

Race And Gender At Work: Men's And Women's Experiences

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Abstract

Despite gains in education and work experience, women and African-Americans remain underrepresented in top management. Research suggests that organizational practices and interpersonal interactions at work contribute to the exclusion of women and African-Americans from top management (Acker 2006; Tolbert and Castilla 2016; Ainsworth, Knox, O'Flynn 2010). The goal of this research is to uncover the interaction processes that restrict women and African-Americans' access to leadership roles. In this study, six male and four female faculty and staff were interviewed at a Midwestern university about whether they believed they had been treated differently because of their race or gender, and excluded or denied opportunities. The results highlight that women still dealt with gender stereotypes that affected how they did their job and their role as mothers played a significant role in their work outcomes. African-Americans mostly reported experiences of social exclusion in the workplace such as feelings of isolation and lack of belonging. These findings suggest that day-to-day interactions create and reinforce gender and racial hierarchy in the workplace.

Keywords: Race, Gender, Experiences

1. Introduction

Despite gains in education and work experience, women and African-Americans are still significantly underrepresented in leadership roles in the workplace. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), women made up slightly more than a quarter of CEO positions (27.3%) in American work organizations. African-Americans were even more underrepresented, comprising just 3.4 percent of all American chief executive officers. Given their gains in human capital, various federal and state government anti-discrimination regulation, and firm-level diversity initiatives, why are women and African-Americans still less likely to attain leadership roles in work organizations?

Past research show that various organizational practices and processes contribute to the exclusion of women and African-Americans from top management (Acker 2006; Ainsworth, Knox, O'Flynn 2010; Tolbert and Castilla 2016). For example, some scholars suggest that the day-to-day interactions at work create and perpetuate exclusionary practices that restrict women and minorities' upward mobility (Roscigno, Garcia, Bobbitt-Zeher 2007; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis 2010; Attell, Brown, and Treiber 2013; Byrd 2016). Other studies show that there is a relationship between home and work life. Specifically, traditional beliefs about work, family and gender roles influence and reinforce gender discrimination at work (Desai, Chugh and Brief 2014). Another possible explanation advanced by Ridgeway (2004) is that we see the world through gendered lens. That is, the larger cultural perception of men and women help shape our expectations for them in the workplace. This could possibly extend to cultural perception of, and expectations for African-Americans. Still, others suggest that the structure of work is conducive to social closure and isolation of women and African-Americans (Castilla 2016; Graham, Belliveau, Hotchkiss 2016).

The goal of this research is to uncover the processes, practices and structures that keep women and African-Americans from attaining top leadership roles in their workplaces. A qualitative approach was conducted to explore the day-to-day experiences of men and women at a midsize public university in Illinois. This approach allows for a more nuanced examination of social and cultural factors, which may not be readily captured in a large-scale survey. Included in this study is a review of the literature and a discussion of the research findings and analysis.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender Stereotypes and Workplace Culture

Gender socialization, according to Ridgeway (2012) is inescapable. In her work titled, “Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World,” Ridgeway asserts that our beliefs about gender can be seen in the different positions assigned to men and women at work, the expectations held of them, and other symbolic processes. Although workplace diversity initiatives are highlighted as the forefront of organizational policies, women remain systematically disadvantaged in daily interactions with colleagues and the decision-making processes that affect their career trajectories (Steidl and Sterk 2016).

Employers tend to worry most about motherhood or other duties stereotypical of women’s roles (Garcia, Bobbit-Zeher, Roscigno 2007). Stereotypes of women as caretakers, and motherly expectations affect the criteria by which they are evaluated as faculty members assume of each other, certain familial roles and work productivity based on ongoing cultural perceptions and expectations (Ridgeway 2004; Steidl and Sterk 2016). Steidl and Sterk (2016) suggest that this is a continuation and reproduction of gendered hierarchies in the workplace due to the embedded gendered organization that place men at the forefront, as not only decision-makers, but also having greater advantages over women in workplace achievements.

