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THE MODERN MAMMY AND THE ANGRY BLACK MAN: AFRICAN AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS' EXPERIENCES WITH GENDERED RACISM IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract: This paper explores the ways that Black professionals experience racism in the workplace as a gendered phenomenon. Drawing from in-depth interviews with 23 Black professional workers, I compare the ways that racism is gendered for Black men and for Black women. I also explore the ways that gendered racism constructs responses to racial affronts. I argue that exploring the gendered nature of racism offers a more precise assessment of how racism in the workplace impacts minorities.

Keywords: : gendered racism; Black professionals; controlling images

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Studies of how racism affects African Americans constitute a sizable body of the sociological literature on race relations. Research in this vein has examined how racism affects African Americans at work, in the educational system, and in everyday life, as well as the overall significance (or lack thereof) of racism for Black Americans (Collins, 1998; Feagin, 1991; Feagin & Sikes, 1996; Ferguson, 2000; , Wilson, 1988). The overwhelming majority of these studies suggest that racism still shapes many, if not most, facets of life for Black Americans. However, these studies often tacitly assume that race generally impacts Black men and women in the same way or fail to take gender differences into account when analyzing the manifestations and effects of racism.

Feminist researchers have attempted to rectify this conceptual limitation by drawing attention to the ways that Black women's experiences with racism are also intertwined with sexism. Thus, studies of Black women in various settings—community organizations, work, public spaces—carefully delineate the intersecting effects of race and gender, noting that both of these categories interact to shape Black women's experiences (Byng, 1998; Gilkes, 1988; Harvey, 2005; Texeira, 2002). However, among the studies of how racism affects African Americans and studies of how race and gender affect Black women, few specifically address how Blacks' experiences with racism differ by gender. In this study, I offer a comparative analysis of the ways Black professional men's and women's experiences with racism in the workplace are gendered.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gender, Race, and Work

Studies of race in the workplace document the extent to which racism plays a role in shaping minorities' experiences in the labor force (Cose, 1993; Higginbotham & Weber, 1997; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Collins (1998) argues that affirmative action policies have produced essential occupational niches that allowed many Blacks to experience social and economic mobility. Feagin and Sikes (1996) claim that in the middle class workplace Black employees experience stereotypes, discrimination, and pay inequity relative to their white colleagues. At the other end of the class hierarchy, Newman and Ellis (1999) and Neckerman and Kirschenman (1999) consider the stigmas of low wage work available to working class and poor Black inner-city residents, and the ways race affects employers' perceptions of potential Black inner-city employees, respectively. Finally, in her study of Black women workers in the hair industry, Harvey (2005) finds that among working-class Black women, the absence of occupational opportunities can push them towards entrepreneurial ventures.

In focusing on these issues of race in the labor market, few comparisons are made as to how the intersections of race and gender differently shape Black women's and Black men's work experiences. Feminist researchers discuss the concept of gendered racism, which posits that racism exists at both the institutional and individual levels, but is a phenomenon that is experienced differently by men and women (Chavetz, 1997; hooks, 1988; King, 1988; Glenn, 2000; Zinn & Dill, 1996). However, many studies based on the conceptual framework of gendered

racism focus primarily on how intersections of racism and sexism impact minority women. Although researchers note that "not only Black women, but also Black men are confronted with racism structured by racist constructions of gender role, notable examples being the absent father stereotype or myth of the Black rapist," very few studies draw a comparative analysis between how Black men and Black women experience gendered racism (Essed, 1991:33).

Controlling Images and Gendered Racism

Espiritu (1997) argues that gendered racism helps to explain several predominant stereotypes of Asian Americans. The Dragon Lady and Lotus Blossom stereotypes are specifically female images of hypersexualized, deceitful women, or docile, subservient geishas, respectively. In contrast, the Fu Manchu and Chinese laundryman stereotypes depict Asian men as evil, villainous, asexual schemers or as eager, willing servants. Espiritu argues that while all of these images are founded in racist stereotypes, they are also explicitly gendered images which suggest that Asian men and women are ultimately unable to meet dominant ideals of masculinity and femininity. Ultimately, the images are manifestations of gendered racism that provide specific justification for anti-Asian biases and promote hegemonic white masculinity as a normative standard.

