by the reactions one receives from others. Traditionally, symbolic interactionism is often used to understand how an individual successfully performs their role in a given situation. However, an enormous aspect of symbolic interactionism is how an individual extracts meaning within an interaction.

Symbolic interactionism helps us to understand how Black women derive meaning from their interactions they have with Japanese individuals and other foreigners. Through these interactions, aspects of the Black women's identity (e.g., race, gender, and nationality) becomes salient due to the perceptions that the individual has of the situation. Another layer to some of the experiences of Black women is how these interactions provoke them into assuming or rejecting a symbolic role. Black women are constantly grappling with social stigma and racial/gender stereotypes in Japan. This research will illustrate how their perception influences their experience given the stigmatization and stereotypes they face.

The Black women I interviewed described their identity either in categories (such as Black, Woman, American) or in narrative form[4]. Their responses to identity-related questions varied, based on the kinds of experiences they had as an individual. Interpreting their own experiences from the past has influenced how they identify, but just as important are the variety of interactions they have engaged in during their time in Japan. The verbal and nonverbal interactions that the interviewees experienced made certain identities more salient for the Black women. Depending on the way the Black woman defines the situation that she is in, she may interpret the situation differently from other Black women. This interpretation will affect how this interaction affects the individual's sense of self.

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1986) is a theoretical framework that has proved useful as a way to understand the formation of identity. Symbolic interactionism, stemming partly from the thinking of George Herbert Mead, is about how individuals understand self through the interactions they have with others, through the means of symbols. As identity theory was expanded, symbolic interactionism was used to illustrate how the interactions affected an individual's understanding of self. An important way in which symbolic interactionism has been drawn upon by scholars of identity features analysis on the basis of roles. Through roles such as teacher or president, symbolic interactionism enables identity theorists to conceptualize the process of identity formation and internalization.

Following after Mead, Cooley illustrated the importance of others, through what he calls the Looking-Glass Self (Cooley, 1902). The role of the other is to give the individual appraisals or essentially feedback. The role of the feedback from the other is to inform the individual of

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[4] Narrative form as in "I am me".

how to act, enabling the individual to change their behavior. Others enable the individual to learn about themselves through appraisals (Cooley 1902, Gecas, 1982; Peacock and Greene, 2007). How an individual perceives the feedback of others influences how they change their behavior (Kaufman and Johnson, 2004). In other words, individuals would act in ways they thought would bring a positive reaction from others. If an individual does not receive a good reaction, they would learn that their behavior was not appropriate and would not repeat the action again (Kaufman and Johnson, 2004; Cooley 1902: Goffman, 1959).

Self-Concept is about the organization of self that develops through the interactions between an individual and others, and the responses from others to the individual (Gecas, 1982; Thotis, 1992). Part of the self-concept is stemming from the individuals internalized understanding of the position/role they are occupying or performing. Gecas explained that an individual has a core identity that carries different identities across situations while allowing certain identities to be salient, depending on the situation (Gecas, 1982). Symbolic interactionism is used to understand how the derived meaning within an interaction affects the individual's self-concept.

Identities that are based on attributes of an individual, like race, gender or nationality, are not of concern within the traditional line of Identity theory, and thus symbolic interactionism was often used only within the context of roles (Gecas, 1982). However, critical race theories, gender theories and other theories that are predicated on attributes of the individual have since critiqued the limitation of Identity theory. For this research, I will illustrate a different aspect of the concept of "roles", using Patricia Hill Collins to help conceptualize how roles are often attributed to Black women.

This brings the question: does the stereotypes of Black women and the role they play within these interactions change the definition of the situation, or does the definition of the situation stay the same, but the response/interpretation of the meaning of the action changes?

Stigmatization and Othering in Daily Interactions

<u>*Staring*</u>

The following three experiences provide three possible ways the interviewees had conceptualized the staring they received. Not all of them experienced staring or at least they did not disclose so, if they did. The ones that did perceived it similarly to the three women highlighted in this section.

Cari is a thirty year American woman who currently lives in a small town in Narita, Japan. She is a English teacher by day, a bartender by night. She came to Japan in 2015, after a friend had presented to her an option of teaching English in Japan. She lived in Mie prefecture and Aichi prefecture before settling in her current location in Narita prefecture. When describing her ability to form a community in the prefectures she was in, before Narita, Cari had lit up when talked about her time in Aichi prefecture and how it is similar to her current experience in Narita.

In Mie prefecture, Cari lived in Ise, a city, as she described, that was in the middle of nowhere. She states, "When I moved there, I think, I am pretty sure, I was the only Black person in the entire city", she says with a little chuckle. "To the point where I am walking around, and I am getting stared at. Like people would stop and stare. Stop everything that they are doing. A few times, I almost caused car accidents by existing on the corner, waiting for the light to change." Being stared at is something Cari has to learn to get used to, just like the other

interviewees who experience the same thing. Even though she had moved to other prefectures that are used to or open to foreigners, she is still stared at. "Black people, we are unicorns, we are literally unicorns", she says with a smile and small shrug.

Cari perceives that she is stared at due to her Black skin. This is clear when she guesses that she is the only Black person in the entire city, simple because she can not find another Black individual. The fact that she is conscious of the fact that she may have been the only Black person in Ise helps her identify the interaction through a racial lens. Though she does not specify a reason for why her Blackness encourages staring, her definition did not change when the location of the interaction changed. To elaborate, when she receives stares in the trains in Narita, her new location, her past experiences in Mie prefecture helps her define the interactions as a Japanese individual staring at her due to her Black skin. Due to the consistency of these interactions, Cari learns to become used to it, no longer allowing the staring to affect her. It is to the point that no matter what she does, her racial identity will elicit a response from Japanese people that is undesirable and there is nothing she could do to change it, besides accept or ignore it.