In other cases, the explanation for the lack of visibility of women in fields dominated by men also results from women fleeing these positions because of bad experiences (Lohan and Faulkner 2004). Those who remain confront these issues by working as “conceptual men,” thereby denying the existence of gender discrimination, and instead adapting to the masculine work environment (Demaiter, Adams 2009). In this case, Faulkner (2009) states that the organization must go through a process of ‘culture change’ by adapting to more socially inclusive practices on an interactional level to be more inclusive towards women as mutually and equally accepted in their positions. This would further increase the retention rate of women in occupations they would normally flee due to lack of social belonging.

2.2 Studies of Race and Gender

Black feminist theorists use the concept of intersectionality to suggest that the relationship between race, gender, and class are interconnected and operate on the social structural level of institutions to characterize the experiences of black women (Collins 1990; bell hooks 1990; Davis 1983). Race, gender, and class then, represent different systems of domination, yet interlock to create dimensions of “inequality regimes” (Collins 1990; Acker 2006). A study on subtle bias or implicit bias found that African Americans with similar qualifications to prospective white employees were significantly less likely to be hired for a job (Nier and Gaertner 2012).

Workplace discrimination tends to weigh heavier on the issue of race rather than gender for black women (Lloyd-Jones 2009). In comparison to white women, studies have found a pattern of verbal and nonverbal cues that specifically target black women, as well as ongoing behaviors and actions that lead to the feelings of invisibility and marginalization (Essed 1993). One study describes numerous cases reported by a black woman whose role as senior-level administrator at a predominantly white university was met with resistance by white male coworkers who felt uncomfortable working with her, passed on information to her assistants instead of directly communicating with her, and indicated finding it difficult to work with her (Lloyd-Jones 2009). The lack of respect given is a form of workplace bullying, which has had a major effect on African-American women in particular, but black men as well (Attell, Brown, and Treiber 2013). As a means to tackle workplace bullying, it becomes critically important for them to seek protection and emotional support from preferably their coworkers who they can confide in or share similar experiences with, but also with whom they feel comfortable having these discussions.

In one study, in order to cope with microaggressions, black women leaders in the Washington DC metro area relied on several key coping methods including having a reliable and strong support system (Byrd 2016). The self-help method is what is at first hand for most black women in order to cope with the different job demands they experience. When this is no longer viable, they often turn to social support groups such as family members, a church community, or even support from their coworkers and supervisor (Linnabery, Stuhlmacher, Towler 2014). These coping method patterns so far have been more effectively used by African-American women, but it is only a means of subsistence as opposed to exercising greater ways to resist their relation to the experiences of gender and racial inequalities.

Other studies have found that African-Americans males who work in feminized positions are stereotyped by their white female coworkers as less hard-working, less dependable, or subject to criminal activity, while white men who work in feminine jobs still occupy higher job positions, are more likely to receive promotions and pay raise, and are treated with more respect or seen as more credible (Garcia, Bobbit-Zeher, Roscigno 2007; Wingfield 2009). White women tend to fear black men with whom they work, seeing them as violent and dangerous. This form of race-based

discrimination also reveals that employees tend to evaluate harsher based on race, which essentially is a system of targeted-bullying (Roscigno, Garcia, Bobbitt-Zeher 2007).

Vallas (2003) notes that over time race and gender inequalities are reproduced; therefore “doing race” or “doing gender” may look differently in any particular environment. The minimal leadership roles held by African-Americans and women is nonetheless due to the reproduction of authoritative elites and “reproduction of racial boundaries” between whites and African-American workers (Smith 2002; Vallas 2003). The spatial segregation of workers by race limits the opportunities for African-Americans to interact with other workers who may be in a better position than them or make socially informal connections with the public to enhance their view of their job or seek for more valued and pleasurable job positions (Vallas 2003). When women and African-Americans do integrate into workspaces as a minority group, the pressure for them is often to fit into the largest cultural group, as opposed to generating social change to resist the rebirth of the same social discriminatory practices (Faulkner 2011).

2.3 Work-Life Balance

Although the modernization of the workplace allows for more genderfluid job positions, findings show that women are still stigmatized in the workplace as being homemakers even when they express more flexibility than their male counterparts (Watts 2007). For example, Watts (2007) found that men who express the need for family time, end up spending more time at work because the assumption is that the male is the breadwinner who must work to provide for their family. Women, however, express concerns of losing their job if they express the need for family time. Whereas women’s work productivity is deemed by employers as a battle between work and family responsibility, men use their roles as fathers to be a driving motivation for seeking promotions or tenure positions (Steidl, Sterk 2016). Some employers justify the gap between men and women in leadership roles as women simply not showing interest in seeking higher level positions or not having the appropriate skills and qualifications to be able to handle such a position (Ainsworth, Knox, O’Flynn, 2010).

