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INVISIBLE LABOR: A MIXED-METHOD STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AND THEIR EMOTIONAL LABOR IN THE ACADEMY

A Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology The University of Mississippi

by

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ABSTRACT

In this study, I examined how black women instructors and professors engage in emotional labor through performances in order to resist controlling images and stereotypes related to their race and gender. The goal was to add to the extensive literature on emotional labor and its impact on how women and people of color navigate white hegemonic institutions (Patton 2004; Harley 2007; Evans and Moore 2015). My hope is to contribute the perspectives and counter-narratives of African American women who are on the margins of race and gender. This can provide a more intersectional explanation for some of the social issues within colleges and universities, and help to lay the groundwork for more objective and long-term solutions. In addition, the study pushes for further development of cognitive labor and how it works in conjunction with emotional labor.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the black women surviving the academy as best they can. I also dedicate this to both my grandmothers Annie Hudson and Mary Buckingham for their unrelenting love and support.
LIST OF APPREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

PWI  Predominantly White Institutions

HBCU Historically Black Colleges and Universities
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my deepest appreciation to my chair, Dr. Willa Johnson and my committee members, Drs. Kirk Johnson, and Kirsten Dellinger. In addition, I thank Dr. Louwanda Evans of Millsaps College for her support and research contributions which inspired this project. Lastly, I acknowledge my dear friends Nadia and LaToya who kept me mostly sane through this process.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In this study, I will examine how black women instructors and professors engage in emotional labor through performances in order to resist controlling images and stereotypes related to their race and gender. I also seek to understand how and why these performances shift based on their audiences. The goal is to add to the extensive literature on emotional labor and its impact on how women and people of color navigate white hegemonic institutions (Patton 2004; Harley 2007; Evans and Moore 2015). The purpose of the study is to contribute further to the perspectives and counter-narratives of African American women who are on the margins of race and gender, and provide a more nuanced understanding about the intersectional identities of African American women who teach in colleges and universities. By identifying these problems, the study will help to lay the groundwork for more objective and long-term solutions.

Black Americans face both marginalization and tokenization in predominantly white spaces (Evans 2013; Kelly and McCann 2014). The negotiation of blacks’ racial identity and responses to their racialized experiences in predominantly white institutions has been characterized by sociologists as emotion work or emotional labor that is not evenly distributed among their white counterparts (Evans and Moore 2015). The literature reveals that emotional labor for both women and people of color includes managing their emotions while trying to fulfill both workplace and socially assigned roles in the workplace (Bellas 1999; Harlow 2003; Durr and Wingfield 2011). In academic
settings, women and faculty of color have different emotional demands and expectations related to their social identities which affects the type and amount of emotional labor they engage in (Bellas 1999; Harlow 2003). Building on Arlie Hochschild (1983), Louwanda Evans (2013), Adia Harvey-Wingfield (2007), and Ervin Goffman (1973), I define emotional labor as engagement in certain performances in order to resist controlling images and stereotypes; therefore, managing the audiences’ perceptions. I pose the following research questions: 1) How do black women instructors and professors describe the performances they give in order to resist controlling images and stereotypes related to their race and gender?; 2) How do black women instructors and professors describe emotion norms in academic settings?; 3) What strategies do African American women use to manage their emotions in accordance with those emotion norms?

Based on the literature, I hypothesize that African American women engage in performances to resist controlling images and stereotypes based on their perceived social status as black women. I also hypothesize that they will engage in surface acting in accordance with organizational and societal emotion norms. Furthermore, I suspect that the performances they engage in will differ based on the racial and gender demographic of their audience.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of systemic racism

In order to understand emotional labor and the performances African American women instructors and professors engage in, we must examine the role of systemic racism. Joe R. Feagin (2010) refers to systemic racism as a social force that affects the everyday experiences of individuals who must navigate a range of racist practices: the unjustly gained economic and political power of whites, unequal distribution of resources, the white racial framing of African Americans, and major institutions that were created and seek to preserve white privilege and power.

While systemic racism impacts African Americans and other people of color within the academy regardless of gender, the system itself is very much gendered (Wingfield 2008). The concept of gendered racism has been explored by many feminist sociologists to contextualize the intersections of race and gender. Systemic gendered racism highlights how black men and black women, respectively, experience racism (Wingfield 2008:6). Black women’s experience within this system is related to their historical position as being both black and female. They have a long history of being marginalized by both men and white women, having little autonomy over their physical bodies, and enduring the white racist and sexist controlling images that shape their experiences especially within predominantly white institutions (Wingfield 2008: 8). An
important part of systemic gendered racism is the stock of controlling images used to manage black women. Thus, Patricia Hill Collins describes controlling images as the socially constructed stereotypes developed and used by the dominant group to maintain and reinforce social relations that subordinate black women (Collins 1990). Systemic racism and controlling images both play a significant role in the experiences and perceptions of African Americans, especially within white-dominated institutions (Feagin 2010). Tracy Patton (2004) argues that a white supremacist hegemonic structure is supported within academia. This argument insists that the academy is structured in a way that is exclusionary and reproduces the racialized hierarchy in our larger society. The constant power struggle, which is often invisible to those with privileged identities, presents many barriers in both the everyday work experiences and emotional well-being of professors of color.

The racialized and gendered structuring of academic institutions often leads to the isolation and exclusion of African American women and other women of color in ways that differ from their white female colleagues (Kelly and McCann 2014). Where race and gender intersect, black women have a unique position in the academy as outsiders within, referring to one’s situational identity that is attached to specific histories of social injustice (Collins 1999). These specific histories include stereotypes that contribute to how African American women are regarded within the academy on account of institutional and socially prescribed work expectations. In addition to their heavier teaching loads, they are often expected to serve as the “go-to person” for African American students (Harley 2008). This view of the black woman as the go-to person has
deep resonance in the enduring stereotype of the black mammy, which is a racist and
gendered caricature that fosters the notion of black women as subservient caretakers
(Wingfield 2007). Similar expectations emerge within the context of the classroom and
professor-student relationships. These expectations reflect the racial and gendered nature
of teaching, since black women are expected to do things that men are not. Generally,
female professors are expected to be more available for personal contact with students,
and even while data suggests they are much more engaged with students versus their
male colleagues they are still rated lower than men by students (Bellas 1999). The
perceived lower social status of female professors also puts them at constant risk of
having their authority challenged (Bellas 1999). For example, in a study examining
student dominance behaviors in male and female professors’ classrooms, there was a
higher degree of male student aggression towards women professors in comparison to
their male counterparts (Brooks 1982). Similarly, Chavella Pittman found that women
faculty of color at a predominantly white research institution reported that white male
students often challenged their authority, questioned their teaching competency, and
disrespected their scholarly expertise (2010:187). They also reported more aggressive and
threatening behavior from white male students in comparison to other students (Pittman
2010). These findings reveal how students assert both their male and white dominance to
undermine the authority of women, especially women of color. In the process, these
women are still expected to efficiently fulfill obligations related to scholarly publishing,
teaching, and service even in the face of disrespectful and threatening behavior from
students.
Engaging in emotional labor consists of managing and communicating emotions through publicly observable facial and bodily displays (Hochschild 1983). This includes masking any negative feelings that may arise on the job, whether justified or otherwise. Research examining emotional labor tends to focus more on frontline service jobs such as waitressing and flight attending (Wharton 2009; Evans 2013). Both of these occupations require a significant amount of interaction with strangers, and tend to be constrained by organizational rules about how they should present themselves when interacting with customers. In a study examining the experiences of waitresses, Wharton (2009) found that worker-consumer interaction may be layered with historical implications of domestic work, which raises important questions regarding race and gender. These assumptions associated with lower-level service jobs may inform us about the experiences of more “professional level” service work. For example, Jennifer Pierce (1995) found that the emotional labor of female paralegals reproduced the bureaucratic gender relations in law firms. This is because the profession is highly concentrated with women who must act as “caretakers” for the lawyers they assist. Thus, Pierce also found that paralegals’ deference and caretaking were forms of emotional labor (1995:129). One paralegal in the study reported that smiling might be a part of the job; others shared similar sentiments about the importance of demeanor when dealing with difficult attorneys (Pierce 1995:131). This implies that female paralegals engage in surface acting in order to meet the demands of their job.
Surface acting is when a person is aware of the act they are putting on to communicate a specific emotion (Hochschild 1983). Generally, most people may have to engage in surface acting when navigating the workplace. However, for women and people of color the motivations behind their performances are indicative of deeper issues. A study examining the work experiences of African American professionals found that both black men and women engaged in “performances” to resist controlling images and stereotypes such as the black mammy and angry black man (Wingfield 2007:209). Still, resistance to these stereotypes requires conforming to an organizational culture that for women and people of color includes gendered and racialized societal emotion norms (Evans 2013). These emotion norms consist of feeling rules which are enforced during emotional exchanges to determine what is rightly owed and owing in the currency of feeling (Hochschild 1983:18). This includes emotions communicated from the worker to the consumer and vice versa. Unfortunately, these “feeling” rules are maintained and enforced by social forces that reproduce racial power and privilege (Evans 2013:12). In one study, African Americans reported that the feeling rules in their professional settings were racialized and they were unable to express emotions such as anger in the same capacity as their white counterparts, even when justified (Wingfield 2010). This demonstrates how African Americans must both manage and suppress their emotions to navigate racialized and gendered structures in the workplace.