Collins (1990; 2004) has been particularly perceptive in drawing attention to the ways racist images of Blacks are distinctly gendered. Historically, stereotypes of Black men as lustful, brutal rapists were used to justify violent repression and lynching of Black men in order to protect the chastity of white womanhood (Davis, 1984; Olsen, 2001). Like Espiritu's analysis of the effects of gendered racism, the stereotype of the lustful Black male rapist served to validate racial inequality but also to contrast Black masculinity with white masculinity as a hegemonic ideal. This image, however, was specific to Black men. In contrast, the "controlling images" of Black womanhood described by Collins (1990) include the asexual Mammy and the castrating matriarch. These racist stereotypes are also gendered in their portrayal of Black women's inability to fit the dominant ideal of motherhood, and in their implicit messages that as unfit mothers, Black women fall short of the larger ideal of appropriate womanhood.

In a contemporary analysis of a "new racism" that is defined by an increasingly global economy, proliferation of mass media images and transnational states where racism is controlled less by local or regional governments, Collins (2004) suggests that the images of Black men as lazy Sambos or brutal rapists and Black women as mammies, tragic mulattos, or Jezebels have been refined and updated to reflect socio-political and cultural changes. Today, controlling images of Black men and women are class-specific and reflect a global economy, unprecedented media reach, and transnational racial inequality as well as the economic, legal, and social changes that have affected Blacks over the last 50-60 years. According to Collins, gendered racism now produces controlling images of working-class Black women in the form of the "Bad Black Mother" (often depicted as the "welfare queen") and the "Bitch" (a materialistic, hypersexual, manipulative figure prevalent in hip-hop culture), while middle-class Black women are depicted as "Black Ladies" whose potentially unrestrainable sexuality is safely confined to heterosexual marriage, "educated Black bitches" who are manipulative and controlling, or "modern-day Mammies," who uphold white-dominated structures, institutions, or bosses at the expense of their personal lives. Controlling images of Black men now exist in the form of working-class Black men as irreverent

"athletes" or dangerous "criminals," while middle-class Black men are presented as effeminate "sissies" or nonthreatening "sidekicks" to a white protagonist. Underlying all these images are the same old stereotypes of Black women as treacherous, hypersexual, aggressive, and/or ideal for service, and Black men as dangerous beings whose sexuality is a threat to the natural order and must be curtailed and harnessed.

Gendered Racism and Controlling Images in the Workplace

The nature of these controlling images has potentially devastating consequences for minority men and women at work. While sociologists have yet to engage in comprehensive research that examines gendered racism's effects on minority workers, some studies have acknowledged that racism in the workplace is gendered and takes on different manifestations for minority men and women (Browne & Misra 2003). Woo (1998) argues that gendered racism which emphasizes images of Asian American women as doll-like and dainty has facilitated their entry into broadcast journalism while simultaneously rendering Asian-American men undesirable for this work. Similarly, the overrepresentation of Latina women into domestic service suggests a gendered racism that presents these women as ideal for low-paying service work in the home, while gendered racism channels Latino men into construction and landscaping work outside of the home.

In their study of the combined effects of racism and sexism on Black women, St. Jean and Feagin (1998) offer a particularly insightful assessment of the mechanisms of gendered racism in the workplace. The authors argue that while Black women experience the "double burden" of racism and sexism, some white employers may view Black women as more desirable coworkers and employees than Black men because they are less threatening. According to these authors, white employers may prefer Black women because their gender makes them more easily controlled through sexist put-downs, whereas Black men's gender renders them less controllable through these means and thus more of a threat. Following this line of reasoning, in their study of the effects of racism on African Americans, Sidanius and Pratto (2001) in fact argue that gendered racism disadvantages Black men to a greater degree than Black women. While numerous other data challenges this conclusion (see Browne & Misra, 2003; Browne ,1999; Maume, 1999), these debates underscore the fact that examining racism as a gendered phenomenon reveals a complex picture of its impact African Americans.