For Cassandra, the staring has made her feel alienated from the rest of the Japanese community in the small city she lives in. "Do I feel a part of the Japanese community? Absolutely not. That is apparent on a daily basis...as far as simple tasks, like... going to the store, and things like that, it is still the same thing on a daily basis as far as just the staring. Which you get used to after a while, but you still have days where it is just like...you just don't feel like being looked at as an alien, pretty much. I mean that is the best way I can describe it, but long story short, no, not really. I am reminded on a very consistent basis that this is not my home."

Cassandra's perception identifies the interactions as a Japanese individual staring at a foreigner. Thus, she is most aware of her identity as a foreigner in Japan. Cassandra's perception is influenced by past conversations she has with Japanese individuals, who are learning English, about how they view her. Due to being phenotypically different from a stereotypical Black person, she thinks she is not being stared because she is Black. By having a lighter complexion and lighter eyes, she believes that she does not fit the image that Japanese people have of an Black person. Due to the idea that Black people have darker skin and darker eyes, when she is being stared in the stores, her interpretation of the situation is different from Cari. This leads her to assume the role of educator as a response to the staring. When she is able, Cassandra uses this opportunity to educate Japanese people on the different ways Black people can look like in order to dismantle the monolith, one dimensional view they have of Black individuals. Her presentation of herself does not match what Japanese people imagine a Black person to be. Cassandra is aware that she can not phenotypically do anything about that, nor does she wants to, which is why assuming the symbolic role of an educator is important to her. Her identity as a Black person is strong-rooted, though it is not salient for her during these interactions.

Just like Cassandra and Cari, Alexandra and Denise also experienced staring in their daily life. However, Alexandra and Denise have a similar perspective as Cassandra; they define the staring as a Japanese individual staring at a foreigner, not a Black person. When Alexandra first came to Japan about nine years ago, she perceived the staring she received from Japanese people was due to her Black aspect of her self concept. However, her perception has changed. "It was just because I am foreign, and being Black is like second...because Japanese people stare at anything different. If you are just not Japanese, that is just their culture, they are just either gonna

stare or be curious and ask questions." Denise, who has been in Japan for two and half years, has

a similar perception on the staring. She states that Japanese people are star-struck when they see

foreigners, because foreigners are less common. Thus, she perceives the staring as a result of her

being different. When she notices Japanese people staring at her, her foreign aspect of her

identity is made salient.

For both Alexandra and Denise, it is not that their race is less important. Instead, their

non-Japaneseness is what is first noticed, then what their racial category is noticed is noticed

second. Even though their identity as a foreigner is salient for both of them, their respective

situations influenced how they conceptualized the reason for being stared at. Though their racial

identity is important, they are reinterpreting the situation based on the local context. Alexandra's

definition of the situation is predicated on her understanding that Japanese people are

discriminatory towards anyone who is not Japanese. On the other hand, Denise's definition of the

situation is predicated on her observation of the lack of foreigners around where she lives in

Japan.

For Alexandra, Cassandra and Denise, the interaction is the same (being stared at), so is

their definition of the situation. What is different is the rationale or how they arrived at their

perception. Their varied interpretations illustrate that even though they are experiencing the same

interaction, and perceiving it the same way, their rationale, that is based on observation of their

surroundings, is different from one another. Cari's definition of the situation, in contrast, is

different from Alexandra, Cassandra, and Denise, because it is predicated on racial difference.

Cari's racial identity is made salient due to her observation of the lack of Black foreigners. Cari's

awareness of being the only Black individual in her town is different from Denise's observation, which is predicated on the lack of foreigners in general.

These experiences illuminate how perception plays a role in how the individual interviewees interpret situations such as staring. These experiences illustrate how important both rationale, even if the feeling of being othered is the same. The interpretation differences illustrate how they conceptualize what identity is affecting them in a particular situation or interaction. Even if the feeling of isolation is the same, the interpretation influences how they see what part of their identity is significant, which in turn influences how they conceptualize their experience or their understanding of Japanese people. For example, Alexandra's interpretation illustrates Japanese people's prejudice towards foreigners though a nationalistic lens, while Cassandra's interpretation illustrates how Black people are seen phenotypically as one way. All four of the Black women learned to get used to the staring, due the fact that it is a regular occurence.

Fear

The following three Black women explained experiences where Japanese people were fearful of them. They provide two possible ways situations where interviewees were the object of fear; in school or on the street.

Nicki describes experiences where old Japanese ladies are scared of her. "I think some of them watch too much T.V. And so, they might think we are ghetto, or something, you know what I mean? Or they might be scared of us. Like sometimes, old ladies wanna, like, clutch their purse or like, walk in another direction. Or they don't want to sit next to us on the train. That is very common; not wanting to sit next to us on the train." For Nicki, she perceives that her race causes

Japanese people to be fearful of her. Her rationale for why the racial aspect of her self-concept is due to the role media has in perpetuating negative stereotypes of Black people. Nicki's perception is that the Japanese people are consuming T.V. that is perpetuating a negative stereotype of Black people, such as they are ghetto and violent, making Japanese people perceive all Black people as dangerous. Nicki's perception on these encounters illustrates the impact of stereotypes, that mostly stem from America, has not only on the Japanese individual, but also on Black people. Due to the pervasiveness of these tropes of Black people, Nicki defines the situation as a Japanese individual fearing her due to tropes attributed to her race. Thus, the racial aspect of her self-concept becomes salient.