For Africans Americans, their emotional labor encompasses not only taking into account their own social identity, but that of their colleagues and those they are serving in whatever context. Evans and Moore (2015) examined the emotion work of people of
color navigating elite U.S. law schools and U.S. commercial airlines. Their data revealed that in both settings, people of color managed their emotions in order to combat stereotypical assumptions of their emotional characteristics (Evans and Moore 2015). For example, in one of the interviews from the study, an African-American law student reported that before responding to racial offenses he considers how to properly respond without coming across as the angry black man. The same negotiation occurred with a black pilot who said: “I try to voice my opinions and give my information in the calmest way that I can because I don’t want them to think that I am the angry black man and be afraid ‘cause then they will tell on me” (Evans & Moore 2015). Both narratives illustrate how these two black men are aware of their racial identities, and the possible consequences if they do not manage their emotions accordingly. Roxanna Harlow (2003) found a similar negotiation of social identity in the emotional labor of African American professors. In order to resist negative stereotypes, Harlow reports that black professors “performed” competence and authority through strategies such as maintaining an authoritative demeanor and reminding students to refer to them as Doctor or Professor (Harlow 2003:354). Similarly, another study found that black women professors engaged in particular etiquette and emotional labor to cope with alienation and to manage their emotional “presentation” in the workplace (Durr and Wingfield 2011). While some of the women reported feeling defenseless, they understood that their performances were both survival tactics and necessary for advancement (Durr and Wingfield 2011). These studies demonstrate that African Americans must engage in certain types of emotional labor in order to stay employed and advance in their respective careers. The negotiation
of this emotional labor, is also consistent with the concept of cognitive labor, which is the process of thinking through potentially racist interactions even before they occur (Evans and Feagin 2015; Evans 2013). It is the processes of black women (and men) that requires them to think through methodically their presentation of self and to negotiate potentially contentious interactions in advance of their occurrences.

Understanding Emotional Labor through the “Performance”

Emotional labor consists of creating publicly observable facial and bodily displays to communicate certain feelings (Hochshild 1983). Based on Goffman’s 1973 study, these publicly observable presentations constitute a type of performance to manage how their audience perceives them. Goffman defines performance as “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by [their] continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has influence on the observers” (1973:22). The aspect of emotional labor consisting of “observable” displays builds from what Goffman refers to as the front. The front or front stage is the part of an individual’s performance that is employed in a fixed fashion to control the situation for their observers (Goffman 1973:22). Studies on emotional labor demonstrate that individuals in the same line of service are all expected to maintain the same front. Thus, the front is both institutionalized as a “collective representation” expected of all those performing a similar task (Goffman 1973:27). However, Goffman notes factors related to one’s appearance may affect the manner of that performance. He refers to appearance and manner as personal fronts. Appearance tends to be fixed stimuli implying the performer’s
social status, while manner consists of how the performer presents the self or acts in social interactions (Goffman 1973:24). An individual’s manner also shifts based on their audience and setting which Goffman refers to as audience segregation (1973:49). Studies have shown that African Americans are aware of their appearances in predominantly white institutions, and how they should act to navigate social interactions in those spaces (Wingfield 2007, Evans and Moore 2015). This implies that African Americans consider the ways their appearance is perceived based on the setting and audience; thus, they will manage their “act” accordingly.

Standpoint Theory, Intersectionality, and the Power of Counterstorytelling

Standpoint theory, black feminist thought, and critical race theory’s counterstorytelling together form the theoretical framework for this study. Combined these theories with Erving Goffman’s Everyday Presentation of Self, help highlight the significance of emotional labor, the unique performances that emotion work requires, and the cost of these performances to black women while navigating academic institutions. Dorothy Smith (1987) maintains that whether it be the construction of ideologies, knowledge, or culture, the experiences of women and people of color are often excluded. Therefore, black culture and views about the world are subjugated to those in positions of power (Smith 1987:20). Elite white men occupy those positions, so how black Americans view themselves and their interactions with the world around them is based on that perspective. Standpoint theory, a postcolonialist and feminist theoretical perspective, argues that in order to get a better understanding of the world, it must be viewed from the
lens of women and other marginalized groups (Smith 1987; Harding 2015). This centers those at the margins as the knowers with equally valid insights.

Smith’s work is incorporated in this study to examine how a feminist sociology might look from the perspectives of women of color. The construction of black feminist thought adds further to Smith’s theory by centering the voices of women who are at the margins of both race and gender. The hallmark of black feminist thought is its emphasis on the interconnectedness of multiple oppressions (Collins 1990). Like Smith, Collins highlights the importance of a feminist epistemology, by adding the importance of race and class when constructing alternative epistemologies. Smith’s and Collins’ work represents the importance of an objective and alternative perspective to how we create knowledge and understand social processes. My work builds on their theories to reveal how black women interpret and justify the necessity of “performances” within the academy.

Critical race theorists also stress the important of centering the unique voices of marginalized groups through counterstorytelling. Critical race theory’s voice of color thesis argues that oppressed people’s experiences privy them to information about which their white counterparts have no knowledge (Delgado and Stefancic 2001:9). Thus, they emphasize the need for counterstories that challenge the ideas of the majority in order to better understand the social world from the bottom up. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic argue that “society constructs the social world through a series of tacit agreements based on images, pictures, tales, and scripts” (2001:42). Much of these agreements were established solely by those in power, and contribute to the
marginalization of people of color. In short, counterstorytelling is an important measure needed to offset Eurocentric and North American interpretations of the social world, and give women and people of color a means to articulate their experiences with racism, sexism, and discrimination in their everyday lives.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

I conducted a mixed-methods study using interviews and an online survey to gather data. The interviews are my main point of reference for the study. The survey data is intended for descriptive statistical analysis. The sample size is too small to do anything more than to furnish a context about the demographics of respondents and their academic institutions, their use of time doing service such as committee work and mentorship, and their teaching load. My interview guide consisted of 16 questions structured around my research questions. The questions were broken up into the following sections: background, classroom and student interactions, interactions with colleagues, emotional management, costs of work and labor, and support networks. My sample included black women faculty members from both historical black colleges and universities (HBCU) and predominantly white institutions (PWI). Participants were from a broad range of disciplines. My rationale for including women at HBCUs was that these institutions’ origins were historically established and controlled by white mission societies (Foster 2001). Thus, their institutional structure both mirrors and is influenced by white hegemonic institutions, donors, and leaders.

Based on Sandra Harding’s (2015) strong objectivity proposal and critical race theory, I account for my sample which consists of only black women with no comparison group. Strong objectivity contends that research started outside of the dominate conceptual frameworks helps to detect the ways that research often serves the values and
interests of the most powerful groups (2015:34). A common critique of sociological research is its dismissal of the unique experiences of women and people of color. For example, critical race theorists highlight the necessity of centering African Americans via counternarratives that challenge white-dominated epistemologies (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Similarly, standpoint theory is intended to create feminist epistemologies that center the experiences of women (Smith 1987). However, neither of these theoretical arguments emphasize the importance of intersectionality. Often the experiences of blacks or women are universally applied to black women without consideration for the multiple oppressions they experience (Collins 1990; Brewer 2001; Sholock 2012). For these reasons I focus only on black women, a group positioned outside of dominant conceptual frameworks that traditionally focus on black men or white women.

