Keep Your ‘N’ in Check: African American Women and the Interactive Effects of Etiquette and Emotional Labor

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Abstract
Black professional women report that they must transform themselves to be welcomed and accepted, especially in the workplace. They speak of performance weariness in verbal and nonverbal communicative interaction-exchanges with white colleagues. Many simply state that they feel they are in a ‘parade’, being judged for appearance, personal decorum, communication skills, and emotion management in addition to productivity. The objective of this article is to describe these women’s experiences in line with promotion opportunities. For them, going to work involves a multilayered performance: (1) they must engage in racialized, gendered impression management at the generalized bureaucratic level; and (2) they rely on instructions grounded in race-based survival strategies to cope with challenges they face in unwelcoming work environments with concrete ceilings. Our analysis of these aspects of workplace behavior reveals that black women co-mingle etiquette and emotion management to gain acceptance and promotions, which strengthens race/ethnic group solidarity.

Keywords
African American women, emotional labor, etiquette, gender, race and gender

Introduction
Perhaps more than any other First Lady since Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama faces considerable pressure to transform, change, and adapt her persona to become more palatable to a broad spectrum of voters. She has been alternately cast as unpatriotic and as an angry, dangerous black woman (Blitt, 2008). Even while she is admired for her fashion sense, she is simultaneously carefully scrutinized and often perceived as too aggressive and pushy.

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While many of the same criticisms were applied to Hillary Clinton in 1992, intersections of gender and race create a particular and somewhat unique situation for Michelle Obama. Hillary Clinton was cast as an overbearing, emasculating feminist, but Michelle Obama faces gendered racial stereotypes of the ‘angry black woman’, an image grounded in the Sapphire stereotype of black women as domineering, vociferous, and curt. Like the image of the angry black woman, Sapphire serves to reinforce ideas of black women’s inherent lack of femininity and worth (Collins, 2004). Thus, Michelle Obama has struggled to distance herself from these stereotypical images and behaviors in hopes of altering the way she is perceived.

Her challenge is familiar to many professional black women, who like her must transform or alter themselves to be welcomed and accepted in their workplaces. The nature of social relationships in the office is dictated by historical customs, which have been a traditionally white male citadel. Not until after Executive Order 11246 mandating affirmative action was implemented (US Department of Labor, 2002) did employers actively seek ways to include women and racial minorities within organizations’ and agencies’ hierarchies. Men, the carriers of organizational culture and authority (Acker, 1990; Kanter, 1977) created this new bureaucratic arm of professional and managerial expansion, making decisions regarding acceptable behavior, communication, skin color, style and dress, (e.g. dark suits, conservative dresses, white shirts, low heels, and no flashy jewelry, hair, or make-up) concentrating on who their clients are and their cultural tastes. This has had implications for women of all races who become employed within this new-found bureaucratic configuration of organizational norms, but has had particular consequences for women of color, who do not fit either the gendered or racialized norms of these environments.

By establishing an implicitly gendered and racialized culture, obstacles remain for women. Acker (1990) and Kanter (1977) argue that organizations are not the gender-neutral bureaucracies they purport to be. Rather, they are gendered in ways that often locate women in dead-end jobs, with exposure to the organizational hierarchy as tokens. Yet this hierarchy is two-tiered. For women of color, especially those in professional posts, these disadvantages are further complicated by race. These women often explain that upon entering the labor market as professionals, they alter their behavior by changing their look, conversation content, and style to fit in, but also to be promoted (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003). They often speak of performance weariness when describing their spoken and unspoken communicative interaction exchanges with white colleagues. Many simply state that they feel they are in a ‘parade’ where they are being judged for appearance, personal decorum, communication skills, and emotion management in addition to work productivity.

To address this, senior professional women like Kenya counsel: ‘That’s not professional. Remember they got the s[hit] that’ll get you bit! Keep your Negro in check! Don’t let it jump up and show anger, disapproval, or difference of opinion. They have to like you and think that you are as close to them as possible in thought, ideas, dress, and behavior.’ Her advice discloses the appropriate etiquette, behavior, and emotion management, but also instructs other black women to blend manners, behavior, and reaction to fashion satisfactory workplace deportment. The counseling given to these women is directly linked to handling stress and alienation while balancing a need for survival and safety in the workplace or remaining employed without a row.