Kayla and Samara have experiences where children were moved away from their direction by their parents. When Kayla lived in the countryside, she had an experience where a mother had yanked her son away when they had seen her. Usually, children would cry when they see her, but in this particular situation a mother had physically moved her son away from her. Samara had been in similar encounters where parents would distance their children away from her. Similar to Nicki, both Kayla and Samara have perceived the fear is a result of the media portraying Black people as criminals. Regardless of which trope it is (either criminal or ghetto), the awareness of the pervasiveness of these negative images of Black people influences how these Black women perceive the interactions between them and the parents and how they define the situation. They understand that the role of these stereotypes is to induce fear of Black people. According to the perception of the interactions that the interviewees had experienced, these tropes have succeeded in scaring Japanese people. Thus, when they saw parents "trying to protect" their children, their immediate definition of the situation is predicated on a perception

that the parents saw them as a criminal. They learn to accept this, because there was really nothing they could do when these interactions happen.

As supposed to adults, Gabrielle's experience children fearing her. When she first starts teaching a class, the children would often show her fear; they would not talk to her or get near her. She had to work hard to get them to warm to her. However, Gabrielle perceives two possible reasons for why the children feared her. Either the children are fearful of her because she is Black, or because she is a non-Japanese person. She can not tell, because unlike the other interviewee mentioned, she is not from America. She is from Jamaica which is more ethnically homogeneous compared to America. Her concept of race and racism is developed differently from those who are from America due to the limited way race played a role in her daily life in Jamaica. Due to this, she is more conflicted about which aspect of her self-concept (race or foreigner) is causing the fear within the children. It is very possible that it is a mixture of both. Though she perceives the racial aspect of her self-concept to be more salient in her experience in Japan, her definition of this situation, she concludes, may not include race. Due to her role as a teacher, she does try to calm her students, so that they do not see her as a scary person. Though she is uncertain about what induced the fear, she still tries to be good as a teacher. What may be clear to others, is not clear to her partly because her preconceived notions of race are not the same as others.

All of the interviewees illustrate not only the role of tropes, but also how perception is implicated by the environment they are currently in or where they came from. It was difficult for Gabrielle to specify which aspect of her self-concept was salient in the interactions where the children were fearful of her because she perceived there could be different possibilities.

However, Nicki, Samara and Kayla did not experience difficulty perceiving Japanese people were fearful of the racial aspect of their self-concept. Gabrielle is in a unique position as compared to the other interviewees. She needs to reduce the fear that her students have of her if she wants to continue working as a teacher. For the other interviewees, that is not an option because they can not influence how strangers feel about them and there is no need to due to the brevity of these interactions.

These interactions illustrate how Black women conceptualize the role of race within their time in Japan. Their experiences show the possible types of encounters that Black women may encounter as they participate in interactional travel. Though each Black woman who travels, especially to countries in East Asia, would perceive interactions differently, they may encounter experiences that perpetuates racial stigma, influenced by stereotypes. How they handle the situation is up to the individual Black women. The next section will discuss how the interviewees perceive the role of gender, and how gender and race intersect, in specific interactions they have Japanese individuals and other foreigners.

Perceptions on the Role of Gender in Black Women's Interactions

This section will bring gender more in the forefront. The previous section center race and "non-Japaneseness" because the interviewees who experienced staring and fear perceived encounters occurred due to their race. However, there are other experiences that the interviewees had encountered that either centered gender or their race and gender intersected. This section will first describe the experiences where the interviewees felt that the gender aspect of their self-concept was more salient due others' gender expectations. The second part of this section

will highlight the dating experiences that have a combination of the race and gender aspects of the interviewee's self concept.

Expectations of Gender

As illustrated in the several sections prior, gender is important in shaping the experiences of the interviewees. The saliency of gender is dependent on how the Black women identify the situation and the behavior, or the response, of the other. In the previous sections, race, nationality or them intersecting with gender was how the interviewees understood the situation. But, this section illustrates when gender was perceived to be the most salient and influential aspect of their identity in a certain situation. Some of the comments on womanhood were not tied to a particular interaction, but an observation that the interviewees did; they contrasted the treatment of men around them to how they were treated and perceived that the difference in treatment was due to gender. Other individuals had encounters with others who specifically informed them that their gender inhibits them from doing something. Due to those kinds of interactions, the definition of the situation for the interviewees were altered. Altered meaning that it changed from a neutral situation to a situation that is gendered through the perception of the interviewees.

Yvette illustrates how their observations and perceptions have produced saliency in gender. Yvette has made observations of their environments and the way in which Japanese individuals interact with their male counterparts. Yvette states that at work, men and women are not treated the same way. She explains that women are typically seen as better caretakers, thus Yvette tends to be given younger classes. In contrast, her fellow male teachers are given older students. Yvette's perception of gender has an influence in her job because it dictates to her what

her boss thinks about her capability. Yvette's perception of her boss's mentality is what made her gender salient within this interaction. By comparing the kinds of students she got versus her male counterparts altered her definition of the situation. Though she is a teacher, just like her male counterparts, her gender, an aspect of her self-concept, influenced the role she played in the school. Due to this, her gender identity became salient. Though she is performing a role (a teacher), the role becomes qualified by her gender; she is not just a teacher, but a female teacher.

Another way that the interviewees perceived that their gender had affected them in Japan was being told they could not do something due to being a woman. Amber and Kayla have examples of this kind of interaction. Amber often gets men telling her that she can not lift something, even though she works out constantly. According to Amber, this is an example of the very light misogyny she gets, as compared to her best friend who is a White petite woman. What Amber means is that her Best friend fits the standards of a Japanese woman due to her small stature, but is still considered exotic by a foreigner. Why that causes Amber's best friend to get more of the blatant misogyny is unclear. However, Amber is somehow exempt for that. She defines those encounters as "pretty mild, run of the mill, casual, diet-like" misogyny because she perceives them not to be blatant or aggressive. By comparing, Amber's perception makes these kinds of interactions less aggressive. So, though the gender aspect of her self-concept is made salient, it does not affect her as it would other women. Though it may be annoying because Japanese individuals, possibly men, would inform her she is incapable of doing something due to her gender, she is able to handle them and shrug it off. Due to the visibility of her gender, she is unable to escape these kinds of misogyny. She is unable to escape the pressures of gender

expectations for women, but due to the lack of aggressiveness in the misogyny that she receives, she does not have to perform her gender differently then how she is used to.