The number of participants I was able to acquire was based on availability and responses to my recruitment emails. The appropriate number of interviews it takes to yield “generalizable” results is still inconclusive. However, a common theme is to focus less on the number of interviews, and more on factors like variability of the sample and saturation (Baker and Edwards 2012). Due to homogeneity of the sample, I was able to reach a point of saturation early on. Thus, I have attained enough data to yield inferences from my findings.

Data collection

Following IRB approval, I gained access to my participants via faculty recommendations and snowball sampling. Before I began officially recruiting for my
study I conducted one pilot interview which enabled me to pinpoint areas for improvement on my articulation and speaking volume, and to recognize the interview questions which required probing and follow-up questions. After my pilot interview, I sent an email inviting 57 African American women instructors and professors to participate in my study. While 18 women completed the survey, only 13 were available to be interviewed. Thus, the extraneous surveys were rendered null and void. During the recruitment process more women also responded to my initial email than those who completed the interview process. Three of them only had availability four months after the data collection deadline ended.

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to complete a survey in Qualtrics which requested demographic data and information about respondents’ departments to enable contextualization of the interviews more fully. The survey also included an electronic informed consent. Once my respondents completed the survey I sent them a Doodle link to select the times they were available to meet. This proved to be ineffective for some of them, so I allowed participants to give me their availability, and made myself available whenever they could fit me into their schedules. Once the interviews were scheduled a confirmation email was sent. I also sent reminder emails the day before each interview after two occasions when respondents forgot appointments that had been scheduled. At the participants’ request, I began sending reminder notices to them about scheduled appointments at least a day in advance.

Each interview was expected to last no longer than an hour. The interviews took on average about 50 minutes, with the exception of four. Since I informed respondents
that the interview was not intended to last over an hour I gave the four who went over the allotted time the option to finish the interview then, to reschedule, or to opt out of the balance of the questions. Only one person did not complete the full interview because it went over time, and they had no other available time to reschedule. My longest interview lasted approximately two hours and was broken up over a two-day period.

All of the interviews except two were conducted via phone, and all were audio recorded. The two in-person interviews took place in the personal offices of each interviewee. To ensure confidentiality, audio recordings were saved in a private, password protected Google drive, and surveys were saved in Qualtrics, a password-protected account. Once the audio recordings were transcribed, recordings were deleted from the Google drive. No identifying information is attached to any of the data. Individual participants who are referenced in the findings and discussion sections of this study have been given pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Once I transcribed all interview data and compiled survey responses, I looked for themes related to the initial variables being measured: Performance, Strategies, and Costs. My unit of analysis was the individual or performer. Performance was defined as how the individual presents herself to her audience through attire and body language. Strategies were defined as surface-acting in order to adhere to formal and informal emotion norms such as controlling one’s tone of voice and facial expressions that communicate emotions that are the opposite of what the individual is actually feeling.
These strategies represent how the individual perceives and acts out appropriate emotions in the context of academic settings. The potential costs were defined as the emotional, physical, and professional consequences which they endure while engaging in emotional labor (Hochschild 1983; Erickson and Ritter 2001; Combs 2016:8). Emotional consequences included job dissatisfaction and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Physical consequences included high blood pressure, hypertension, weight gain, and other health-related complications that are a result of chronic stress. Professional consequences included lower teacher evaluations, denied tenure and promotion, and lack of scholarly publications. The individuals’ performances, strategies, and costs were dependent on their audience, which includes students, other faculty members, and administrators.

The findings produced patterns that aligned with the initial themes I intended to code for in addition to themes of denial, avoidance, and mentally negotiating strategies or cognitive labor. The overarching codes I employed to analyze patterns in the data were emotional labor, cognitive labor, performance and strategies, avoidance, and denial. Emotional labor included emotion management, activities respondents specifically identified as emotional labor or emotion work, service related to mentoring and advocating for students of color, service related to advocating for one’s self and other faculty of color. Cognitive labor was used to describe how respondents negotiate the strategies they use to manage their self-presentation as well as the mental or “cognitive” processes they describe while navigating interactions in the workplace. Performance and strategies codes included anything related to attire, tone of voice, or body language to
assert or affirm one’s authority and competence. In addition, themes of avoidance or boundary-setting surfaced typically as a means for self-preservation. Lastly, a common and unexpected theme arose among respondents that I coded as denial. This code was applied to responses denying behaviors related to managing one’s self-presentation seemingly in attempt to affirm authenticity and agency.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The findings derived from the data collection and analysis address how black women instructors and professors describe the performances they give in order to resist controlling images and stereotypes, how they describe emotion norms or manage their emotions in academic settings, and the strategies they use to manage their emotions in accordance with emotion norms. The findings aligned with my initial expectations that African American women engage in performances to resist controlling images and stereotypes with the most common one being the “angry black woman.” This included managing their emotional presentation during interactions with students, colleagues, and administrators sometimes to avoid conflict and at other times to not appear too “angry.” Their performances also heavily relied on appearing competent and as an authority figure. While I initially suspected that their performances would depend on the demographics of their institution that was not necessarily the case. The majority of the women regardless of their institution managed their presentation to students and to colleagues. Most of the women also reported engaging in what I have identified as cognitive labor, which includes in some cases a perpetual state of internal negotiating in committee and faculty meetings, in the classroom, and in other situations where they must interact with students, colleagues, and administrators.

I conducted 13 semi-structured, open-ended interviews and administered a 20-question survey. Of the 13 respondents, only three taught at historically black colleges.
The age range of the participants was between 35 and 64 years. The sample was skewed towards the social sciences with three in Political Science and four in Sociology. The other six represented the following disciplines: Biological Sciences, Education, English, History, and Religious Studies. The majority of the women taught in the South or Southeastern part of the United States, but the Midwest and Northeast were also represented. The following tables include other noteworthy departmental and institutional data that provides further context to the findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Rank</th>
<th>Time at current Institution (years)</th>
<th>Time teaching at college-level (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>5-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>5+</td>
<td>7-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: This chart represents data collected about interviewees’ position or rank and teaching experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Loads</th>
<th>Department Size - # of faculty members</th>
<th># of Black women in department</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>Only me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:2</td>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:2</td>
<td>15+</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:3</td>
<td>8+</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: This chart represents data collected about interviewees’ teaching loads and the composition of their academic departments.

In addition to the above reported data, those at PWIs taught classes that were predominantly white with some noting that certain classes tended to be more diverse depending on the content. The women at HBCUs reported teaching classes that were
overwhelmingly black. Those at PWIs also reported fewer than six faculty of color in
their department with the exception of one. For those at HBCUs there were
inconsistencies between the number of African American women reported in their
departments and the number of non-whites reported in their departments. For example,
one person reported 4-6 African American female faculty members, but only 1-3 non-
white faculty members.

Respondents explicitly named supporting marginalized students as emotional
labor. About 70 percent of them reported that they are viewed as a go-to person by
students of color and other marginalized students with the other 30 percent being unsure.
In addition, about 77 percent reported spending at least a moderate amount of time or
more devoted to helping students who feel marginalized due to structural barriers at their
institution. While the preceding findings indicate these women are disproportionately
relied on to work with marginalized students, when asked via the survey whether or not
their male colleagues described similar amounts of time dealing with marginalized
students, five each marked no or not sure and three marked yes.

The women also reported other types of service in the survey which I have also
identified as emotional labor. Eleven women reported being asked questions unrelated to
their formal expertise, simply because they are black women. In addition, 10 of them
reported serving on thesis or dissertation committees with seven working on at least two
or more in a typical year. All except one of the women reported being on committees. Of
the committees they served on, most of the women at PWIs served on either or both
hiring committees and diversity-related committees. Lastly, roughly 62 percent reported
being called upon “sometimes” to “very often” to deal with racism in their department or at their university. Note: All reported percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

The findings are broken up into the following categories: Service and Advocacy, Negotiating Every Move, Looking the Part, Acting the Part, and Resistance: Maintaining a Sense of Self. These categories reflect the unique and most prominent themes that arose in the data. Direct quotes are incorporated to contextualize the data. Each quote has been edited for grammatical clarity and pseudonyms have been assigned to protect the identity of participants. All identifying names, places, and incidents have been omitted from the quotes.