Many of these women have stated, ‘The work is too much. I get tired of being “on” for [white] colleagues who scrutinize every behavior. So every now and then, I lose it.’ Others have said, ‘They [white supervisors] make deals about the next position or talk about my future being bright. They say I have time, so the next promotion available is mine. But it never happens. For some reason an organizational change erases the promised promotion. It just never happens, unless there is pressure to promote black.’ Even then, according to many of these women, African American ‘institutional gatekeepers’ are consulted, who are often black women and men that possess institutional acceptance, but are not advisors that navigate new employees through their frosty work
environs. Consequently, the challenges these women face involve doing the necessary work to fit in, and managing their feelings in an often inhospitable workplace in hopes of capturing some degree of professional success in the form of promotion.

Working in predominantly white agencies, organizations, and institutions, while living and working as ‘black’, may cause part of these women’s apprehension and estrangement. The ever present reminder of their master status – skin color – makes the work week a bit more difficult and requires a bit more strength. Many believe they continue to carry stereotypical and media-based depictions of them as domineering, unaccomplished breeders, whores, welfare queens, as well as confrontational. Bebe reports an administrator at her school saying ‘I am not afraid of aggressive women.’ So, ‘performance’ becomes their safety mechanism.

These workplace contexts exact an additional toll as black women also must manage the demands of emotional labor in these work environments. Coined by Hochschild (1983), emotional labor describes women’s work experiences in service economies as producing emotions in themselves or others. Emotions, which are typically gendered, become commodified and sold for a wage. Doing emotional labor, women are often expected to recreate gender appropriate feelings, e.g. paralegals are expected to make men attorneys feel cared for (Pierce, 1999), while male bill collectors induce fear and intimidation (Hochschild, 1983). However, for African American women, performance related to whites’ gendered and racialized expectations is rarely accounted for or described.

Research that describes the down-to-earth contexts and contests for African American women in organizations, institutions, and agencies continues to be limited and comparative when describing mobility outcomes for black and white women. We seek to situate black women’s voices and experiences at the center of discussions and research on occupational mobility by examining the interactive effects of manner, behavior, and reaction or etiquette and emotional labor. We argue that this aperture in the literature lacks a definition of informal and/or formal race-based boundary maintenance in the workplace for black women. Etiquette and emotional labor for African American women is defined as performance to describe two levels of personal deportment:

1. a generalized bureaucratic passive aggressive level; and
2. a race-based set of expectations grounded in survival strategies to cope with challenges they face in environments that are unwelcoming and possess concrete ceilings across organizations and occupations.

The Unwelcoming Occupational Environment and Where They Stand

Di Prete and Soule (1986) argued 25 years ago that federally mandated mobility programs benefited women and minorities, despite the fact their opportunities for promotion were no greater than those of men and white lower level employees. Di Prete (1987a) extended this argument by emphasizing that modifications by government penetrated the administrative and professional model of personnel organization. Beneficiaries of these changes, women and minorities employed in lower level managerial positions, were promoted due to pressure from civil rights groups during the 1960s and 1970s. In a follow-up to this line of reasoning, Di Prete (1987b) argued that promotion depends on organizational dimension and shape, and is guided by formal and informal rules as well as demographic composition. Permeability of organizational boundaries is tied to the configuration of positions within an institutionalized structure, making movement from one position to another possible and suggesting that room may not be available. More important, probability of a shift depends on opportunities for further advancement and transferability of skills from one ladder to another (Di Prete and Soule, 1988), all of which is determined by the relative gain in job rewards.
As the potential for gains increases, the desire for changing jobs increases, but women accept the jobs they can get (Femlee, 1984; Reskin and Roos, 1990). This is especially true for women of color, because their organizational port of entry may have been secured through affirmative hiring, changing the conditions and ladders of career advancements available, or related to societal demands for inclusion (Collins, 1989).

Gwendolyn Combs (2003) argues that although women in managerial careers have advanced and equalized their representation, status, and earning power as managers, black women battle with the confluence of race and gender to gain organizational standing and advancement. Within the workplace, informal social networks are important for organizational socialization and career advancement, but African American women in managerial and executive positions are often members of the out-group. Thus, networks salient to advancement are less accessible, but possess alternate dimensions for black women than for black men and white women and men.