Kayla used to live on a navy base, and the Japanese locales were used to it, and thus her. But since she recently moved to a new location where the local Japanese people are not used to her. One type of interaction she constantly gets is of Japanese individuals questioning her femininity. She often experienced encounters with Japanese individuals telling her that she can not do something because she was a woman. She went on to describe that Japanese women, from her perception, aim to get married and stop working. Due to this, Kayla perceives Japanese women's femininity is different from her because she can't live up to that kind of standard. This is how she defines the situation with Japanese people who question her version of femininity. Kayla's discussion on these kinds of interactions illustrates how difference in cultures makes a particular identity salient, and how that then may not affect her sense of self. She is engaging with individuals who have a different sense of their self-concept then her. Due to this, her gender identity becomes more salient, since it is the topic of discussion. Kayla is comfortable in her femininity, and so regardless of the feedback of Japanese individuals who are shocked about how she displays her femininity (the feedback of the others), Kayla does not think about changing it. She is not Japanese, thus does feel the same cultural pressures to be a certain kind of woman. Kayla's interactions illustrate that the gender aspect of her self-concept is constantly on display to be critiqued by other Japanese individuals.

Dating

The dating experiences of foreigners can highlight the complexities of the social dynamics, both positive and negative, that are at play within the new country. Social dynamics enables Black women to understand their positionality within the society and how that positionality, in comparison to other immigrant groups, affects their understanding self and the country's citizens.

10 of the interviewees actually had dating experience, a mixture that was good and bad. Their experience varied, as well as how they perceived their experiences. Not all of the Black women had dated Japanese men. Some of them dated foreign men, particularly Black men. Though there were 10 women who had dating experience, many of the interviewees had an opinion on the dating scene based on their perception and observation of how other foreigners were treated. There are several interviewees who are in a committed relationship, either with a Japanese individual or a foreigner. This section will highlight the common trends and the complexities that Black women face while trying to date in Japan. In addition, this section will illustrate how race and gender intersect each other within the various experiences of dating. The voices of the Black women who had dated and did not date will be discussed.

Jezebel

Shannel is a twenty-seven year old woman from America who lives in Hokkaido, working as a teacher at an English conversation school. She states that there are Japanese men who are mesmerized when they see a Black woman. She claims that Japanese men love foreign women, but especially Black women. When she is alone, Japanese men flock to her. Shannel says, "Sometimes, you walk in places and like, you see the way guys look at you and it is like

you are the most beautiful woman in the room. And it's like... I've been cute, but I've never been like jaw dropping, I stop what I'm saying, I drop things on the floor, beautiful until I went to Japan". Shannel perceives that she is treated in a special way due to racial identity. Due to her being Black, men would often spend money on her, especially at the bar. Though she enjoys the attention, Shannel perceives that the Japanese men had no real interest in dating her to get to know her. Instead, they see Black women as beautiful models to be paraded around like a trophy. Thus, when a Japanese man approaches her, she defines the interaction as a Japanese man trying to date her to seem cool.

Another reason for why Japanese men are interested in Black women is predicated on the stereotypes they believe. According to Madison, Teanna, Cassandra, and Samara, Japanese men hypersexualize Black women due to the Jezebel trope or the image of Black women that is perpetuated in hip-hop culture. The interviewees perceive that Japanese men are interested in them because of the stereotype that Black women are more sexually promiscuous than other foreign men.

Madison is a thirty-one year old American woman who is currently living in Osaka. She works as a Kindergarten teacher in an international school. She lived in Japan for 2 years. Both Madison and Teanna of them had experienced Japanese men interacting with them with an assumption that because they were black, they were sexually free.

Though she is not entirely sure, Madison compares her experiences with her White friends, who, she discerns, do not experience the same things like her. She felt that her racial and national aspect of identity (Black, and American) and her large chest attracts Japanese men in ways that make it harder for her to date. She perceived that Japanese men were not interested in

dating her for her. Instead, they were dating her based on the assumption that she was sexually free. Thus, due to how she defines the interactions between her and a Japanese man, she is discouraged from dating.

Teanna and Cassandra have a similar mindset. They stated, in their own way, that the Jezebel trope is attributed to all foreign women. Cassandra specified that the trope is attributed to American women, as opposed to women who are simply not Japanese. Teanna perceives that Asian men like to skip steps because they are not obligated to treat foreign women the same way they would have to treat Asian women. Due to the Jezebel image, Japanese men try to get to the physical stage faster.

However, in regards to Black women, the Jezebel trope is stemming from the limited exposure Japanese men have about Black women. Thus, Black women are perceived to be more promiscuous than other foriegn women. Due to this perception, Teanna encountered incidents where people did not believe that she was Ace, which is an individual who does not have an interest in sex. Due to her race, Black women are seen as sexually promiscuous, and thus warrants less respect then other women. Similar to Madison, Cassandra and Teanna had been discouraged from dating in Japan.

Unlike the other interviewees, Samara tried online dating, but she had to stop, because Japanese men saw her in only a sexual way, based on the images that are portrayed in hip hop. The first messages she got from men were: "What's your cup size?", "Oh, I want to have sex with you". Sometimes she gets men who ask her if she enjoys sex or giving blowjobs. Though she heard that other foreign women receive these kinds of messages, she perceives that the reason why she is getting them, specifically, is because of the racial aspect of her racial identity. Thus,

she thinks her Black identity becomes salient, because that is what attracts the Japanese men towards. In fact, her racial identity is intersecting with her gender identity, just like the other interviewees, making both of her identities salient. When she gets messages, such as ones listed above, she feels like a sex object, or fetishized. These messages are the reason for her no longer participating in online dating, or dating in general.