Service and Advocacy

The theoretical explanation of emotional labor focuses on interactions that involve managing one’s facial and bodily displays of emotion (Hochschild 1983). However, the findings reveal that emotional labor can be described in more concrete ways beyond managing one’s physical presentation. In order to understand the specific ways the respondents described their emotional labor I asked both direct and indirect questions to gain a sense of their conscious and unconscious engagement in emotional labor. Some respondents were very explicit with what they believed to be emotional labor and how it affected them. What stood out the most was their interactions with students which one respondent, Anita, explicitly referred to as emotional labor:

What comes to my mind [is] when you’re in an institution with so few black professors and you are sort of a hands on, involved professor, you
will find that you kind of get a lot of the students of color coming to you with problems and issues and obstacles and challenges. And in your effort to listen and to help solve problems, that’s part of my emotional labor.

Anita revealed how being one of few faculty members of color is indicative of a two-fold burden of having to take on the added labor of supporting students of color. This was particularly consistent across the board with the women navigating predominantly white institutions. Another respondent, Nettie, also specified her work with students as a form of emotional labor:

My first thought as an emotion would be probably fatigue from being tired because when it is just a few African American professors you feel like a certain responsibility to all your African American students.

In Nettie’s case she referenced both her emotional labor and a physical cost, yet she described it as an obligation to black students. This service to students of color that Nettie sees as an obligation may reinforce the racist and gendered mammy caricature that fosters the notion of black women as subservient caretakers (Wingfield 2007). As other studies have shown, this expectation of women doing the unofficial duty of caregiving in the context of the workplace can have negative impacts on their work experiences.

Interestingly, Nettie is not alone in feeling she has an obligation to black students. Benita, a professor at an HBCU, has a similar perspective about her work with students:

So here in this context being a person of color teaching at a HBCU, the emotional labor that I face I think is a little bit different in that it’s often my desire for my students that produces the extra burden . . . I know that there’s a world out there that doesn’t believe in their potential so I’m often pushing them perhaps even beyond where they want to be pushed.

Benita, Nettie, and other women in the study who described feeling an obligation to black students reveals the complicated nature of emotional labor in the case of black
women in academia. In Benita’s case, she appears to intentionally distinguish her emotional labor as different in the context of an HBCU setting. Supporting and advocating for students in a setting where racial bureaucracy is assumed absent, may alleviate some of the conflict for black women at HBCUs, who, like those at PWIs, expend a significant amount of emotional labor with students of color. In the case of black women at HBCUs it appears to be more of a choice rather than an implied institutional obligation.

Negotiating Every Move

While scholars are still operationalizing the idea of cognitive labor, my findings revealed a significant amount of “cognitive” work disproportionately observed among women at predominantly white institutions. Cognitive labor can be understood as “a form of self-protection, involving the process of thinking through racialized interactions, including those yet to occur” (Evans and Feagin 2015; Evans 2013). This posits that cognitive labor is one’s private negotiation while navigating and anticipating, in the case of my respondents, both racialized and gendered interactions. Andrea, a full professor at a PWI, gives insight to the kind of cognitive labor she must engage in:

I would say generally speaking a meeting is not just a meeting . . . if I know there’s a situation that might be contentious or a problem for somebody, I have to be attuned to the unspoken dynamics of who’s saying what and how it’s going to be received which is more work for me . . . I got to think three steps ahead about what’s going to happen when this person says this in this way, and then how that’s going to mean this other person is going to react, and then that’s going to come back on me when they want me to solve this departmental problem of why there are issues with departmental tensions and culture and stuff like that.
Andrea’s position of having to think three steps ahead, particularly in meetings, demonstrates that she has to manage situations that may not even directly involve her. She is actively observing and negotiating how she will proceed based on who says what, to whom, and how they say it, in addition to making sure she reacts appropriately to avoid having to later deal with issues that may arise due to a contentious interaction. Other respondents in the study also alluded to managing interactions in a way to preclude further labor or conflict similarly to Andrea. Another respondent, Lisa, provides a rationale for a similar type of negotiation in faculty and staff meetings:

I never respond quickly. I really want to think about the arguments that people are making to figure out a way to sort of sum it all out, put it all in context and then respond. Because what would typically happen is if I would have responded that way initially they would have made that more so an argument about me than about what they’d done. And I did not want that to be the case.

In this example, Lisa describes how she navigates a meeting and has to be strategic in how she responds. Thus, she is negotiating how she responds as well as the interpretation of that response by those she is interacting with. Ericka, who is an instructor at a PWI, is also aware of how she must manage how she engages certain interactions:

I’m always negotiating with myself. How much can I relax? And so your colleagues look at everything you do as well. They’re listening to you. They’re looking at what you’re wearing. And they’re making judgments.

What Andrea, Lisa, and Ericka reveal is potentially a constant state of negotiating, almost as if they are playing chess and every move matters. This is an important distinction from the “work” associated with emotional labor. Cognitive labor may prove
to be more insidious and uniquely gendered and racialized in a way that does not allow for neutral interaction in the context of institutions that nurture unequal power relations.

In addition to what I position as a cognitive labor, emotional labor works at the other end of the spectrum as, in a sense, the result. When these women report negotiating their next moves, it typically involves strategizing how to express themselves in accordance with societal emotion norms (Evans 2013). Following the negotiation, they are able to proceed in a way they presume to be appropriate and that will offset negative consequences. Annette, an assistant professor at an HBCU, illustrates the nuances of emotional and cognitive labor:

Sometimes you find yourself having to put on that professional face when really you just want to say what’s on your mind, what you’re thinking . . . I know you’ve heard the expression “you have to go along to get along” and there are some people who take their jobs as professors a little too seriously . . . And so in order to avoid engaging people, and more importantly giving them a reason to try to exercise their power over me, I just do my job and I’m respectful and hopefully that will move me along.

Annette, like other respondents at both HBCUs and PWIs who are at various levels in their career, incorporate “go along to get along” strategies in numerous ways. This includes communicating emotions through their physical and verbal presentation in order to avoid professional repercussions.

Looking the Part, Acting the Part

In addressing the idea of performance and strategies to manage the perception of both colleagues and students, a common theme of asserting competence and authority was revealed in the findings. As highlighted in the review of the literature, African
Americans are aware of their appearance in predominantly white institutions, and how they should act to navigate social interactions in those spaces (Wingfield 2007, Evans and Moore 2015). This is evident in both their internal negotiation or “cognitive labor” as well as Goffman’s (1973) theory of performance defined as publicly observable presentations one engages in to manage how their audience perceives them. In the case of this study, attire, body language, tone of voice, and overall demeanor served as ways the women consciously and unconsciously tried to negate stereotypes and biases potentially projected on them by students and colleagues. One example from Ericka noted the role of attire:

I think it does have a lot to do with credibility. I think the way you dress has a lot to do with how people see you. I think that it has a lot to do with authority, if they’re going to see me in a sort of authoritarian way…

Ericka, like many of the other respondents, described attire as a way to assert authority and to “prove” one’s competence and credibility. However, as mentioned by a few respondents, the content presented in the classroom setting, especially in PWIs, also affects how they must manage themselves and their students’ perceptions, as noted by Andrea:

... if you’re going to be a woman of color teaching [race, class, and gender focused] classes you don’t really have a choice other than to be very careful about moderating and controlling your self-presentation in the classroom.

She goes on to add how this presentation is necessary to offset inherent racial and gendered biases imposed by the students:

... students are going to make assumptions about you and what you think and your qualifications and it’s important for me to not only to be an authority figure, but to make sure that I’m managing how I’m presenting
myself when we’re talking about these issues, that I am good at my poker face.

Andrea demonstrates the necessity of managing one’s presentation due to likely assumptions about her competence and credibility in the classroom. Her strategy is consistent with the literature that reports black professors performing competence and authority through an authoritative demeanor and by reminding students of their credentials (Harlow 2003). Interestingly, Annette who teaches at an HBCU, has run into similar issues with having to “perform” authority and credibility by way of reminding students of her credentials:

I hate to have to reiterate to students that I am a professor, I have a Ph.D. I have four degrees, actually, you know, and so often times I’ll find myself having to deal with students who don’t seem to respect that.

While Annette is teaching predominantly students of color, her experiences with having to re-assert her authority and credibility is consistent with women in general at colleges and universities.