To develop such relationships affects career opportunities. Embedded in the increasing discussion of inclusiveness, a tendency exists to argue that there is little or no difference in the work experiences of white women and women of color (e.g. Latino, Asian African, and Native American). But, Bell and Nkomo (2001), Thomas (2001), and Mattis and Giscombe (1999) argue that organizational circumstances for persons of differing racial/ethnic groups contrast those experienced by majority men and women. These arguments are supported by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workplace Development (2002) which argues that workplace milieu function in a different way for blacks than for other racial/ethnic minority groups (e.g. Hispanics and Asians).

Their work reveals that African Americans, more than any other group, are most likely to be treated unfairly in the areas of promotion and training opportunities, more significant in disengagement, and targets of workplace discrimination. Above and beyond these problems, being African American might also create difficulty accessing or becoming part of informal networks (Phinney, 1990). In addition, the data from several studies reveal the dissimilarity of the status and advancement of African American women in comparison to white women. That is, the organizational experience of African American women operates differently than that of majority women (Blake, 1999; McCollum, 1998; Yoder and Aniakudo, 1997). The intersection of race and gender is suspected to have a negative impact on the work experiences of African American women (Bell and Nkomo, 2001; Lach, 1999). But these issues are rarely explored, even in media accounts about black women’s lives.

The 26 November to 1 December 2007 NBC nightly news series African American Women: Where They Stand purported to focus on the experiences, lives, and unique social circumstances of African American women. Yet this series aired a snippet of reality for these women’s lives. Employment issues and outcomes were missing. Unlike social scientists, who acknowledge a narrowing of some of the racial gap issues in the workplace (Cancio et al., 1996; Farley, 1983; Farley and Allen, 1987; King, 1992, Maume, 1999, 2004), this series neglected to discuss that black women (and men) continue to earn less than whites (Beggs, 1995; Bridges and Villemez, 1994; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993), to hold jobs with less task complexity and authority (Kaufman, 1986; Mueller et al., 1989), or that they are promoted at lower rates (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Nkomo and Cox, 1990) than whites. So despite the spate of research on black women’s location in the labor market and scholars’ contention that promotion is purposeful or, as stated by Baldi and McBrier (1997), a ‘strategic place’ to investigate workplace racial inequality as a site where discrimination most likely resides and persists due to a lowered risk of litigation against employers (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Nkomo and Cox, 1990), this argument has been publicly ignored.

Like CNN’s Black in America (23–24 July 2008), a similar news feature designed to display the trials and tribulations facing black Americans, Where We Stand might have looked more deeply at African American women’s work life and noted that in many organizations, promotion decisions are less likely to receive scrutiny – other than for affirmative action screening – when surveying
the labor market for talent, because criteria and decisions are more often than not subjective (Reskin and Roos, 1990). Simply stated, these series did not look at employment – a life sustaining feature of African American women and their families.

Lockwood (2004) correctly argues that white women have been breaching the ceiling to capture managerial and executive leadership positions within organizations and firms. Yet, Cotter et al. (2001) assert that despite some women’s breach of the ceiling, it still exists. They argue that to determine whether gender or racial inequality remains in the workplace, it must be found:

1. in undelineated job-related characteristics of the employee;
2. at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome;
3. in high level advancement opportunities; and
4. in inequality that progresses along with an individual’s career.

Moreover, they argue that not all gender/racial inequality should be characterized as employment glass ceilings, but analyzed as a factor that contributes to glass ceiling effects. If women in nonprofessional and nonmanagerial posts experience equivalent measures of gender inequality as professional and managerial women, then inequality exhibited among professionals and managers is not a glass ceiling, but a common pattern of gender inequality.

Banuch and Barnes (2003) suggest that labor markets are structured around gender and race, which effect women’s acquisition of high paying employment. Reskin and Roos (1990), Kaufman (1986), Baron and Bielby (1984), and Beck et al. (1978) all explain that structural determinants of occupational achievement, mobility and advancement explain differences in occupational and gender segregation. Steinberg et al. (1990) describe institutional barriers to promoting women as a plethora of formal and informal rules that regulate public sector employment. These variables fail to explain the experientially isolating contexts for women in general and for black women in particular. However, Mitra (2003) and King (1988) argue that black women face an even greater obstacle, a ‘concrete’ ceiling, where race and gender combine to form a double disadvantage. This does not produce a positive outcome, but this disadvantage is linked to managerial access to human capital differences, and job segregation with discrimination in industries or firms playing a significant role. We contend that tied to the amalgamation of race and gender is also behavioral expectation, or performance, which has a direct relationship to promotion contests.