2.4 Promotion

At colleges and universities the issue at large seems to be the salary gap between faculty men and women (Tolbert and Castilla 2016). Mid-career faculty members have the expectation of receiving promotion or tenure as career trajectories; however, faculty women are less likely to receive tenure and promotion due to the impact of gendered organizational logics and social symbolic processes. Steidl and Sterk (2016) study found that meeting the criteria for tenure or promotion had more to do with faculty engaging in impression management rather than just work productivity.

Women of color in academia are often used by universities as markers of diversity, yet are less likely to receive promotion and tenure (Ford 2011). While they are expected to perform their roles as faculty and staff, their experiences at work are often alienating and marked by various implicit racist and sexist dynamics. The corporatization of higher education fosters the “systematic othering of minority women” imposing various challenges such as stereotyping and a silencing of their voices (Cortes Santiago, Karimi, and Arvelo Alicea 2017).

Further, Faulkner (2009) found that men’s social networks are much more powerfully organized than women’s because men made up the majority in the workplace. This makes it hard for women to build relationships with their male employees; therefore, women do not receive the same insights on promotional strategies that men share among their groups. Male employees will informally invite one another for a “men’s day out” to converse about personal life, but more importantly, to discuss promotional strategies and other beneficial information regarding the job.

Micro-level symbolic social interaction processes between men and women is applied through their evaluation. Although both genders express the importance of work and family balance, women are less likely to receive promotions or tenure positions assuming their role as mothers would hinder their work responsibilities. Men seemed blind to the idea of any differences in the evaluation criteria between men and women when applying for promotion or tenure positions, assuming an equal and unbiased system while women recognized that they are systematically disadvantaged given their daily interactions with faculty members and the decision-making process affecting their career trajectories. Lewis and Consuella (2016) examined the effects of proportional representation in higher education for African-American men and women. The authors found that the presence of tokenism is faired differently for African men and women. The study revealed that women are more likely to remain in their initial positions while men experience career advancement or promotion. This has to do with the cultural capital men accrue such as participating in leadership programs and being coached or mentored informally by their colleagues.

2.5 Work Environment: Social Closure

In numerous cases, it has been found that women or African-Americans who work as token employees often feel the need to work harder in order to prove their qualifications (Lewis and Consuella 2016). While men saw it as advantageous

to be the only minority in their position, they also often experience social exclusion from their colleagues and felt the need to work harder in order to fit in with the dominant group (Lewis and Consuella 2016). This is true as well for African-American women who often feel excluded from interaction, and experience more macroaggressions by virtue of their race and gender (Lewis and Consuella 2016). In one case study, Lloyd-Jones (2009) found that an African-American woman working on an administrative level implied that some of her subordinates responded better to her administrative assistants, and white male coworkers in particular, expressed difficulty working with her. Ford (2011) also found that women of color often encounter raced and gendered bodily stereotypes not only by their colleagues, but by students as well. Their experiences are marked with challenges to maintain the role of authority in the classroom, such as being called by their first name, or Mrs. or Ms. instead of Dr. as students will assume their physical appearance does not conform to the stereotypical image of a professor.

The lack of social belongingness for African-Americans and women is intertwined with the issue of social stigma (Walton and Cohen 2007). Stereotypes about women being less assertive and less agentic than men, or African-Americans as less trustworthy and likely to commit crime leads the two groups constantly feeling self-aware and likely to underperform especially in fields that are culturally linked to being reserved for white men (Ridgeway 2004). Most occupations held by women and African-Americans are not ones associated with a high wage or prestigiousness (Tolbert and Castilla 2016); therefore they are vulnerable to the cultural stereotypes often used by employers as threats to their career. Employers who view their employees in this light will be motivated to act in a discriminatory manner, using their position of power to show favoritism to some employees for reasons not necessarily relating to their work abilities or qualifications (Cohen and Garcia 2005). In effect, social exclusion hinders the “self-executive function” of a person by limiting them from seeking greater resources and opportunities, and reducing their work performance (Baumeister, Twenge, Nuss 2002).