Resistance: Maintaining a sense of self

An unexpected theme that manifested in the data was denying of managing one’s presentation when dealing with students and colleagues, particularly among respondents further along in their careers. Much of the resistance presented itself in the more explicit questions measuring performance and strategies. Brenda, a tenured faculty member at a PWI, reports the following regarding self-presentation: “I really work at being who I am and not trying to foster a particular way of being and that, too, may be part of having been teaching for a good while.” Here Brenda’s rationale is her teaching experience. This
was similarly expressed by some of the women who were full or tenured professors at PWIs. Ethel illustrates this in her response:

At this stage in my career, you know, at the rank of full and this point in my career I think I can say unapologetically I don’t care how they feel. I don’t give it any thought. I come in [and] either you like me or you don’t. . . . I feel very confident that I know what I do, like I know what I teach, I am an expert on what I’m teaching, and I thoroughly enjoy it.

Ethel and a few other participants demonstrate a level of ease and confidence once they have advanced in their careers. However, many of the claims of autonomy contradicted the strategies nearly all the women actually engaged in to distinguish themselves as authority figures and maintain “professional” relationships with their colleagues.

Interestingly, even some of the respondents with tenure, still admitted to not feeling enough at ease to let their guard down, and admitted to still presenting a “professional front” while in the workplace. Andrea, who is a full professor and well established in her career, expressed this sentiment in her response:

My self-presentation is what I think of as professional [Andrea] where I’ll be efficient and will get this done and will be focused and will stay on task and will be about business . . . I’m trying to prevent being viewed in ways that would be consistent with racial stereotypes...

Andrea referred to the front she presents in her department as “professional Andrea” to maintain a boundary she has set for herself and her colleagues as well as a way to control how she is perceived. One of the respondents, Brenda, provides a probable explanation to why this denial occurs with some of the other women:

What has happened as I’ve gotten more comfortable in the classroom is that I get lost in the subject or I’m not focused on me as the performer or
actor so much... It’s more of losing one’s self. It’s really a performance when you think about it. But it’s not a self-conscious kind of performance, but to lose one’s self as a musician might once they’re really into the music. It’s not about them, it’s about the music.

Brenda alludes to becoming so lost in her performance as an educator that she is no longer focused on the mechanics of the performance.

There were also contradictions that occurred from questions about managing the perception of students. One example of this was from Lisa, an assistant professor:

I don’t think I use any rituals as far as that concerns [sic]. I try to be who I am and allow my personality to shine through. I don’t know how that works, again because a lot of it is battling their perceptions of me [as] being stern, as being emotional, and in some ways [as] being unavailable. So in some ways I may even try to come across as a little bit more friendly, but I don’t know if it’s perceived as such.

Lisa denies using strategies or “rituals” to manage how students perceive her. Then she goes on to mention trying to come across as more friendly. Lisa and other women in the study were reluctant to label even the most subtle adjustments to their presentation as “strategies” to manage how they are perceived. One respondent, Benita, also demonstrates this:

This is my second career and I have tenure. I’m 52 years old. I don’t really use strategies to manage how students perceive me. It’s not something that I care about. I do try to be authentic to whatever authentic is for me. I have ground rules that I use in the classroom. One of those is learning, I believe learning should be fun, but I’ll never sacrifice fun for learning

Benita noted her experience, tenure, and age as markers for why her self-presentation, particularly as it relates to students, is not something she worries about. However, she also mentions that she establishes ground rules in the classroom which is still a strategy, but it is not something she views as such.
This was not just limited to their interactions with students. When I asked women whether or not they code-switched or changed their tone and pronunciation, particularly when interacting with white colleagues, some denied it. However, their responses upon denying it were not consistent with the actual behaviors they engaged in. Nettie’s responses is a prime example of these inconsistencies:

I talk to [white colleagues] just like I’m talking to you now. I don’t change who I am to interact with them, but they just know it’s a line they can’t cross. . . Now when I’m with faculty of color I’m me like all the way. I’m probably using all of my home language.

Nettie describes using her “home language” with faculty of color, which is code-switching. Code-switching occurs when one shifts between two or more languages or uses certain cultural colloquialism depending on the situation. While most of the women, admitted to some forms of code-switching, they still more often than not used qualifiers such describing the changes as “minimal” or by reiterating that they are still being their authentic selves, even when managing their presentation. One respondent, Delia, demonstrated this in her response:

So there’s not necessarily a whole lot of performance on my part of having to feel like I need to code-switch. . . I don’t speak any differently around white people than I do black people in terms of my pronunciation, but there may be certain cultural things I don’t want to share with them because I feel that they’re personal and I want to share that intimacy with a black person. . . The kind of code-switching I do is so I don’t necessarily have to translate what I’m saying, and so that doesn’t mean I don’t use certain colloquialisms or I don’t use informal speech, [because ] I do. It’s just if I don’t feel that person will understand it then I don’t share that part of myself with them. So when I say code-switching it’s pretty minimal on my part.
In Delia’s response she downplays the idea of code-switching, and explains it in terms of setting boundaries or not sharing that part of herself. While some of what she describes is code-switching, she emphasizes that it is minimal and gives explanations of the “type” of code-switching she doesn’t do.

Women who are more established in their teaching careers may have lost awareness of the ways they manage their self-presentation, and now see it as them being their authentic selves. Most of the participants, including some of those who deny it, reported employing strategies with the intent of resisting controlling images and stereotypes and managing the perception of others. However, not all of them explicitly interpreted their behavior as strategies or performances.

Additionally, when asked about what advice they would give to young black women pursuing academia, there was also a theme of maintaining a sense of self and authenticity which can be observed in Nettie’s response:

Be yourself. Don’t change who you are for anybody. And you can be yourself without showing yourself if that makes sense. Like I told you, I like to put that line between the professional and the personal. But my personality is still the same, it’s just that it’s only so much of that you gonna get.

Nettie, like other women in study, stressed the importance of staying true to who you are in the process. Many of the women also stressed in their advice that black women should also have a clear sense of why they are choosing academia and what they hope to gain, as shown by one respondent, Denise:

I would say have a really clear sense of why you’re doing it, and what you want to be and what kind of work you want to do because people will have a design for your life and if you don’t have one you’ll be following theirs.
So really having a clear sense of self, a clear sense of purpose. You got to know why you’re doing this, and what you’re trying to get out of it.

Both Nettie’s and Denise’s advice displays that they feel it is necessary for black women to have a strong sense of who they are and what they’re doing in order to be successful academics. Further context will be provided in the discussion addressing how this relates to their cognitive and emotional labor.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The examination of black women faculty members in colleges and universities reveals that these women explicitly and implicitly describe emotional labor connected to time they give to supporting students, particularly those in PWIs. They also articulate persistent “cognitive work” or cognitive labor, which applies almost exclusively to those at predominantly white institutions. While many women were reluctant to admit it, their emotional labor consisted of intentional performances in order to manage how they are perceived as black women.

Emotional Labor: Token servitude and costs

The basis of this study was to provide counternarratives of how black women engage in emotional labor. While the findings revealed emotional labor that was not reported, it is still important to first address how they articulate for themselves what they see as “emotion work.” Two noteworthy responses were reported. The first and most common was working with students. Particularly in PWIs these women reported having to support and advocate for their students. An interesting example was Nettie, who expressed fatigue from her commitment to students of color. She also reported taking on other underrepresented students who were not of color, but who still needed support. Similarly, Harley (2007) also found that African American women end up being the “care providers” for black students in addition to other marginalized students. Another
respondent, Andrea, reported that sometimes the service interferes with “time I could be working on my book.” The second aspect of emotional labor described by women, particularly at PWIs, was being one of few black people in their departments. This burden means they also serve as the token or representative for diversity, and are called upon to address “diversity issues” and sit on committees to fulfill quotas. One respondent, Ericka, expressed this sentiment in her articulation of what she sees as emotional labor:

When I think emotional labor, I knew when I was even put on the hiring committee it was only because I was African American and it was to fulfill a particular quota. And so I remember saying to myself, and again it was only after being here a few years, I was like I totally feel like a token now. I completely feel like a token hire.

Ericka went on describe her sadness over her status which puts in perspective how psychologically detrimental emotional labor can be. Joseph and Hirshfield (2010) refer to this as a type of cultural taxation. This taxation is the expectation projected on faculty of color “to perform in certain academic capacities because of their ethno-racial group membership” (126). While Ericka was the only person to refer outright to tokenism, she was not the only one who was assigned this type of role. An overwhelming number of the women reported that they served on either hiring committees, diversity-related committees, or both. Many of the women also reported being called on to address certain issues or questions simply because they are black. This played out for one respondent, Nettie, who mentioned being singled out in a meeting:

Before I became the diversity office I was serving on a search committee, and we were interviewing this young man who was teaching in Australia. He was basically asking us a question about our international student population . . . That’s the demographic he enjoyed working with. My little colleagues on the committee, had nobody asked me to answer nothing the whole time we been interviewing this man [sic], and when he said that
they said “Oh, [Nettie’s] into diversity, she can answer that” and then they all looked at me.