Rosenbaum’s (1979) tournament mobility thesis suggests that the competition for jobs one participates in will have an effect on the kind of career one has. Career mobility is a competition with consequences for ensuing selections. Given that each contest has winners who capture the opportunity to compete for higher level positions, and losers who are denied the opportunity for further competition, assessment of employees in the initial years of employment has effects on future career outcomes. For African American women, assessments occur repeatedly and they must continue to pass hurdles in order to advance. These contests become even more important in light of changes in the labor market and a decline in black women’s earnings (Newsome and Dodoo, 2002).

**Etiquette in the Workplace: Penetrating the Concrete Ceiling**

In 2005, Harvard president Larry Summers attracted widespread attention with his statement that women simply lacked the intellectual capacity and biological drive to succeed in careers that emphasized science and math. Though Summers’s comments generated widespread controversy, he was reiterating views about women’s skills, ability, and appropriate roles that have a long history in the American cultural imagination. However, these perceptions are not race-neutral. In predominantly white work places, while white women may be thought to lack the necessary skills
to excel in science-related fields, minority women, especially black women, may be deemed to be less capable across all occupational dimensions and often assumed to be completely unsuited for upper level managerial and professional posts. But attention is rarely focused on their workplace experiences, representing unstated perceptions which emphasize their invisibility.

In previous research, one author has examined a series of positions in New York State government that acted as ports of entry for persons of color into administrative posts in state government and argued black women felt they were in managerial and executive posts as a positive by-product of affirmative action legislation and on the recommendation of white males (Durr and Logan, 1997). Seldom did they receive recommendations from white women. They felt they were still competing and undergoing acceptance by white women – vying for the same or similar positions.

Given these conclusions, the primary focus of this article is to examine how race and gender intersect to shape African American women’s experiences with etiquette and emotional labor in the professional workplace. Considering the racialized nature of professional work environments, and black women’s precarious positions within them, it is worth questioning how they navigate these settings and the nature of the emotion work and etiquette that enables them to do so.

**Data and Methods**

Data for this article was collected through two sources. One involved using direct participant observation from 2005 to 2007 while in conversation with 20 African American women over occupational mobility issues. Because conversations addressed issues in the workplace and their feelings about executives, managers, supervisors, and co-workers, one author listened attentively to concerns presented, speaking only when directly pulled into the discussions, as a sociologist who examined race/gender and would write about these tete-a-tetes. These women were employed as lower level executives, middle managers, and administrators in public and private organizations, state and city government, and universities.

The use of a snowball or probabilistic sampling procedure was not possible, because many women did not wish to complete surveys and stated their desire to remain anonymous, and in many cases used coded responses or vernacular terms which shielded bureaucratic personalities they spoke of (e.g. ‘boyfriend’, ‘girlfriend’), while ever so briefly and scantily describing issues in their workplaces. Participant observation allowed one author to capture etiquette and emotional labor responses in their work-social relationships. Conversations took place at sorority and fraternity dinner dances, church and community luncheons, occasional meetings at work or while shopping at local grocery or department stores. Pseudonyms will be used for confidentiality.

All respondents were college graduates, with master’s and doctoral degrees, ranging in age from 30 to 55 years of age, five were married, five were divorced, and 10 had never married. Respondents were from southern New England, mid-Atlantic, and Midwestern states and employed in professional or managerial positions that contained less than 10 black employees throughout the levels of administration or management, and required working effectively in workgroups as an integral factor for employment success and /or future promotability.

Additional data came from a larger sample of 25 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with African American professionals. These respondents were located through a snowball sample. Interviews focused on the use of emotional labor in predominantly white workplaces. These respondents were employed in various professional posts in work environments where they estimated African Americans constituted 10 percent or fewer of professional employees. Our questions centered on whether and when respondents had to control emotions at work, in response to what occurrences, the frequency of this practice, and the nature of the emotions being controlled. Respondents also discussed producing emotions in others and the context in which this occurred.
Context for Women at Professional Workplaces

According to an unpublished 2003 Current Population Survey report, in 2002, African American women in the workplace totaled 8,469,000 or 5.8 percent of the labor force, but, by 2010 they will compose 7 percent or 11,050,000 persons in the labor force, an almost 60 percent increase from 1990. This same report suggests that in 2001, 2,412,000 black women held 5 percent of all administrative and managerial posts, in professional and related occupations. However, a more concentrated review of these women’s labor market location, disclosed only 106 or 1.1 percent of these women were corporate managers (Giscombe and Jones, 2004).