Yvette, who is Queer, have similar experiences where her Blackness was seen as fascinating by the Japanese women she interactes with. For Yvette, she perceives these experiences as weird. For example, she often got phrases such as, "Wow, you are Black" and "Never had a Black friend, this is cool". Yvette questions why these interactions happened. "They (Japanese women) are acting like, because I am Black, it is an odd thing". As she said this, Yvette's hand gestures suggest that her Blackness is considered almost outworldly, or majestical by Japanese women. Due to this, Yvette notices that the Japanese women are very enthusiastic to meet her. The curiosity that Japanese people have of Black women does not stem from a willingness to learn the essence or characteristics of this foreign group, as mentioned by many interviewees. Instead, the curiosity stems from Japanese people's perceived understanding, or fetishizing of Black women's sexuality or coolness, connecting them to a larger stereotypical Black culture. Amber, another Queer woman, claims that it would have be difficult if she try to date in Japan as a person who is a woman, non-white and queer due to the experiences she perceive she would encounter.

Some of the interviewees end up taking up the role of educator. Kayla, for example, questions the Japanese men who try to hit on her. When they say, "I like Black culture", she tries to ask them what aspect of Black culture they like, because "Black culture" is diverse and is not

only predicated on hip hop. She even goes so far to explain that different states have different versions of Black culture. She does this because she perceives that Japanese men have one view of Black people. Though she wants to expand their thinking and knowledge, she perceives that Japanese men are not interested in learning about diverse Black people. Due to this, she perceives that Japanese men have a fetish for Black women and are not willing to change that. For Kayla, her racial identity is intersecting with her gender identity within these kinds of interactions, just like the other women. Though she tries to educate, it has been proven futile.

Many of my interview participants perceived that the role of Black women in the minds of Japanese individuals is to satisfy sexual desires. The interviewees perceived that Japanese believe that they could have sexual encounters with Black women in ways that they could not have with a Japanese women. These tropes enable Japanese men to objectify Black women sexually. By hip hop being the only source that Japanese people have that to understand Black individuals, Japanese men are viewing Black women one dimensionally because the Jezebel trope is constantly being perpetuated. When the Black women are engaging in these interactions, they perceive the racial identity is salient. This is because they define the interactions as a Japanese sexualizing them back on their own conceptualization of the sexuality of a Black women. Their experiences illustrate how their gender and racial identity are intersecting, enabling them to perceive they are being fetishized or sexually objectified.

Black Women are Intimidating

A couple of the interviewees described experiences where Japanese men are intimidated by them. Nicki perceives that Japanese men assumed that Black women are strong willed and

that intimidates them. She states, in response to this reason why Japanese men are intimidated by Black women, "So sometimes, as a woman, that makes me feel very undesirable. It makes me feel like I am never going to get married. At least it used to. I am okay now because I am in a relationship. However, not with a Japanese man. I gave up on that a long time ago". Though she does not go in depth as to why a strong-willed woman intimidates a Japanese man, a possibility is that a strong-willed foriegn woman disrupts what Japanese men expect a woman to act like. Due to this intimidation, Nicki perceives that some Japanese men try to avoid intermingling with Black women due to this stereotype. This has affected her self-esteem because she perceives herself to be undesirable due to being a Black woman. The role of the stereotype, which is intersecting race and gender, is to hinder Japanese men from trying to interact with a Black woman like Nicki.

According to Shannel, some Japanese men are intimidated by Black women because Japanese men become self-conscious of their own sexuality. Shannel discussed how Japanese men would bring up insecurities before they would have sexual intercourse. She would get things like, "you're a Black woman, you'll be bored with me", and "is my size okay?". Through these interactions, she notices that Japanese men would bring up stereotypes about their sexuality as if they have an inferiority complex. It is as if these Japanese men were comparing themselves from other men (particularly Western men) because their perception is that their sexuality can not match the expectations of Black women. Teanna states that Japanese men perceive themselves undesirable by foreign women. Due to this, the interviewees perceive that some Japanese men are too intimidated to date or have a sexual encounter with Black women.

Though not all of the Black women had dated a Black foreigner, many discussed interactions they had with Black men. Nicki brings up the idea that there are two types of Black men who came to Japan; Military men and Weeaboos. Military men are those who are stationed in Japan and only there for a certain number of years. They were proud of their blackness. They are either okay with Black women or would rather date Japanese women. On the other hand, there are weeaboos, men who worship Japanese culture. These kinds of men come to Japan with a purpose to date Japanese women. Due to their deep obsession with Japanese culture and people, Nicki perceives that they try to negate their Blackness. By negating their Blackness, these kinds of men would claim that there is no racism in Japan. Nicki perceived that, due to their interest in Japanese culture, these men are not interested in Black women like her. Her race makes her undesired by these Black men.

Shannel has similar interactions with Black men who were solely interested in Japanese women. She describes situations where Black men have said things that hurt her self-esteem. She talks about a particular situation where she is flirting with a guy at a club because she finds him to be attractive. She thinks they are vibing with each other, but he tells her, "Oh you cute, but I did not cross the pacific to end up with some Black chic." This comment makes her feel so low and undesirable by the very men she is attracted to. Similar to Nicki, Shannel's racial identity made her undesirable to Black men.