This type of cultural taxation these women experience in the form of tokenism and obligation to serve fits under the umbrella of their emotional labor and helps to reinforce controlling images, such as the black mammy caricature. Interestingly, most of the respondents had roles that reinforced the mammy caricature. While Wingfield (2007) focuses on the black mammy as a product of gendered racism that black women in the workplace face and attempt to resist, my study reveals significantly more resistance to emotion-based stereotypes. As I will address in the next section, much of their emotional labor is rooted in performances to resist controlling images attached to “emotions” as well as to establish authority, competence, and validate their existence in the academy.

Emotional labor: performance as the “antidote”

At the very root of emotional labor is “surface-acting” in the form of managing and presenting emotions to one’s audience (Hoschild 1983). This surface-acting which the individual is solely aware of is an observable presentation that Goffman (1973) refers to as the front, which in the case of this study, is the way black women in the academy manage how they are perceived by their students, colleagues, and sometimes administrators. Manner and appearance are the two aspects of Goffman’s personal front that I focus on to give context to this emotional labor. Manner represents an emotional presentation to one’s audience. In the case of black women educators this is a crucial aspect of their presentation that they knowingly perform (though they were reluctant to refer to it as such). As noted in the literature, emotions are both racialized and gendered
(Evans 2013). Thus, much of their performance is intended to conceal their anger lest they be seen as “the angry black woman.” As illustrated by Nettie, the main priority of their presentation was rooted in “emotion norms” that exclusively applied to their identity as black women:

The only thing that I know I work on is trying to make sure that I don’t give off the persona of being an angry black woman, like “Oh lord, here she come.” I try to work on that so even if I’m bringing up something that may be confrontational or an issue that I feel like needs to be addressed, even if I’m presenting it to the dean or my department chair or other faculty, I try to keep my tone even and try to keep my emotions out of it and just present it as this is the case.

Nettie notes presenting a certain tone when addressing administrative or department-level issues. Similarly, other women reported that they resisted seeming angry not only to reject a common stereotype, but also to avoid the consequences of being perceived that way. As reported by those who suppressed their anger even when it felt justified, they believed that showing anger was detrimental to them in the long run. Nettie adds in reference to her position on making sure to not look like an “angry black woman” that:

If I present it in as an angry black woman then nobody’s going to hear me because it’s just going to be like “She’s just black and she mad and she just mad about everything and she makes everything about race” so I’m trying to make sure that what I’m saying is heard.

Nettie and other women who shared similar sentiments, believe that their anger discredits them. This suggests that emotional presentation is a marker of credibility and a form of self-preservation. There is also management of their physical appearance through their dress. While clothing, particularly in the academy, may be a universal marker of
professionalism, it is much more than that for black women. Yolanda expresses this in her response:

My definition of business casual will be slacks, a shirt, a cardigan, is traditionally what I wear on most days. The reason that I do that is partially is to distinguish myself in terms of age because I look fairly young, and I don’t want my students to mistake me for their peer. So to create some distance between us. Another reason I do it is I’m very aware that there are things majority individuals can do and minorities can’t do, and so I try very hard to model the behaviors that I think minorities need to do.

Yolanda explicitly regards dress as something she must manage because of her minority status. To give context, Yolanda and others in the study reported that many of their colleagues had the luxury of dressing more casually, and the general consensus among the women was “we just can’t do that.” There appears to be a collective awareness that a higher standard of self-presentation is just a part of how they must navigate the academy, and something that is uniquely attached to their minority status. It was also a mark of asserting their authority and credibility as professors. As referenced in other studies, African Americans are aware of how they are seen and perceived in predominantly white settings (Wingfield 2007, Evans and Moore 2015). Thus, a part of navigating the setting is connected to offsetting controlling images and stereotypes. The performance of presenting appropriate emotions and physically appearing competent is also connected to my conceptualization of cognitive labor which I explore in the next section.
Two-Way “Invisible” Labor

The most interesting and, I’d argue, most insidious aspect of emotional labor is the negotiation that takes place as black women navigate their interactions given the hegemonic nature of these institutions. While black women have their credibility constantly called into question, they are also “culturally taxed” to be caregivers and diversity representatives (Harlow 2007). The “chronic” negotiation of the roles and images they have to resist, manage, and sometimes embrace is a form of cognitive labor. This sort of cognitive work involves thinking through or processing racialized interactions, and essentially negotiating how one must proceed (Evans and Feagin 2015; Evans 2013). Many of the women navigating predominantly white institutions expressed how this labor served as a way to preserve themselves. One example of how this cognitive work looks is evident in Denise’s response:

There are definitely times when I make a calculus and say, “Is this worth engaging? Are the students going to be better for it? What am I trying to get out of this? What’s the goal here?” And so I think about those kinds of things . . . it’s less to avoid conflict than it is to maintain my own health mentally, physically, and emotionally, all of that.

Denise’s narrative aligns with the predominant narrative of black women at PWIs. However, women at HBCUs also engaged in cognitive labor that may not be directly related to race, but is very much connected to their gender. Annette, an HBCU professor, gave a response illustrating this:

Before I walk into the classroom, I always take a deep breath and just sort of say, “Okay you’re gonna do this” and come in and try to be pretty positive about what we’re going to do . . . and then after class I sort of try to go over in my head like, “Okay did you come across angry, did you
come across as emotional, did you come across as happy?” You know that sort of thing. And another thing that I notice with not just myself, but with other women faculty, is students want to tell us “You need to smile more” and that is also, I’d argue, a form of implicit bias towards women. Why do you expect women to smile all the time?

Not only does Annette implicate gender as the driving force behind her cognitive labor, but she implicates it for other women faculty members at her institution. This is an example of the way emotional labor and cognitive labor work in conjunction with one another and it is important that the two not be conflated.

Because of the pervasiveness and the private “internalized” nature of cognitive labor, these mental gymnastics may have more detrimental effects than even “performing” or managing one’s emotional presentation. Ericka expresses this in her articulation of her own mental processes:

It hurts mentally. And to me, therefore, it wears on your body because you’re constantly having to think about, what do I think that you think that I think about me? So it’s always that constant negotiation. What type of person is this? What are they going to be thinking about me? What should I wear for this? And it’s more than the normal person would do.

Ericka and other women used language such as “hurt,” “exhausting,” and “painful” to describe the constant negotiation that weighs down on them. While there was no report of significant mental health issues, the language they give to their labor was more indicative of what is happening to them emotionally even if no pathology is reported or detected.

The women also used avoidance and boundary-setting strategies to navigate interactions with colleagues. Lisa, an assistant professor at a PWI, provided an example of this in her response:
I don’t really have any strategies to control how my white colleagues perceive me outside of just not really interacting with them outside the institutional context. I don’t care to be friends with them. And so, maybe that’s a strategy. I’m not quite sure, but the strategy I guess then would be avoidance. If I had to call it a strategy.

Lisa went on to state the following: “Avoidance for me is not allowing the opportunity for offense to take place.” Lisa illustrates how part of her cognitive labor is setting strict boundaries to counteract potential slights by her white colleagues. The process of having to think through avoiding situations where “offense might occur” is a type of cognitive work that functions as a double-edged sword because while it protects, it also interferes with the development of healthy and trusting relationships with their colleagues.

Another respondent, Anita, also described the boundaries she sets with her white colleagues:

> We exchange pleasantries in faculty meetings. We talk about business and whatever. I don’t, beyond that, if I know something personal, let’s say someone’s child is sick or whatever, I might inquire about the health of sick family member, but I don’t get too deeply involved in it. And so that’s sort of what I do. I mean, but I don’t really go to lunch with people. I do go to the departmental social functions, not all of them, but I go to most of them. And so, you know, that’s what I do.