When examining black women’s occupational location in the public sector, a New York State Center for Women in Government study reports and graphically displays that despite the 2000 census’s documentation of considerable change in the racial and ethnic composition of the US population, the demographics of executive branch leadership changed very little between 1999 and 2003 nationally (Center for Women in Government and Civil Society, 2004). Black women moved in greater numbers into policy leadership positions, appointed by the nation’s governors, while the percentage of agency head posts held by white, black and Asian American women rose slightly. Yet, in nine states (Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Maryland, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota) women of all races held less than half the top policy posts to which they would be appointed, if the proportion of women appointees were equal to the proportion of women in the population of those states. Nationally, the percentage of African American appointees increased between 1999 and 2003 by 1.6 points. Latino/a and American Indian appointees remained at the same level. Asian American appointees experienced a gain between 1999 and 2001, but had fallen below previous levels by 2003.

Table 1. Employed women by occupation, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity: 2006 annual averages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black or African American</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total 16 years and over</td>
<td>59,500</td>
<td>8,410</td>
<td>3,011</td>
<td>7,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management, Professional and related occupations</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management business and financial operations occupations</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional and related occupations</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service occupations</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service and office occupations</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and related occupations</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and administrative support occupations</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Resources, Construction and Maintenance occupations</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, fishing, and forestry occupations</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction and extraction occupations</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production, Transportation and Material Moving Occupations</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production occupations</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and material moving occupations</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between 1999 and 2003, the total number of department head positions appointed by governors decreased overall by 4 percent. White men’s share of appointments declined by 5.9 percentage points over this period. The percentage of executive posts held by white, African American, and Asian American women rose respectively by 1.9, 1.3, and 1.5 points. Latinas lost some ground; two American Indian women served in governors’ executive offices in 2003. Thus, across the public and private sector little advancement for these women exists.

What accounts for this lack of progress? Could it be that, as reported by Baldi and McBrier (1997), the subjective nature of the promotion process implies that there is greater probability that discrimination occurs in shrewd and often undetectable ways? Or as Greenhaus et al. (1990) and Nkomo and Cox (1990) suggest, that managers/sponsors, who are white, are more likely to associate with and sponsor persons like themselves in terms of color and social background – subtly signaling that whites are more likely than blacks to be promoted.

**Findings**

For professional black women, the performances that they feel compelled to give are shaped by the ways intersections of race and gender isolate them and place them under greater scrutiny. As they take stock of their work environments and perceive colleagues’ stereotypes, beliefs, and preconceptions, these women learn that, like Michelle Obama, they must repackage themselves in ways that are more palatable to their white co-workers. As these colleagues’ goodwill and collegiality is necessary for advancement and occupational stability, black women professionals find themselves doing both surface acting and emotional labor in order to successfully integrate their work spaces (Hochschild, 1983).

### Table 2. Gender, race and ethnicity of policy leaders appointed by Governors 1999, 2001 and 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1784</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1724</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>1999 Number</th>
<th>1999 Percentage</th>
<th>2001 Number</th>
<th>2001 Percentage</th>
<th>2003 Number</th>
<th>2003 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>1116</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>1089</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>1012</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native Alaskan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1253</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>1237</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>1172</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>1999 Number</th>
<th>1999 Percentage</th>
<th>2001 Number</th>
<th>2001 Percentage</th>
<th>2003 Number</th>
<th>2003 Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>547</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Native Alaskan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>665</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>546</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Due to a small number of policy leaders who identified their race/ethnicity as ‘other’ and some missing data, percentages may not total 100% and numbers may not sum up to the total.
Many of these women work in administrative roles. To an extent, this shapes the ways in which they must engage in careful self-presentation. Their positions may not originate within the organization, or link to its mission and objectives, but the series of administrative posts they have held or hold, regardless of their nature, provides an avenue and motivation for advancement. Tandy states, ‘I got my job as a manager because they had no black managers, but guess what I manage? I manage compensatory education staff and programs.’ Elizabeth says, ‘I do the same, but it’s the only way to become a manager at … This place does not care about their students, just the federal aid and visibility of their darkies. That’s when they get them and if they stay. You are on for them all the time. But you take what you can get.’