In this article, I examine ways Black professionals' experiences with racism in the workplace are gendered. I also address how Black workers' responses to racism are also shaped by gender. By treating racism as a gendered phenomenon, I address the different implications workplace racism has for minority men and women.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this project were collected from semi-structured, intensive interviews with 23 African American professionals employed in a variety of occupations (see Table 1). Respondents were all college educated and ranged in age from 24-61. Fourteen had attended predominantly white institutions for undergraduate degrees, and the remaining nine attended historically Black colleges

or universities. Eleven had advanced degrees, and two were in the process of completing an advanced degree. Seven were married, three were divorced, and the remainder had never married. I used a snowball sample to create the data set, beginning with respondents that I knew personally, and asking these subjects to refer me to others who fit the criteria for the study. All names were changed to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1: *Respondents*

Name	Age	Occupation	Educational Level
Steven	35	Loan officer	BA
Beatrice	37	Lawyer	BA, JD
Bill	31	Government employee	BA
Sharice	34	College professor	BA, MFA, PhD
Garrett	26	Financial analyst	BA
Georgia	51	Teacher	BA
D'Angelo	25	Researcher	BA, MA
Angie	43	Higher education administrator	BA, MA
Leon	41	Community outreach administrator	BA, MA
Roger	49	Community educator	BA
Ken	25	Researcher	BA
Nate	25	Engineer	BA, MA in progress
Simone	42	Community educator	BA
Lester	37	Lawyer	BA, JD
Marla	57	Sales executive	BA, MBA
Omar	47	Military officer	BA
Rhonda	30	Lawyer	BA, JD
Ricky	26	Engineer	BA, MA in progress
Russell	61	College professor	BA, MA, PhD
Marcia	60	Pharmaceutical consultant	BA, MA, PhD
Todd	31	Banker	BA
Theresa	23	Director of education	BA
Veronica	29	Human resources staff	BA, MA

Respondents were from the mid-Atlantic and southeastern region of the United States. Those from the mid-Atlantic US lived and worked in a major metropolitan city in that area, while those from the southeast lived and worked in a smaller, more rural city. Since some research has demonstrated the important role that location can play in assessing racial issues, I attempted to include respondents from different geographic locations and from rural, urban, and suburban areas (Hartigan, 1999). In this way, I hoped to account for any regional variations in Black professionals' experiences with racism.

Most respondents worked in settings where they estimated that African Americans constituted 10 percent or fewer of the company's employees. All the respondents described themselves as employed in occupations where working effectively with coworkers was an integral factor in their job success, and that interacting with coworkers comprised the majority of their jobs. In other words, these workers stated that some or all of their jobs required them to work closely with colleagues in interracial groups. As Black professionals continue to integrate predominantly white workplaces and in some cases occupations that were

previously predominantly white, I expected that these workplace dynamics would be ones where Black professionals would likely be exposed to expressions of racism.

Interviews were conducted during the spring, summer, and fall of 2005. They generally took place in the respondent's workplace, their home, or in a nearby coffee shop or other neutral location. On average, interviews lasted about an hour, and were tape recorded and later transcribed. Interviews were analyzed using grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss 1967). By using constant comparative methods, grounded theory enabled me to identify key concepts that emerged from the data. Though grounded theory methods did not permit me to draw conclusions that could be generalized to all racial minority groups, they did allow me to draw attention to some of the ways in which experiences with and responses to racism were gendered.

Despite the fact that some interviews took place in respondents' workplaces, overall they were very candid about their experiences, even at times being harshly critical of the racial dynamics at work. I expect that their openness stemmed at least partially from our shared racial status. Though in his studies of whiteness and white identity, Gallagher (2000:205) argues that shared racial status will not necessarily facilitate "automatic cultural access," and that factors such as region, age, and ethnicity may limit the rapport between interviewer and interviewee, I suspect that as a Black woman in a predominantly white workplace and in a professional occupation, respondents conceivably felt that I could appreciate their experiences in similar settings and accordingly were very forthcoming.

In interviews, respondents discussed their general work history up to their present position, gave an account of the responsibilities and duties of their current jobs, and described the racial climate at those jobs. They also discussed instances where they had experienced racism at work, why and how they categorized certain experiences as racist, and their reactions to these experiences. Respondents described the racial climate at their workplace, how they navigated this climate, opportunities for advancement, and the personal and professional tolls of coping with racism in the workplace.

FINDINGS

Grounded theory methods revealed that Black professionals' experiences with gendered racism often took the form of combating controlling images. Interestingly, Black women's encounters with gendered racism evoked the controlling images Collins (2004) describes in her analysis of the "new racism" that characterizes contemporary American society. Specifically, gendered racism in the professional workplace often meant that Black women were expected to conform to controlling images of the modern mammy or that they were sexualized and objectified. For Black professional men, experiences with gendered racism also took the form of encounters with controlling images, though not the ones Collins (1990, 2004) describes. Instead, they faced a new controlling image—that of the "angry Black man." The existence of these controlling images also structures the ways in which Black professionals—both men and women—respond to encounters with gendered racism.