Nicki perceives that weeaboos tend to have a better experience in Japan, because they are not only seen as cool by Japanese people around them, but also due to the increase in interest for mixed babies. Nicki states that, "Japanese women, they want a mixed kid. Mixed babies to them

are like, man they are like little glass dolls or something. Like things to collect I feel like". Due to Japanese women viewing Black babies as cute, Nicki perceives that Japanese women try to get with any Black guy who would be with them. "It is just a fetish for them. I think a lot of Black men don't see it that way. They are just like, 'Oh, I am getting all this praise. And so, they jump into the relationship head first and then they realize when it is so late that it is so toxic, but I am in this situation, but I can't get out." Madison and Shannel have a similar view about the interest in biracial children. When Shannel had broken up with a foreigner, Japanese individuals tried to encourage her by stating that she would find a Japanese man who she would make a cute baby with. These perceptions of the interviewees, are illustrating what they perceive to be the reason for why Black men are treated better in the dating scene. Due to Japanese women's interest in biracial children, specifically Black biracial children, Black men are receiving attention. By getting this attention, the interviewees perceive that Black men are rejecting them, so that they could be with a Japanese woman.

These experiences illustrate some of the difficulties that Black women face when trying to date in Japan, due to racial stigma and the Jezebel trope. Hip Hop is one of the key elements in these interactions because of its role in perpetuating the image that Black women are sexual. Due to this, Black women are faced with Japanese men sexualizing them. The interviewees perceive that their Black identity makes them the objects of Japanese people's sexual desire and unfair treatment, illustrating how their race and gender are intersecting within these interactions. In addition, the racial identity of the interviewees turns them into a trophy. Several of the Black women felt that Japanese men would only date them to seem cool, due to their race being connected to Hip-Hop culture, which is of the urban trend in Japan.

On the other hand, they are deemed undesirable by other Black men who travel to Japan specifically to date Japanese women and negate their Blackness. A couple of the interviewees perceived that these men are of the object of desire for Japanese women who are interested in mixed babies (i.e., *hâfu*s). Not all of the interviewees, who dated in Japan, had negative experiences, but many were discouraged to date from the very beginning due to preconceived notions of what the dating experiences could look like. Several of the women, like Amber, are already in a relationship when they arrived in Japan, while a small few found their partner randomly and untraditionally.

This section illustrates how Black women conceptualize the role of gender, and how gender intersects with race, within the experiences they have in Japan. This speaks to the type of interactions that Black women may encounter in countries outside their homeland. Their gender identity is just as visible as their racial identity, thus Black women visibly stigmatized or sought out due a stereotype. Due to the visibility of their racial and gender identity, they will experience encounters that either enable the Black women to perceive that their gender is salient or that their gender and racial identity are intersecting, making both salient. Dating was the most popular type of interaction that illustrated the intersection of both race and gender, but dating is not the only interaction that does this. Interactions such as others asking a Black woman to teach them how to twerk[5] (also a stereotype stemming from hip hop) may also be common for Black women as they travel to other countries[6]. The next section will discuss how the interviewees perceive their ability to be integrated within a community, either within the Japanese community or the foreign community.

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[5] One of my interview participants discussed this.
[6] This kind of situation can happen in the club or when friends, who are non-black, ask to be taught how to twerk.

Black Women's Perceptions on Community

Having a foriegn community has been extremely important for many of the Black women. Whether it was to provide support or a space to vent, the foreign community enabled the interviewees to find ways to connect with others who shared an aspect of their identity, whether it was being a foreign in Japan, or a racial/national identity. The Black Women in Japan facebook group, especially, has been extremely powerful, because it allowed a space for all of the Black women to find others to connect with other Black women and share their experience as well as receive support. There have been several other ways that the interviewees were able to obtain a community with those who were not Japanese. Individuals found communities within their workplace or the organization that employed them. Several of them were attending school in Japan, so their community were individuals who were in their classes or department. Though this section is not going to go in depth about the many different communities that the interviewees were able to develop during their time in Japan, it is important to lay out the different types of communities the Black women were a part of.

For Gabrielle, who is living West of Tokyo, she only feels a sense of community within the Black population in Japan. The Black community gives her a sense of home while being in Japan. She defines the interactions she has with other Black individuals as a group of people she could be herself around. Not only in terms of personality, but also in terms of culture. Meaning, aspects of her culture would be brought to Japan, allowing her to enjoy what she does not have full access to in Japan, and enjoying it with other Black individuals. This way she could stay sane enough to stay in Japan. If Gabrielle did not have the Black community, she states that she would have felt even more alienated in Japan then she does now. On the one level, having a

community that is similar to her takes away some of the feels of isolation within a country that is homogenous. On another level, the Black community provides a space to develop friendships, as well as, discuss race-related questions. There is a presumption that individuals within a racial category would be able to relate and support each other on a cultural, racial and, sometimes, gender level. In Gabrielle's case, they have. Due to this, Gabrielle feels that the community she could count on is the foreign community.

However, unlike Gabrielle's experience, Yvette experienced Black men not acknowledging her. Similar to Gabrielle, Yvette has a presumption that Black individuals, women or men, would acknowledge each other when they see each other in passing. When she sees another Black individual, particularly a Black man, she defines the encounter as an opportunity to nod, a gesture within the Black community that translates to a non-verbal hello. She stated that Black men do not reciprocate. Instead, they ignored her. For Yvette, it is unclear why this occurred, why she is not acknowledged by Black men who are also in Japan. Cassandra states that the longer a Black individual has been in Japan, the more likely they would ignore you if they see you in passing. Several of the other interviewees state that if they saw another Black individual, they will, similar to Yvette, make an effort to say hi to them, yet they are often ignored. For the Black women who have these kinds of interactions, the feedback they get (not being acknowledged by members of the same racial categories) force them to think about the presumption they have about acknowledgement based on race. Meaning, just because an individual was in a similar racial category, there is an assumption, or hope, of willingness on the part of the other to acknowledge the individual. By being ignored, the Black women have to redefine the interaction for the future in order to account for individuals who are perceived to be

Black, but may not acknowledge them. The redefinition allows the interviewees to not take personally an interaction where a Black individual, particularly a Black man, do not acknowledge their existence. It is unclear what the reason is for the lack of acknowledgment, but because the interviewees perceive the reason to be self-hate on the part of the other, they saw no reason to change anything about their habits. For them, meeting individuals who are within the same racial class was more important. It is just unfortunate that these Black individuals do not share the same views.