When, like Michelle Obama, these women advance, their self-presentation and communication style are scrutinized. Barbara reports, ‘Being direct and speaking your mind is never encouraged. In fact if you do, you encounter a world of silence and avoidance, which is one of the most severe penalties. You are placed outside of the loop, and you may stay there for a long time. Quite possibly – permanently. So despite the fact you may have a contribution, it is not welcomed.’

So, as they learn the verbal and body language of bureaucracy, they must negate values and styles of communication developed as a survival skill in their community. Most say they feel defenseless.

Nevertheless, for many, negotiation within this environment in most cases occurs at a cost. Sharon reports, ‘You learn to remain quiet and speak when spoken to and never verbalize your thoughts on an issue or policy.’ Others, such as Rhonda, suggest that ‘You go with the flow, since you realize this may not be a battle you can win, despite the fact you may be correct in assumptions and remedies you have in mind.’ They apply a survival-safety analysis and render their verbal participation to a lower level of priority. They smile on cue, remaining expressionless, unmoved by the content of conversation even if the subject is distressing or controversial, and carefully

| Table 3. Department heads by gender, race, and ethnicity 1999 and 2003 |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                  | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |                  |
| **Year**          | **1999** | **2003** | **1999** | **2003** | **1999** |
| **TOTAL APPOINTMENTS** | **1244** | **100** | **716** | **100** |                  |
| **Men**           |         |           |         |           |                  |
| White             | 820     | 65.9      | 62      | 60.0      |                  |
| African American  | 55      | 4.4       | 29      | 5.2       |                  |
| Latino            | 27      | 2.2       | 12      | 2.4       |                  |
| Asian American/   | 14      | 1.1       | 6       | 1         |                  |
| Pacific Islander  |         |           |         |           |                  |
| American Indian/  | 6       | 0.5       | 10      | 0.5       |                  |
| Native Alaskan    |         |           |         |           |                  |
| **Total**         | 922     | 74.12     | 844     | 70.7      |                  |
| **Women**         |         |           |         |           |                  |
| White             | 264     | 21.2      | 276     | 23.1      |                  |
| African American  | 30      | 2.4       | 44      | 3.7       |                  |
| Latina            | 20      | 1.6       | 16      | 1.3       |                  |
| Asian American/   | 6       | 0.5       | 7       | 2         |                  |
| Pacific Islander  |         |           |         |           |                  |
| American Indian/  | 1       | 0.5       | 2       | 0.6       |                  |
| Native Alaskan    |         |           |         |           |                  |
| **Total**         | 321     | 25.8      | 345     | 39.6      |                  |
couching responses in the language of the workplace. The emotion that is concealed is evident in their voices, body language, and style of conversation. Keena states, ‘But you have to endure this if you want to get ahead, regardless of where you might be promoted to.’ Mary says, ‘Promotions aren’t everything, surviving them is. I got kids in college, a mortgage, and my hair to keep up.’ Laughter follows Mary’s comments, but all understand what she means and silently accept her pronouncement.

Black women also engage in etiquette and emotional labor to cope with feelings of alienation and loneliness that stem from being the only, or one of few. Harlow (2003) has documented the existence of emotion management among black college and university professors. Feelings of anger, frustration, and aggravation are often stifled to conform to colleague expectations. Janice, an assistant Dean at a small liberal arts college, states, ‘I’ve dealt with people who were so dismissive, and you knew race was at the core of it. But I would have to grin and bear it, because I needed to work … very rarely do you see me expressing my true feelings, and when I do, my reaction tells me it scares the hell out of [my white colleagues].’ Irene offers a very astute assessment of the importance of concealing emotions: ‘If you don’t play by their rules in terms of your behavior … modulating your emotions [and] if you don’t do certain things the way they want you to do them, it has a direct impact on your career and your economic stability.’ Similarly, Gina states, ‘I have to be very congenial. Sometimes I don’t want to deal with [racism]. But I just have to hide my real emotions.’