Black Women and Gendered Racism

For Black professional women, the most common controlling image they had to counter was the image Collins (2004) characterizes as the "modern Mammy." The modern Mammy is expected to sacrifice all vestiges of a personal life in order to demonstrate unshakeable loyalty to the (usually white) boss or institution. This image dovetails with St. Jean and Feagin's (1998) observation that white employers may perceive Black women, by virtue of their gender, as easily exploited. Many of the women interviewed here stated that they often encountered situations where they were expected to accept unreasonable demands, willingly accept compromising roles, or silently accept disrespectful treatment to avoid potentially disrupting the smooth innerworkings of the organization. In other words, colleagues expected Black women to fit the image of the modern Mammy through a willingness to make enormous personal sacrifices for the sake of the business.

Angie is a higher education administrator who speaks directly to this issue. One of her most pronounced experiences with racism involved an unpleasant interaction with a lower-level staff member who worked in the university dining hall. The dining hall mistakenly charged a dinner to Angie's department, and when Angie called to rectify the error:

> "that woman called me rude and condescending and hung up on me! She filed a complaint. So I had to meet with the dean, who arranged for mediation. When they did the mediation, everyone was trying to support this woman, even though she hung up on me and I am in a much higher position than she is. Even with everyone kissing her ass, this woman got mad, said she wasn't staying, and walked out! Now can you imagine that happening if I were a white man? There's no way that woman would have talked to me like that, and no way the other administrators would have supported her for doing it."

Angie's experience clearly reflects this aspect of gendered racism. Her treatment is that of many Black workers who are treated disrespectfully by coworkers, even those in positions with less status. However, the racism Angie experiences is also gendered, in that her status as a woman likely made her more easily disparaged. Even more important, the institutional procedures used to resolve such disputes were instrumental in pressuring Angie to conform to the image of the modern Mammy. The administrators' tacit support of the lower-level service employee in the supposedly neutral mediation session suggests that Angie is expected to conform to and accept disrespectful treatment in order to avoid causing trouble. Significantly, Angie herself implies that the discourteous treatment she received in this situation is attributable to gendered racism, when she questions whether the incident would have occurred not only if she were white, but a white man.

Similarly, Simone, a community educator for a nonprofit organization, cites experiences with racism that are not neutral but are quite gender-specific. She asserts that during her tenure in the organization, she was frequently asked to do things that she found uncomfortable and compromising. Specifically, she cites an incident where

> "we had a Black client who had really terrible body odor. I was solicited to deal with this person. "I had to ask, is this because I'm black? It

> would not look racist for me to tell this other Black person they have BO, but if you all say it, it looks like you're being racist? Is that what you think?" They all got quiet. I might be the only Black person in the organization, but I will be damned if they'll put me in situations like that! *They were always trying, though.*" (emphasis added)

Ostensibly, this experience is one of a Black worker being solicited to deal with a Black customer with whom they might (at least theoretically) have greater familiarity and cultural ties. However, when interpreted through the lens of gendered racism, the nature of this request suggests that it is another example of the assumption that Black women are more easily placed in compromising positions or exploited than Black men in comparable positions. Like Angie, Simone's colleagues saw nothing wrong with expecting her to perform a distasteful task on behalf of the organization, even though this task was clearly outside the bounds of her job description as a community educator. Her experiences with gendered racism reflect the struggle faced by Black women who confront colleagues who expect to interact with the modern Mammy.

Gendered racism was also reported in the form of Black women workers feeling uncomfortably sexualized and exoticized by white colleagues. Many of the women interviewed described unwelcome sexual tensions shaped by a perception that as Black women, they were exotic, sexually powerful beings. The stereotype of the uncontrollably sexual Black women has a long history and has, in one form or another, been implicit in controlling images of Black women as welfare mothers, Jezebels, and the Black bitch (Collins, 1990; 2004). In contemporary work spaces, these images remain problematic for African American women.