Anita’s description of keeping her interactions pleasant and not too personal is a representation of other women at PWIs. These remarks reveal a part of these black women’s cognitive and emotional labor. By not getting too close to their white colleagues, they limit the opportunities for offenses and they also, self-protect. Delia, an assistant professor, gave a poignant response that provides further context to why this boundary-setting matters:
I really like them on a personal level, but even that is peppered with my own caution about entering into a personal relationship with them where I reveal too much of myself. And I just don’t feel comfortable with that. And so yea, I definitely think I just don’t allow myself to get too familiar with my colleagues because I can’t trust that they have unshackled themselves from the vitriol of whiteness, and I don’t mean them as white people, but what white supremacy and white nationalism looks like in this country.

Delia was very explicit in why she cannot allow herself to “reveal too much” or get too close to her white colleagues. Lisa, Anita, and Delia provide deeper context to how their cognitive labor includes the anticipation of racial slights from white colleagues and the emotional labor it takes to set boundaries intended to preclude these potential offenses.

While a part of the presentation of our everyday selves may include getting so invested in our performance we don’t see it or recognize it as such (Goffman 1973), this may not have been the case for these women. Upon reporting behaviors and strategies they used to assert authority, prove their competence and set boundaries, many outright rejected the idea that they presented themselves in certain ways to manage how they are perceived. This could be in part due to the fact that for many black Americans, navigating one’s environment in ways to reduce harm is a universally lived reality. I am reluctant to label this as deep acting, but more a condition of a social status that cannot transcend institutions that are a product and reinforcer of an inherently racist society.

Their advice to black women pursuing academia was also very much connected to how the women articulated their presentation of self or lack thereof. While they equally stressed that young black women should be themselves and have a clear sense of their
goals, they also emphasized being aware of the challenges. Lisa illustrates this in her response:

Know what you’re walking into and understand that a Ph.D. doesn’t make everything disappear [sic]. A Ph.D. doesn’t make racism go away. [It] doesn’t make sexism go away. . . I would tell future Ph.D.’s to be aware of the demands of the job that are often hidden [and] that you get no credit for and you have to be wary or aware of how much time it takes to be a person of color in predominantly white institutions . . . a good chunk of your time is going to be spent with marginalized students. It’s not just racialized students, but also marginalized students. And that is work that the institutions do not recognize.

Lisa, like many of the other women, felt that it was important be aware of what the challenges may be. In addition, they often followed up with awareness, a sense of self, and clear goals as a part of their self-care. Anita, expressed this in her response: “Be prepared [and] don’t even start out neglecting yourself.” These examples illustrated a need to expand emotional and cognitive labor to include how women negotiate self-care or self-preservation through boundary-setting, and maintaining a strong sense of self.

Other considerations

My findings and discussion focused on the most prominent themes that arose in my study. There were also other noteworthy patterns. One that was most interesting was the mention of police violence and other forms of racial violence. At least half of the women admitted that police violence affected them emotionally, especially when having to interact with colleagues they believed to be apathetic about it. In addition, there was also a general consensus among women who were more open about their “performances” that even as they attempt to present themselves “respectably” it still didn’t change how
they were regarded as black women. Ericka gives one of the more poignant responses that illustrates both the contradiction and tension with emotional labor: “Know that they don’t care about you in terms of your identity and that you have to sometimes be able to check that and understand that. And as much as it hurts to be able to just move forward.” Ericka and other women in the study are fully aware that all of the extra labor they engage in to be “respectable” and credible doesn’t negate how they are generally viewed by society.

Contributions and Research Implications

While there is extensive research on the emotional labor of African Americans in white institutions, scholars are still exploring all that emotional labor encompasses. Louwanda Evans (2013) introduced the idea of cognitive labor as accompanying the emotional labor and management that African Americans must engage in while navigating racially hostile spaces. This cognitive labor can consist of thinking through and anticipating gendered-racist interactions in their everyday lives (Evans and Feagin 2015). Africans Americans, in general, have a keen cultural awareness of how they are regarded in society. Historically their survival has hinged on the management of their emotional, verbal, and even physical presentation in a white racist social world. Thus, they are constantly doing mental or “cognitive” work in order to resist and avoid overt and covert racial slights and violence.

Building from Evans’ working definition, my contribution furthers the development of cognitive labor. In this study, I found that black women very much

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strategize against and negotiate enduring stereotypes while navigating academic institutions. Moreover, this research is unique because it reveals the emotion and cognitive work occurring in both predominantly white and predominantly black settings. While their emotional and cognitive labor at PWIs has more racial and gendered implications related social conditions within their institution, black women at HBCUs see their emotional labor in more positive ways, especially as it relates to supporting their mostly African American students. However, black women at HBCUs still experienced gendered slights and still may have to resist controlling images such as the “black mammy” based on one respondent, Annette, who said, “I have to remind students: You are not my children, you are grown adults. And while I’m happy to guide you, I am not your mother.” This observation contributes to the understudied phenomenon of how white hegemonic institutions influence the social structure of even historical black colleges and universities. The emotional costs that women noted with reports of feelings exhausted, sad, and hurt by their experiences also implies that both emotional and cognitive labor have psychological implications that require further study. Moving forward, it is vital that sociologists and social psychologists collaborate to further operationalize cognitive labor, and position it, not interchangeably, but in relationship with emotional labor.

Conclusion

In closing, this study gives insight into the unique emotional and cognitive labor that black women in colleges and universities do. The racialized and gendered nature of
their experiences gives further nuance to how race, gender, and the intersection of the two affect the invisible labor of minority academics. The costs associated with this labor also shed light on how insidious and normalized the added burden is for black women educators. While the HBCU sample was not large enough to be representative, it does reveal that more research is needed to examine those at the margins even in predominantly black settings. In addition, this was designed as a multi-method study, and the survey was intended to describe the participants and their institutions. However, the survey did have some shortcomings. Response options such as “sometimes” and “yes/no/not sure” provided limited information, particularly given such a small sample. There were also a significant number of open-ended questions, which made data analysis difficult. I believe a survey with a larger sample and fewer open-ended questions may yield richer results. It might also be useful to include both black men and women since many of the women viewed black men as allies. Lastly, during the interview process some respondents felt that certain questions only applied to those teaching at PWIs. In future research, questions should be generalized to colleges and universities as a whole.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Combs, Barbara Harris. 2016. “No Rest for the Weary: The Weight of Race, Gender, and Place Inside and Outside a Southern Classroom.” Sociology of Race and Ethnicity 3(4):491-505


LIST OF APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SCRIPT
Recruitment Script

Greetings [name]:

My name is Danielle Buckingham and I am a MA Sociology student at the University of Mississippi. I was referred to you by [reference]. I am currently conducting research for my Master’s thesis under the supervision of Dr. Willa Johnson. I would like to invite you to participate in my study about the emotional labor that African American female faculty members do at college and universities throughout the United States.

If you participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a brief survey on Qualtrics in advance of your interview. The link follows: http://uofmississippi.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8AkiH4VjGFA8hn. The purpose of the Qualtrics survey is to collect demographic and other contextualizing data such as few questions about your department, and your contributions to it. During the interview you will be asked a set of 16 semi-structured interview questions related to your experiences with emotion work or emotional labor as a black female instructor or college professor at a HBCU or PWI. The interview is expected to last no longer than 60 minutes, and will be audio recorded for research purposes only. No identifying information will be attached to the data, and all quoted materials will be attributed to a pseudonym. All survey data will be secured in a password-protected file on Qualtrics; and interview recordings will be secured in a password-protected google drive until they are destroyed following transcription.
I have set up a doodle poll that will invite all potential interviewees to schedule availability for interviews. I will select one of the times that you list and will send you a confirmation email. If you are on the University of Mississippi campus, I can arrange to meet with you at your office or at a convenient place on campus. If you have any questions or concerns about this request or the interview process, feel free to contact me via email at dbucking@go.olemiss.edu or via phone at (662) 705-4193. You are welcome to CC or contact my advisor, Willa Johnson, directly at wjohnson@olemiss.edu. Thanks in advance.
APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM
Purpose of the research: To understand the emotional labor of African-American women in the academy.

What you will do in this research: If you decide to participate, you will be asked several interview questions related to your teaching, service, and academic responsibilities. With your permission, I will audio record the interviews.

Time required: The interview will take no longer than 1 hour.

Risks: No risks are anticipated.

Benefits: This is a chance for you to tell your story about your experiences being an African American woman in academia.