For many of these women, ‘performance’ becomes their safety mechanism. In some cases, these performances are conscious and intentional – what Hochschild (1983) describes as ‘surface acting’, where the individual is well aware that they are putting on a show. In an example of this, Barbara states, ‘I always prepare because I want to make sure my temper is in check. You know, I’m mellow. I have unhooked from personal feelings, previous conversations to deal with what’s ahead. I do this because so few [black] women are in managerial and executive level posts.’ Barbara’s performance is purposely crafted, specifically designed for the racial parameters of her work setting.

More often than not, workplace dynamics place these women in positions where routine interaction with co-workers heightens these performances. For instance, Deidre, a faculty member at a southern New England university, says ‘There is a “double standard” in departmental decisions regarding promotion and tenure.’ She reports, despite her service on the departmental committee to determine promotion procedures, the procedures have been used arbitrarily by those in authority. She notes, ‘African Americans are denied promotion while whites with fewer publications and lower scholarly profiles were promoted without question.’ Sheila reports slights and loud verbal assaults in the hallway by department colleagues and secretarial staff. She felt isolated and alienated by colleagues who made a concerted effort to have her removed from the teaching staff. Like Sheila, Janice, a bi-racial woman found herself in a verbal confrontation with her white female department chair in the doorway of her office. This confrontation was the culmination of several months of what she perceived as constant harassment regarding petty issues. During the verbal confrontation, she was poked in the chest by the chair as she loudly chastised her publicly.

When incidents like these occur, emotional labor becomes a key part of the resulting performance. Charlotte, the only black attorney at a mid-sized firm, states, ‘I think the one that stands out the most is that I am a black professional woman in [names town]. And as much as I’d like to be upset about it, I can’t ever do that in my job because it would come off the wrong way. So I have to be happy-go-lucky, everything’s great, and the fact that I don’t have a life is wonderful when it really sucks!’ Similarly, Giselle states, ‘At one point I was the only person of color who was not cooking, cleaning, or maintaining the grounds. It got so bad that the [black] men, they had their
social support group and they invited me to join because they knew how that felt.’ This respondent’s comments led us to revisit Rosenbaum’s (1979) tournament mobility thesis through conversation. Giselle stated, ‘So you mean we need to be seen and supported as one of the stars.’ We say, ‘Yes.’ She says, ‘Right, that will take until I retire.’ Shana remarked that she feels she will never be promoted. For black women, internal promotions are a primary means of career mobility since most organizational vacancies are filled from within organizations, often as a matter of official and unofficial policy, making promotions a high reward for white collar workers (Markham et al., 1985).

21st Century African American Women’s Etiquette in the Workplace: Penetrating the Concrete Ceiling

Today, black women share and report the same kinds of remonstrations and wonder whether they should be happy that a progressive era arrived and ended so quickly. Many think it appropriate to say, when is change ‘gonna come’. Others echo sisters of the churches’ admonition to ‘hold to his hand’, but are contemplative, knowing that downsizing and displacement have eroded the development and growth in the labor market. Wendy seethed when remembering how she felt and still feels about her perceptions of her white colleagues and what she calls ‘the black woman factor’: ‘They are a big joke! They want you to think they are being progressive, but I do like they do, smile and lie. I am ok so long as I agree, but if not, they begin not to know your name when they see you or forget you have been introduced on numerous occasions. The hell with them.’

Phrases like ‘These are white women’s jobs’, or this is not a ‘black woman’s position’, or ‘Girl the pendulum has swung back’ are still vociferously spoken, but in hushed tones. Those who do openly comment say, ‘Most white people have become conservative again, believe in colorblindness, that is when it comes to them, and are no longer progressively liberal.’ Others verbalize that hiring affirmatively to upper level positions outside of the ‘black job market’ is impossible. These women’s statements emphasize that they remain part of a racialized or minority submarket (Collins, 1983; Durr and Logan, 1997). But their inclusion in primary labor markets brought unforeseen gender challenges, often wrestling with some type of narrow-mindedness or favoritism grounded within the myopic intersection of race and gender. Ramona says, ‘Office politics are vile, so girl, watch your back … learn to negotiate the politics. Girl, it’s about self with them, not fairness.’ Janet follows up with: ‘They leave me alone, because my clothes are too loud. African you know! But, they think I am still living in the 60s, since I still believe in activism … because I fight for what seems fair and right.’