Marcia, a consultant for a health care firm, describes one disturbing incident of visiting a hospital that was a client of her firm and feeling sexualized by a patient's relative. During this visit, Marcia endured listening to the patient's relative reminisce about the "good old days in the South" and how people "knew their place." At the end of the visit:

> "he came over and kissed me on the cheek! I was so dumbfounded that I couldn't figure out what was going on or if I should take my knee and slam him because I've never been kissed on the cheek by a little white man who felt that women were...(trails off). .And I'm the only person he kissed in that room, this man I had never seen before in my life. But that this man would go on and on about the days when people *knew their place* (emphasis hers) and then kiss me, out of all the people in the room? I bet I knew exactly what place he—I know what was on his mind."

In Marcia's role as a health care consultant visiting a client of her firm, a patient's relative taking the liberty of kissing her is unorthodox at best. However, she astutely notes that this advance came after a thinly veiled reference to Southern life when Blacks were openly subjugated and Black women were routinely subjected to—and often powerless to resist—unwelcome advances from white men. This experience with racism is specifically gendered in that Marcia was unwillingly cast in the role of the sexually available Black woman.

Georgia, an analyst for a nonprofit organization, also reports gendered racism in the form of being confronted with stereotypes of Black women as exotic sexual beings. Interestingly, this took place in the context of an interaction with a

white female coworker. Georgia recounts attending a board meeting where she wore a red leather suit:

> "I had no idea what buzz got created until I talked to a board member who did not participate but her husband was there. She called and said, 'Georgia, I don't know what you had on, but it certainly got my husband's attention.' First off, this is a man who wears white socks all the time. Second, I don't want to know that her husband is checking me out in my suit! And why would she tell me that? We don't have that kind of relationship."

Given the history of Black women as prey for more powerful white men, the convergence of race and gender here create a situation that renders Georgia particularly uncomfortable with the board member's uninvited interest.

Gendered racism structures both the nature and scope of the experiences these women recount as well as their reactions to these experiences. When confronted with expectations that they would accept unreasonable demands and/or disrespectful treatment for the sake of the organization, many of the women interviewed openly expressed their irritation, frustration, and anger. For instance, Angie recounts her reaction to the administration's support of the lower-level employee who treated her rudely:

> "I'm totally disgusted and feeling totally devalued by the situation. After the session was over and she decided she wasn't going to go through it, I basically told them exactly how I felt. I said this is uncalled for, I requested mediation, and this is not a mediation...[My reaction] was not a controlled thing. They heard exactly how I felt right then and there."

In the meeting with the administration, Angie unequivocally expressed the irritation, frustration, and dissatisfaction she felt in response to her experience with gendered racism. However, the availability of this response can also be interpreted as an effect of gendered racism. As St. Jean and Feagin (1998) suggest, Black women, because they are women, are generally considered less threatening than Black men. As such, Angie's vocal expression of discontent was likely less problematic to her white superiors than a similar response coming from a Black man. Gendered racism structures workplace interactions such that Black female respondents were not considered threatening and thus had more leeway to vocalize their feelings of frustration.

Some women purposely adopted a more threatening, intimidating role, because they viewed this as one of few options that allowed them to be taken seriously and to avoid the awkward, uncomfortable situations that accompanied coworkers' expressions of gendered racism. Sherice, a professor of humanities, states:

> "I sometimes play a no-nonsense role that makes people feel intimidated but not with thinking about it. If I don't actively work to correct it will happen. People give me more credit for being on top of things and less willing to put me in positions where I feel uncomfortable. It makes people feel intimidated or overly respectful."

Sherice's statement echoes the view that because Black women are seen as more malleable and controllable because of their gender, they experience gendered racism in the form of being placed in awkward situations. As she indicates, some Black women consciously present themselves as tough and intimidating in order to avoid the gendered racism in the form of exploitation.

Black Men and Gendered Racism

Many Black men experienced gendered racism in the form of countering white colleagues' perceptions of them as threatening, menacing, or overly aggressive, or as many respondents described, the image of the "angry Black man[1]". As respondents described it, the angry Black man image is a middle-class, educated African American male who, despite his economic and occupational successes, perceives racial discrimination everywhere and consequently is always enraged.