As Benedict Anderson (2006) argues, the national community - like all communities - is imagined. The idea of the nation-state being a part of the self-consciousness is predicated on the ability of citizens feeling a sense of belonging to the overall apparatus. The modern Nation-state needs to create a shared identity that is inclusive of its citizens; the way to do that is to create several criteria of what it means to belong within the nation. Citizens internalize it, creating a us-vs-them dichotomy that they can utilize as reference when confronting someone who may not seem a part of the nation-state. This criteria could include values, a shared ethnic lineage, religious beliefs. Nation-state enables members to conceptualize their own identity which in turn allows for a sense of belonging and patriotism (Anderson, 2006). As a result, the others, such as foreigners, are targeted and ostracized, even if the xenophobia is not explicit.

The Black women who are in Japan understand that they are visibly different from Japanese people. The interviewee's perception of Japan's sense of belonging and membership would influence how they perceived inclusion within the Japanese society, even on a local level. Perceiving herself as an outsider within the Japanese society, based on her perception of what it means to belong in Japan, will influence her ability to feel connected to the larger community.

The interviewees voiced hopelessness of fitting in Japan regardless of an attempt to assimilate due to their perception of being an unchangeable outsider and stigmatized due to that.

This results in an awareness of particular identities that may or not have been consciously acknowledged. The stereotypes help to see how being othered is not only influenced by a nation-state sense of belonging, but also the Western one-dimensional images of Black women.

Celebrity

As Valeria states, Japanese individuals can be superficial. Due to the interviewees being Black, they are often treated as a trophy or a celebrity. Both Teanna and Alexandra experience Japanese people who only wanted to be friends with them due to the desire to be cool.

When Alexandra first came to Japan, the set of Japanese friends she acquired only invited her out to parties. At the time, she had dreads, so she perceived that her Japanese friends only hung out with her was due to her physically looking Jamaican. Other than for parties, she noticed that they never really reached to her. She perceives that these interactions are a way for them to seem cool to other Japanese people.

Teanna stated similar things to Alexandra. She perceives that there are Japanese people who would become friends with you just to show you off to others. Unlike Alexandra, who perceived that the Japanese people were only around her due to her ethnicity, Teanna perceived that Japanese people only talked to her due to her race. She perceived that her race is seen as cool and sometimes, she has experiences where Japanese people randomly take pictures of her. She does not like when these experiences happen, because she thinks about what that individual is going to do with the photo as well as the superficialness of the friends she thought she gained.

Though they each found a community in Japan, they perceive these interactions as off putting and unfortunate. Their racial and the ethnicity part of their self-concept is salient because they perceive that is the main reason for the interaction. The perceived superficialness of the Japanese people affected other interviewees because they perceived the images attributed to their identity warranted Japanese individuals to tokenize them. This affected their sense of belonging, because they perceived that Japanese people did not want them for who they truly are.

Positive Interaction

Not everyone feels that they do not have a community within Japan. Despite being physically and culturally different, several of the Black women found a community with Japanese people who accepted them for who they were. Several of the women discuss how Japanese individuals help them, especially when they first came to Japan. Shannel describes that when she first arrived in Japan, she was lost and in need of help. Several Japanese individuals helped her, creating the opportunity for Shannel to develop a positive outlook on Japan and its community. When she reflects on her time in Japan, she states that she has an overall good experience with the Japanese community, even if there were small incidents that were upsetting. Melissa had a similar experience. When she first arrived, she moved into a dorm with Japanese individuals. While she lived with them, she was able to develop a friendship with them. Due to this, she stated that she did not feel like an outsider. Joelle is another individual who also stated that Japanese individuals are willing to help, despite her being physically different. What the experiences of these three women are illustrating is the lack of stigma or use of misconceptions or stereotypes on the part of the Japanese individuals who had helped them. Though it is

impossible, at this point, to know the true intentions of the Japanese individuals for helping the three interviewees, the most important part is that the Black women perceive their interactions in a positive way. The interactions they had with Japanese individuals who were willing to help them did not cause the interviewees to be self-conscious of their identity, either national or racial/ethnic, like other interviewees. Even if they, themselves, were conscious of, at least, their racial identity, the interaction did not warrant it. There were no symbolic elements, like questions of their national origins, that forced the interviewees to look at themselves in relation to the Japanese individuals. By being helped, they did not feel othered, but instead welcomed. This perceived positive interaction enabled them to have a more positive perception of the sense of acceptance in their surrounding Japanese community.

For Trisha, when she is asked questions in regards of her racial or ethnic (Jamaican) identity, she does not perceive the Japanese people are coming to her with a malicious intent. Instead she sees them as having an interest in something related to her. She understands that Japanese individuals may seem ignorant, but that is mostly due to a lack of exposure they have to her culture. Rather than an fetish, she sees a lot of appreciation, especially of Jamaicans and their culture. Denise, another interviewee, had a similar take of the Japanese people. She claimed that Japanese people are racist, in terms of immigration, but the country seems less anti-Black, then America, a country that is built on Black oppression. The anti-Blackness that Denise is referring to is probably the amount of Japanese individuals who listen to Hip-Hop and engage in Black culture. Due to this, Trisha does not mind getting questions in regards to her identity, because this interaction is an opportunity for the Japanese individuals to learn something. She claims that she has not had many negative encounters with Japanese people, since she has started working as

a Model in Japan. Denise's and Trisha's perception of the interactions she has with Japanese

individuals influences how she understands the true intentions of the other. By these interviewees

seeing the interactions as a chance to educate about their identity or Japanese individuals

showing appreciation, they are not feeling the effects of being othered. Meaning, their perception

allows them not to demarcate their relationship between them and the Japanese individuals they

come across. Though their racial or national aspects of their self-concept is salient within these

interactions, their perceptions on the interactions cause the interviewees to be self-conscious in

the way as other interviewees. Due to this, they do not feel alienated from the Japanese

community they are surrounded by.