Some researchers say that the lack of racial diversity in occupations requiring greater skill level and expertise is a continuation of employment hierarchies and the “character of corporate and judicial responses to racial inequalities at work” (Vallas 2003). Race alone, regardless of the gender identity has been and continues to be a major barrier for African-Americans attempting to gain full acceptance into the workplace (Acker 2006). “Modern racial prejudice” exists in many white owned private corporations whose practices purposefully put African Americans in low-level positions subordinate to their white-male counterparts (Wilson, Eitle, Bishin 2006). This automatically makes African-American employees disposable during times of layoffs. Thus, the correlation between this pattern of race and job loss is due to their position of vulnerability, which allows employers to hire and fire them as they please (Wilson and McBrier’s 2005).

Gender beliefs on an interactional level are also normative in government policies, work organizations, and other forms of institutions making dominant processes of social closure a more subtle process in the way employers choose to hire, fire, and promote (Garcia, Bobbit-Zeher, Roscigno 2007; Ridgeway 2004). Castilla’s (2016) analysis found that a work organization that is structured with an emphasis on meritocracy often leads both male and female managers to be more selective towards male employees and be more critically harsh in evaluating female employees appointed to leadership positions. Situations like this when a woman is hired due in part to her gender may lead her coworkers to undermine her authority by holding biased views as to how and why she was hired (Ridgeway 2004; Tolbert and Castilla 2016). From Ridgeway’s perspective, gender, like other bases of inequality, is culturally and socially institutionalized, meaning, if a woman is hired in a respective position, others see it in relation to the normative social practices and views that categorically and systematically define and organize individuals into their appropriated positions. Individuals, therefore, will either be threatened or challenged by having a woman or an African-American as the person in charge. In cases where a woman of color is in position of authority, the resistance to see her as intellectually legitimate or comparable to a white male is ingrained and reinforced in within institutions and interpersonal dynamics in the workplace (Ford 2011).

Minimal representation of women in high ranked positions is due in part to a process of reappointment. This process of replacement termed the “gender-matching heuristic,” impinges the progress of attaining diversity in the workplace because instead of increasing the number of women in a given position, it acts as a replacement of another woman who had just exited a position (Tinsley, Wade, Main, and O’Reilly 2016). Other management structures elect individuals in hierarchical positions in charge of filing the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO-1) report, to increase the employment outcomes and opportunities for women (Graham, Belliveau, Hotchkiss 2016). The varying interpretations of how men and women view their work productivity is in part shaped by their understanding of the role that race and gender play (Steidl and Sterk 2016). Whereas men see these enforced policies and structures in place as an egalitarian approach to increase diversity, women recognize the disparities that reproduce gendered norms. Despite the various implementations, and diversity committees assigned the same task to address issues of lack thereof, employers still tend to be selective towards male candidates regardless of the equal certifications (Graham, Belliveau, Hotchkiss 2016; Tolbert and Castilla 2016).

Other studies have found low retention rates of women engineers, a field predominantly occupied by men, because of its culturally masculine environment. In her study on the belonging and identity of women who work in engineer fields, Faulkner (2011) find that women express the need to choose between their identity as a “real woman,” feeling the

pressure of “losing their femininity” in order to fit in with the men, who are seen as the “real engineers.” Yet those women who remain in this field found it necessary not just to have the technical qualification skills of an engineer, but communication skills as well in order to increase visibility and acceptance by their male coworkers (Ayre, Mills, and Gill 2013). In their discussion, the author suggests that it is up to organizations to find it in their interest to teach their male employees respective styles of interaction, topics of conversation relatable to and not offensive to both genders, and mixed social-networks to avoid feelings of exclusion from any inner circles in order to increase the retention of their women employees.