Many respondents perceived that white colleagues and superiors expected them to fit this image. As such, they took pains to avoid engaging in any behavior that might reflect it. Todd is a banker with a major financial institution. He asserts that a constant part of his job involves carefully constructing his demeanor, actions, and behaviors so that he does not threaten or intimidate his white colleagues:

> "Most of them haven't spent too much time around Black people, so what they think they know is usually from TV or some other stupid source. So if they already think most Black guys grow up in the 'hood and sell drugs and are basically like [popular rapper] 50-cent, then I have to do everything I can not to portray that. That means that if they say something to me that reflects that they think that about me, I can't ever get mad. I have to brush it off, always be the nice guy who's *not too threatening, not too militant*, because they'll lose it if they ever really see me in that way. And that would have serious repercussions for my job" (emphasis added).

As Todd describes, he is always in a battle to present himself in opposition to this particular stereotype of Black men. Note that he particularly attempts to portray himself as someone who is not too "threatening or militant," since these are the key characteristics associated with the stereotype of the angry Black man. Consequently, he experiences gendered racism at work in that he must constantly show, through his behavior, speech, mannerisms, and general demeanor, that he is in no way this threatening, angry persona often associated with Black masculinity.

Garrett, an accountant for a major sports organization, was one of the respondents who specifically evoked this controlling image by name. Here he describes how he must constantly monitor employees' treatment of him as well as their reactions to him:

> "I always have to tread lightly because I know I can't afford to be seen as that 'angry Black man.' You have to always watch how people react to you, and even then it's like, why wasn't I invited to that meeting? Or that dinner? And if I say something, I'm always watching, like, how did people take that? How did they respond to it?" Like Todd, Garrett experiences racism at work in the unspoken pressure to counter coworkers' concerns that he is uncontrollably angry and therefore

> threatening. Steven is a loan officer for a bank who gives another example of the tension of combating the image of the "angry Black man." Being a black male, you're put in a situation where you have to work twice as hard to prove yourself. Especially in the corporate world, because its such a white male dominated field...I've always put myself in a position where I felt it was my job to represent the race. So I can't ever be that stereotype that others have of us—loud, angry, I can't really talk about or acknowledge race at work...I can't be that stereotype of that guy, because that's just perpetuating the stereotype. So I've sort of taken that on my back in my work environment to prove that whatever you may think about people who look like me, I'm going to open your eyes to a whole other perspective.

Note that Steven describes a stereotype of a loud and angry man who openly addresses racial issues as the image that he must refute through contrasting behavior. Like Todd and Garrett, Steven also locates this stereotype as one that is present among whites and one that Black men in particular must work to avoid.

Gendered racism may also be implicit in the lack of close ties and exclusion from social networks that characterized many Black men's interactions at work. Of the workers interviewed for this research, many more Black men than Black women reported that they were often excluded from collegial workplace interactions and that they had fewer friends or close acquaintances (if any) among their coworkers. Garrett describes these feelings of exclusion, stating:

> "A lot of the guys in the office, they usually get together after work and play poker, I believe. Poker's their thing. And I've never been invited, *I don't know any other black person in the office that's ever been invited.* It kind of seems like a little clique. Not that it necessarily bothers me, but its something that I play in the back of mind. Like, I wonder why nobody's ever asked me to play? Things like that." (emphasis added).

Garrett describes this poker group as comprised solely of white men, noting that no other Black colleagues are invited to join. Though some of the Black women in this study certainly experienced isolation from colleagues, Black men were much more likely to report being excluded from work-related events and to have few office allies.

Similarly, Ken describes a workplace where he has given up trying to be forge ties with his coworkers. He states:

> "the thing is, my coworkers don't speak to me. This one guy never speaks to me. I say hello to him in the morning, and the guy just looks at me. The only time he speaks to me is if it's negative or sarcastic, and we don't have that kind of relationship where he can be sarcastic with me. It's like once a week he'll mess with me. If I was off of the job I'd say something, but since I'm on the job I have to keep it to myself, because he is a manager. He's not my direct manager, he couldn't fire me, but he is a manager."

Like Garrett, Ken is not a part of the informal interactions that occur at work, and he has not been able to develop a very cordial relationship with many of his colleagues. While Black women were much more likely to state that they were

often exploited or placed in uncomfortable, compromising positions, they rarely suggested that they had difficulties interacting with colleagues in general. This difference may also be a residual effect of gendered racism—that Black men experience gendered racism in the presumption that they are intimidating, fearsome people, and this perception makes them people with whom other coworkers would prefer not to regularly interact.