The ‘dual’ nature of Janet and Ramona’s remarks uncovers their veiled references to their adaptability in organizational and institutional environments. These exchanges immediately bring into view images of these and other respondents’ family backgrounds and style. Reared to question, confront, and resolve conflict, some describe themselves as the ‘last’ or ‘close to last’ beneficiaries of the Civil Rights Movement and affirmative action policies. Barbara says, ‘I marvel at how we are still in the first stage of acknowledgement, but are constantly bombarded with pronouncements about a diverse workplace.’ She ends her comments by saying, ‘White folks ya’ll.’ Jackie’s braids, Gina’s twists, Nicole’s mud cloth dresses and pant suits, and Alice’s cowry shell earrings and bracelets conveyed clothing preferences, not politics. These women were describing ‘black women’s place’. Embedded in this picture of persona was a need to survive in volatile work situations and a changing economy, making them accept the rules and expectations of the work place. They are urban bush women, guerilla fighters still struggling to become free of the bondages of the past.
Conclusion

The number of African American women who now try to penetrate the ‘concrete ceiling’ recognize promotions as their primary avenue of career mobility, given that a great many organizational vacancies are filled within and/or across organizations, often as a matter of official organizational policy. A great majority of the time these considerations take place without regard for their race and gender. They work even harder to climb the ladder to receive each position’s resources and rewards.

Generally, emotional labor enables black women to present the appropriate emotional veneer that allows them to fit in and enhance their compatibility with organizational norms. This is particularly useful when confronted with racial issues. Their desire to move up the ladder in many ways represents a voluntary job shift with the same employer and acts as a proxy for vertical advance in the firm or with different employers. They are aware that occupational mobility also depends upon personal, social, and cultural characteristics. More important, they understand that the process of occupational mobility differs depending upon whether it occurs within a particular organization or involves a change of employers (Femlee, 1982). It may be argued that this is true for all women, but nuanced when it comes to African American women.

Or is it that many African Americans know what Bell and Hartmann (2007) suggest: that race is ever present in workplace diversity discussion, but missing in action? The discussions about race do not necessarily translate into decisive action intended to minimize racial inequality. African American women’s need to present the appropriate etiquette and emotional labor is likely shaped by tenuous commitment to racial diversity in professional workplaces.

The levels of behavioral expectation and exceptions are both boundary maintenance mechanisms for whites and social-psychological issues of safety for African American women. While calls for inclusiveness and diversity weave seamlessly at work and in the larger society, rejection of difference remains as well. Our analysis reveals that social expectations shape individuals’ fit at work and in society, while prescribing the conditions and consequences for integration within employment and social communities and while strengthening ethnic group solidarity.

They believe their social, cultural, and occupational location remains beleaguered by stereotypes beached in psychological needs. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in a professional community where interaction is close and constant, varied but integrated, but laced with a strong sense of propagandized social acceptance. In such communities, individuals learn more about themselves based on exchange relationships when a sense of ‘community’ and ‘belonging’ is initiated and achieved for most of its members through working to build the community. However, in some instances, becoming part of such a community, especially for persons of color, is a journey into remembering, as well as understanding, that who we are, what we are, where we fit, and how we are received marks our continued journey.

Moreover, these results suggest that the challenges of the professional workplace are shaped in important ways by race and gender. For black women workers, attempting to perform the appropriate emotional labor while simultaneously conforming to etiquette norms creates specific issues that may not be present for other race/gender groups. Future research should consider whether these social and professional expectations pose the same challenges for Latinas, black men, Asian American women, and others. The expected norms, sanctions, and rules of the professional workplace are not neutral, but raced and gendered in ways that may have a different impact on various groups. Future research should consider how this plays out for other populations.
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Notes

1 Jones and Shorter–Gooden (2003) reported that 58 percent of 333 African American women surveyed reported that every so often they altered themselves behaviorally to gain white acceptance – meaning they changed their communication styles and choice of topics.

2 Only five states (Massachusetts.96; Oregon.95; Florida.88; Iowa.85; Missouri.83) are close to parity in terms of the degree to which women are represented in top policy positions. (Parity is achieved when the representativeness ratio = 1.0). In 11 additional states (Connecticut, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, Tennessee, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming) women hold about three-quarters of the top policy posts to which they would be appointed, if the proportion of women appointees were equal to the proportion of women in the population of those states.

3 In this study, the ‘department head’ leadership cohort includes individuals at the helm of departments, agencies, offices, boards, commissions, and authorities who are gubernatorial appointees.

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