Confidentiality: To ensure confidentiality, audio recordings will be saved in a private google drive, and surveys will be saved in Qualtrics which is password-protected database. Once audio has been transcribed, it will be destroyed shortly after. No identifying information will be attached to any of the data.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty. You may skip any question during the interview that you are not comfortable answering, but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

To Contact the Researcher: If you have any questions or concerns about this request or the interview process, feel free to contact me via email at dbucking@go.olemiss.edu or via phone at (662) 705-4193. You are welcome to CC or contact my advisor, Willa Johnson, directly at wjohnson@olemiss.edu.

Whom to contact about your rights in this research: This study has been reviewed by the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of this research project, please contact the IRB at (662) 915 7482.

Agreement: The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.
ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

By checking this box you are giving the equivalent of your written signature and informed consent.

- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
APPENDIX C: SURVEY
Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study! Please proceed to the survey. Note: You may skip a question or opt out at any time.

Q1 What is your age?
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 years or older

Q2 In which department do you teach?
- Africana Studies
- Anthropology
- Art
- Biological Sciences
- Business
- Chemistry
- Communications
- Economics
- Education
- Engineering
- English
- Foreign Languages
Q3 Where do you currently teach?
..............................................................................................................................................

Q4 How long have you been employed by your institution?
..............................................................................................................................................

  o Less than 6 months
  o 6 months - 1 year
  o 1 - 3 years
  o 3-5 years
  o More than 5 years
..............................................................................................................................................

Q5 How long have you been teaching at the college-level?
..............................................................................................................................................

  o Less than 6 months
Q6 What is your academic rank?
- Instructor
- Assistant Professor
- Associate Professor
- Full Professor
- Distinguished Professor

Q7 What is your teaching load?

Q8 Describe the racial and ethnic composition of an average seminar or class that you teach?

Q9 What committees do you serve on at your institution?

Q10 How large is your department? (# of faculty members)
- 1 - 5
- 5 - 10
Q11 How many African American women are in your department?
- None, except me
- 1 - 3
- 4-6
- 6 - 8
- 8 or more

Q12 How many non-whites are in your department?
- None
- 1 - 3
- 4 - 6
- 6 - 8
- 8 or more

Q13 What is the general demographic of your institution?
- Predominantly white
- Predominantly black
Q14 How much of your day is devoted to helping and supporting students who feel marginalized due to structural barriers at your institution?

- A great deal
- A lot
- A moderate amount
- A little
- None at all

Q15 Do male colleagues, black or white, describe spending similar amounts of time with marginalized students?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q16 Do students of color and other marginalized students view you as a go-to person, even if they are not in your class?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Q17 In a typical year, on how many theses committees (including Honors theses, Masters theses, and doctoral dissertations) do you serve?

________________________________________________________________

Q18 Do you actively mentor junior faculty members? (E.g. book proposals, drafts of journal articles, etc.)

________________________________________________________________
Q19 How often are you called upon to deal with racism in your department or at your university?

- Always
- Very Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Q20 How often are you asked questions unrelated to your formal expertise, simply because you are a black woman?

- Always
- Very Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never
APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT AND INTERVIEW SCRIPTS
• Good morning/afternoon [name]. Thank you so much for agreeing to be a part of my study. I’m Danielle, a MA student at the University of Mississippi. I am conducting research for my thesis project focusing on the experiences of African American women in colleges and universities. My hope to elevate the voices of those in the academy that are seldom heard. Before we begin, I want to remind you that your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the interview at any time. This interview should take no longer than 1 hour of your time, and it will be audio recorded. Until the recording is transcribed, it will be stored as an mp3 file in a password protected google drive. Following transcription, all interview audio will be destroyed. Lastly, everything we discuss today is confidential and no identifying information will be attached to your responses. Do you have any questions for me?

• Well, this concludes our interview. Thanks again for your time. It’s been a pleasure to speak with you. I just want to remind you again that once I have transcribed your interview the audio will be promptly destroyed. I will also send you a follow-up email with me and my advisor’s contact information. If you have any questions or concerns regarding our session or my research feel free to reach out.

• Dear [name],

I hope all is well. Just following up to thank you once again for participating in my study. It was much appreciated. The purpose of my study was to examine the emotional labor of African American women and instructors, and gain a more nuanced understanding of what that labor entails. If you have any questions or concerns about anything we discussed or about my research please feel free to contact me via email at dbucking@go.olemiss.edu or via phone at (662) 705-4193. You may also contact my advisor, Willa Johnson, directly at wjohnson@olemiss.edu.
APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW GUIDE
Background

1. Briefly tell me about what led you to your current department and institution.

2. What comes to mind when you think about your workplace environment and the phrases “emotional labor” and “emotion work”?

Your classroom and student interactions

3. Tell me about how students generally respond to you as an authority figure.

4. How do you describe what you wear to work? Is dress a part of your ritual for presenting yourself to students?

5. What other strategies do you use to manage how students perceive you in the classroom? Prompt: tone of voice or facial expressions?

Interactions with colleagues, within the department, and the institution at large

6. How much do you think about how you carry yourself in your department? Prompt: why or why not?

7. Tell me about how you present yourself when among white colleagues. Do you change your diction, vocabulary, or speaking volume when you’re with them? How is this different when you are among colleagues of color? Prompt: why the change or why not? Code-switching?

8. What strategies do you use as a black woman to control how your colleagues perceive you? How do those strategies change when you’re interacting with white colleagues or black male colleagues?

9. When you use those strategies, what are you trying to control or prevent from happening? Do you feel there will be negative consequences for not altering your actions?

Emotional management during interactions with colleagues and administrators
10. Describe the usual tone of your interactions with your white (or black) colleagues. Do you ever find yourself holding back your thoughts or feelings to avoid conflict? Prompt: How? If so, why did it feel necessary?

11. Tell me about a time when you authentically expressed anger or frustration to one of your colleagues or administrators.

12. Tell me about a time you had to handle a university-related issue tied to racism. What was your mental process before, during, and after?

Costs of work and labor

13. Tell me about the kinds of racial and gendered slights that you experience at work. How do colleagues respond when you identify these actions? How do these interactions affect you physically and mentally?

14. Have you experienced stress-related complications due to the demands of your workplace? Prompt: For example, have you experienced health problems such as a change in blood pressure, weight change, depression, or other medical conditions due to your work?

Support networks

15. Do you have a place of refuge or support among certain colleagues in your department or institution? How does this look for you?

16. What advice would you give to young black women pursuing academia?
VITA

EDUCATION
University of Mississippi – Oxford, MS
Master of Arts in Sociology, Expected May 2018

Millsaps College – Jackson, MS
Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, May 2015

RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE
Millsaps College, 1 Campus 1 Community
AmeriCorps VISTA
May 2015 – May 2016
Project Coordinator for Education Initiatives
Advised first-year students in Wellspring/Living & Learning community
Coordinated literacy programming for underserved communities
Host service-focused events with Midtown and Millsaps Community
Place and manage volunteers in K-5 classrooms at Millsaps’ adopted partner school

INTERNSHIPS
Millsaps College Center for Career Education
August 2013 - December 2013
Career Counseling Intern

Millsaps College, Institutional Advancements
May 2014 – July 2016
Office Assistant/Annual Funds Intern

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Teaching Assistantship, University of Mississippi
August 2016 – present
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Introduction to Sociology, University of Mississippi
November 2016
Visiting Lecture - historical and religious implications of racism.
Introduction to Sociology, University of Mississippi
April 2016
Visiting Lecture
Presentation on the theories of poverty and the misconceptions that underlay them.

Diversity of Psychology, Millsaps College
February 2016
Visiting Lecture
Presentation on Microaggressions and the experiences of African Americans in educational settings.

Racial Dialogue Facilitator, “Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation,” Jackson, MS
Fall 2015
Campus-engaged activity designed to enhance student learning and give students tools they need to engage in productive dialogue and problem solving activities around critical issues that impact the campus community as well as the broader community.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE
Conference Paper - “Not all PWIs, Deny it to Survive it”
February 2016
Alabama-Mississippi Sociological Association
An examination of the experiences of black students in colleges and universities

Conference Paper – “The Experience of LGBTQ Black Women at PWIs”
March 2016
Sarah Isom Center Student Gender Conference
An examination of the experiences of LGBTQ+ black women in colleges and universities

SKILLS
Research: Data collection, input, and analysis; oral presentations
Computer: PowerPoint, Excel, Word, Qualtrics, Google Drive, social media
Office: secretarial work
Language: Spanish (basic)