Gendered racism also structured Black men's responses to these affronts, revealing reactions that differed sharply from Black women's. While Black women, because they were perceived as less threatening, could speak out about the treatment they received, Black men had no such luxury. Their attempts to repudiate coworkers' assessments of them as frightening people meant that they could not afford to actually get angry or vocalize their displeasure at various offenses. They feared that colleagues would perceive such assertions as evidence of the very stereotypical traits Black men were attempting to downplay. Gendered racism, therefore, structured Black men's responses to racism such that they tended to repress any emotions, statements, or behaviors that could possibly be construed as militant, angry, or belligerent.

Roger, an analyst at a nonprofit research organization, reinforces that it is incumbent upon Black men not to reveal any sense of anger at work:

> "Different black men I've seen in my office and growing up and knowing about, we focus so much on not bringing or showing our feelings at the office, but a lot of times the office produces so much stress you bring that back home. It's difficult to keep them both separate."

Roger's account emphasizes how gendered racism leaves Black men with few outlets at work where they can express "negative" emotions, and also highlights that this lack of outlets places Black men in a predicament where repressing these behaviors and emotions affects their lives outside of work as well.

Black men were also much more likely than Black women to downplay or minimize their feelings of irritation or displeasure at their experiences with gendered racism. Recall that because gendered racism renders Black women less threatening, they often were able to immediately vocalize their feelings about being treated as the modern Mammy without serious repercussions. In contrast, because gendered racism suggests that Black men are inherently threatening, Black men interviewed here perceived a greater risk in drawing attention to their coworkers' and employers' gendered racism. Without the option to speak out, Black men frequently became emotionally detached at work and minimized their anger at the gendered racism they encountered.

Leon, a community educator, states:

> I work with a woman who is a complete racist and culturally clueless. And what do I do when she tells the biracial woman on our team that her hair looks like a poodle's? Or when she assumes that because I'm Black I know people in [names a predominantly Black part of the city]? I stay calm, change the subject, and get back to work. I have to do this, because how will it look if I curse her out, even when she deserves it? I'll be the one in the fire, not her.

Leon's rhetorical question of how he will appear should he respond to his colleagues' racially insensitive remarks underscore the constant burden on these Black professional men to disprove stereotypical images of Black men as angry, out of control, or bothered by racial issues, and the importance of doing this by displaying the opposite characteristics. Leon's response is a stark contrast to those of Angie and Donette who took the opportunity to establish themselves as no-nonsense women who could be intimidating.

Nate, for example, is a mortgage loan officer who employs complicated strategies to discourage his coworkers from seeing him as an angry Black man. He describes ignoring racial slurs at work unless they are repeated frequently to him, and even then states that his policy is to "pull someone aside to quietly tell them I may not like what they're saying." However, despite the effort he exerts to avoid the possibility that his coworkers might view him as the angry Black man, he still tries to diminish his feelings of irritation at the gendered racism that creates these circumstances:

> "When I think about it now, I mean, definitely I'm upset but it has to be something really big and overt and serious before I could get really pissed. So you downplay it, contain it like that."

Though Nate assumes a measured, careful reaction to avoid being stereotyped as the angry Black man, he also minimizes his irritation with this situation in ways that Black women in this study did not do. Black male workers' efforts to remain calm, affable, and genial in order to rebut the image of the angry Black man sharply contrast Black women's willingness to vocalize and speak up about their colleagues' and supervisors' gendered racism.

Conclusion

Black men and women in this study both describe experiences with racism that are clearly shaped by gender. Black men confront gendered racism at work when they struggle to avoid manifesting any behaviors or attitudes that could possibly reinforce colleagues' perceptions of Black men as threatening or intimidating. Even when Black men attempt to portray themselves as non-threatening, affable people, coworkers may still find them too daunting and unapproachable for the inter-office friendships and socializing that are often essential to occupational advancement. Black women deal with gendered racism in their encounters with the controlling image of the modern Mammy, and in confronting coworkers' sexualized, exoticized perceptions of them. Both Black men's and Black women's reactions to racism are also structured by gender. Black men have fewer outlets for challenging gendered racism and thus minimize their feelings about it, while Black women's responses to gendered racism are shaped by its implications that they are fundamentally unthreatening.