Community is important, especially for Black women who are living in another country.

Community enables them to feel connected to others and not feel alienated or alone. This section

illustrates how Black women perceive the role of different aspects of their identity in their ability

to become a part of a community in Japan. Their experiences illustrate how Black women's

perception on the different types of interactions they encounter affect their sense of community.

When Black women travel internationally and live in another country, their sense of community

will be influenced by how their perceive the role of existing stereotypes attributed to their

identity and what kind of community they can form[7]. Each Black woman, who lives in another

country, may experience a period where they feel they do not have community[8] to be a part of.

Lacking in community, virtual or physical, can have a tremendous impact on how Black women

perceive their overall experience in the country they are living in.

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[7] There could be a foreign community that consists of non-black individuals. Or there could be a virtual community. The kind of community that a Black woman can be involved in is dependent on who is around them, and their perception on which community they feel accepted into.
[8] Community could mean a small group of friends.

Conclusion

In order to understand Black women experiences in Japan, it is important to acknowledge how perception plays a huge role in how the interviewees conceptualize their time in Japan. How they perceive Japanese individuals' acknowledgement of them (or lack thereof) influences their own sense of belonging within a community (or loneliness). There are two types of communities that the interviewees described: the Japanese and the Foreign community. Black women's perception of either the Japanese community or the foreign and how they relate to them enables them to determine whether or not they could feel a sense of acceptance.

Learning about some of the most common daily interactions that interviewees had with the members of the Japanese community is important to understand how they perceive their acceptance within the Japanese community. From these interactions, the interviewees extracted meaning that influenced their sense of community. Japan's nationalism enables Japanese individuals to feel connected to one another, due to a shared history and cultural values. Some of the Black women interviewed expressed that due to Japan's sense of national community, they are othered and alienated, while others found a supportive Japanese community. Finding other foreigners to connect with is desired because of this notion that those who are similar to oneself will understand the experiences that one had. Meaning, there is a perceived sense of a shared experience within the foreign community, as well as a connection to cultural roots.

The foreign community provides comfort and familiarity. The Facebook group, that was created by Black women, enables individuals to find a virtual community that is supportive to either support others. One particular barrier for the Black women in finding and connecting with

individuals, either within the Japanese society or with other foreigners, is the role that stereotypes or misconceptions have in interactions that the interviewees encounter. These stereotypes that are either in the consciousness of the Black women or expressed by others stigmatizes the interviewees on a daily basis. Due to this, many of the interviewees define an interaction they have with others by describing what trope is influencing the encounter and which part of their identity the trope is attributed to. From there, the interviewees are able to explain the kind of meaning they extracted from the interaction. This process makes certain aspects of their identity salient, enabling them to perceive when their race, gender, nationality is influencing the interaction.

When Black women travel around the world and live in other countries, especially countries within East Asia, they will encounter interactions that are influenced by stereotypes and misconceptions stemming from America. Whether they are from the Caribbean, Africa, America or any other part of the world, it is almost inevitable that they will encounter situations where parts of their identity, especially race and gender, become salient. As illustrated within this research, some of the experiences that Black women may encounter are emotionally exhausting. Thus, it is important for Black women to think about how they will engage within these interactions without stressing themselves out.

There are several topics that this research did not highlight or expand upon, that further research could look into further. The first is the role of class in the experiences of Black women in Japan. Though class plays a major role in the experiences of the Black people in America, there is no research on how class dynamics affects Black women in East Asia. How much of an issue is class for the Black women when race and gender differences tend to be more salient?

The second topic that could be expanded upon in further research is the experiences of queer people of color. In this research, there were five individuals who identified as queer or within the LGBTQ+ spectum, but only two of them had dating experiences while three of them were discouraged due to their race. I wondered what kinds of experiences that members of the LGBTQ+ encounters and how they are forced to react.

In this research, I wanted to honor the voices of my interviewees in the best way I could. Everyone had unique, inspiring, insightful answers to my questions, and they were a joy to talk to. I learned so much and gained so much insight from women within the Black diaspora, such as myself, and are in a country I've been interested in. All of my interviewees are powerful, beautiful, and talented Black women living their life, unapologetically them.

Through all of the ups and downs they face in Japan, they all were able to change and become a better version of themselves. Majority of the interviewees found their identity empowering, even if it was empowering for them. By coming to Japan, they were challenged in ways that made them learn skills and lessons in life. For example, many of them learned patience. Being in a country where the language is not their first language is hard. Many of them have been in situations where they had to be patient due to the language barrier in order to get things accomplished. Patience was particularly useful when some of the interviewees were having an interaction with a Japanese individual who was ignorant about Black people. Sometimes, for some of the interviewees, it was difficult to figure out what the appropriate response was.

Another way that the interviewees grew was that they became more proud of who they were. Several of the interviewees became more proud of their nationality, whether it was in

America, the Caribbean or Africa. Due to being around Japanese people, who are physically and culturally different, and being stigmatized as different, they learned to be proud of their difference. Though they encountered situations that affected them emotionally, they were still able to reflect and see how that situation made them grow as a person. Though being in Japan is hard, they were still able to find a way to smile, laugh and find joy in life.

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