Drawing attention to gendered racism in the workplace refines sociological understanding of exactly how racism is manifested at work. The results of this study demonstrate that it is erroneous to presume that Black men and Black women experience racism in the same way. While in some ways they experience similar manifestations of racism—assumptions that they are less intelligent and capable, the existence of glass ceilings, institutional discrimination—focusing on *gendered* racism provides a more nuanced

understanding of the ways in which Black women may experience racism in ways that are inapplicable to Black men, and vice versa.

A particularly significant finding is that while gendered racism contributes to the perception that Black women are easily exploited, particularly for the sake of the workplace, the responses of the women here suggest that this very perception creates a space for them to demonstrate their opposition. In other words, when they know that they are seen as more easily taken advantage of than Black men, they often take the opportunity to assert themselves and demonstrate their toughness. This reaction, however, is complex and in some ways potentially problematic. While Black women who assert their refusal to conform to the stereotypes of the modern mammy may convincingly rebut that stereotype, they run the risk of being alternatively perceived as a version of the "educated Black bitch."

Collins (2004) describes the controlling image of the "educated Black bitch" as one of Black women with "money, power, and good jobs [who] control their own bodies and sexuality" (145). The Black bitch label is often assigned to Black women who fail to embody the extreme loyalty of the modern Mammy or who cannot uphold the image of the Black lady. With the women interviewed here, their assertive refusals to conform and outspoken rejection of confining workplace norms and organizational cultures that rendered them easily exploited or sexually available leave them dangerously subject to gendered racism in the form of being labeled the Black bitch. As such, while gendered racism creates confining norms for Black women, it also may create a space for opposition. Ultimately, however, this opposition can potentially reinforce controlling images like that of the Black bitch, thereby upholding yet another manifestation of gendered racism.

While Black women face the predicament of avoiding one controlling image by potentially embracing another, Black men face a different conundrum. Their struggle stems from informal workplace norms that pressure them to appear genial and cordial to undermine the controlling image of the "angry Black man." This issue highlights the fluidity of gender privilege as it intersects with race—while men, in general, receive rewards in patriarchal society, for Black men, gendered racism may function to minimize male privilege in *some* settings. Indeed, the Black women interviewed here did not indicate that they experienced the same sense of exclusion and social isolation as their Black male counterparts. For Black men, the dynamics of gendered racism suggest that in certain contexts the advantages of masculinity are less apparent than in others.

The results of this study do not suggest that gendered racism advantages Black women at the expense of Black men, nor that gendered racism eliminates the advantages of male privilege for Black men. Rather, this study reveals a picture of racism that is starkly complicated by gender. As a group, Black men still enjoy gender privileges relative to Black women in occupational, social, political, and economic spheres (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). However, it is important to consider this gender privilege as a fluid state that is not constant in all environments or social settings. The results of this study clearly indicate that Black men's gender privilege at work does not correlate into an ability to openly address the ways in which racism is manifested for them.

Furthermore, the controlling image of the angry Black man, like the controlling images described by Espiritu (1997) and Collins (1990, 2004) should be further explored for its implications for African American men. This image, like

those of the Fu Manchu, Chinese laundryman, sissy, sidekick, and others, ultimately seems to uphold hegemonic white masculinity. This image suggests that Black male rage at racism is inopportune and unfounded, and simultaneously reinforces the perception of Black men as a threat and a danger to the social order. The implications of this in the workplace are seen in many of the respondents' unwillingness to confront racial hostilities at work. Thus, this image controls Black men by presenting their anger at racism as unjustified paranoia that threatens to dismantle the social order.

Finally, it is interesting to consider what implications Black men's responses to gendered racism may have on their interactions outside of the workplace. If Black men learn at work that they should repress their aggravation with gendered racism, what effect does this emotional control have in other spheres of social life? Does downplaying feelings help Black men to achieve some of the tenets of hegemonic masculinity, specifically those that suggest that men should always control their emotions (Kimmel, 2001; Connell, 1987)? If so, does the practice of repressing emotions benefit Black men in social spheres where conforming to hegemonic masculinity is idealized?

Ultimately, this research suggests that understanding racism as a gendered phenomenon offers a more nuanced depiction of its impact on African Americans and a more intricate portrayal of their responses to it. This study furthers existing research on gendered racism by addressing the ways gendered racism produces controlling images that impact African Americans at work and the strategies Black workers utilize to counter these images.

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NOTE

[1] Collins (2004) argues that a similar controlling image of the "criminal" is often applied to working-class Black men.