To gain recognition and prove their commitment for their job position, women are quick to offer longer working hours by staying after work for longer; yet men’s positions remain unthreatened even as they do not put forth similar efforts and even assert their priorities as putting family first (Watts 2007). In turn, men who work in women’s positions still receive better treatment and greater opportunities to move up the social ladder through promotion and status (Wingfield 2009). Yet research finds that the notion of male privilege is not equally applicable for African-American men. Upward mobility of white males out of or within feminized occupations far exceeds that of black men, who instead are viewed by white women as threatening, dangerous, or are again assumed to be violent and prone to criminal activity (Wingfield 2009). These racist stereotypes hinder their qualification for promotion despite working in fields dominated by women who share similar disadvantages as a minority group. Racial discrimination for African-American men in this case far outweighs their privilege of being male.

Whether it is sex employment discrimination or social exclusion based on race and gender, the nature of gendered and racial discrimination isolates African-Americans and women as they are marginalized through cultural perceptions and social closure from within the workplace (Demaiter, Adams 2009; Garcia, Bobbit-Zeher, Roscigno 2007). The reality is that jobs lack to increase their adapting sensibilities to accommodate to the changing and reproduction of racial and gender discrimination, especially on a micro-level basis. Therefore, the determinants of racial and gender disparities remain stagnant based not only on structural attributes of our workforce today, but also through symbolic processes that happen subtly in our everyday lives and often go unnoticed. As a result, marginalized groups adopt to various assimilative strategies of the dominant group in order to remain successful in the workplace (Ford 2011).

The persistence of race and gender hierarchy is self-sustained through new and developed social practices, while at the same time being fundamentally preserved through traditional gendered power dynamics (Ridgeway 2004). Growing an awareness to the different forms of gender and race disparities may play a significant role in how social institutions operate to employ gender-neutral organizations. Arguably, gender and race inequalities have not been completely erased from our institutional policies or symbolic interactions. The gender gap and racial disparities in the workplace between men and women exists based on our everyday experiences in addition to the disproportionate representation reported in the job market. The issue and lack of mobility for women and African-Americans in leadership positions has been made more increasingly aware as a modern concern in our workplaces. Therefore, understanding the experiences of both groups will help us to understand the barriers that continue to make it difficult, despite the policies that make it illegal to discriminate and the ever increasing population of college-level educated women and African-Americans.

2.6 Method

The objective of this research is to understand how different dynamics and theories of inclusivity and exclusivity may come to play in promotion gains, hiring and firing decisions, as well as the influence of social networks in these work procedures. Semi-structured interviews were conducted of employees at a Midwestern public university to examine how daily workplace interactions influence women and African-Americans’ work outcomes. E-mails were sent out to faculty and staff members detailing the purpose of the study and what was being asked of them as potential participants in this study. Included in the e-mail is a summary of the kinds of questions that would be asked, their confidentiality, and their freedom to withdraw at anytime from participating. All of the interviews were held in the offices of the participants, allowing them the comfort of being in a familiar space. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes to an hour and a half; however, there were no time limitations imposed on the participants.

Both male and female faculty were interviewed about their relationships with their coworkers and supervisors. The questions asked included “whether they believed they had been treated differently because of their race or gender,” whether they think that their “relationship with their coworkers and supervisor is influenced by race or gender,” if they have ever felt like they have been “treated differently because of your race or gender,” and “if they have been denied or granted opportunities because of their race or gender.” The Participants were also asked to state their current position or job title, the number of years in their current position, prior job experience, their highest level of education completed, and any other certification or qualifications required for their job. We also discussed their familiarity with the tenure and promotion process.

The interviews were transcribed and used the qualitative data analysis software QDA Miner Lite to code the transcribed data. The initial set of codes were based on the keywords participants used during the interview such as feelings, the

meanings they assigned to a particular experience or observation, and their relationship to and interactions with others. The process of coding revealed the emerging themes, which were then used to quantify similar experiences.

Table 1 provides a description of the research participants.

Table 1. Distribution of Participant Characteristics by Race and Gender

Variables	<u>Males</u>		<u>Female</u>		Total
	White	Black	White	Black	
	3	3	1	3	10
Education:					
MA/MS	1	1	0	0	2
PhD	2	2	1	3	8
Position:					
Adjunct (part-time)		1			1
Non-tenure track Instructor	2			1	3
Assistant professor (tenure-track)				1	1
Tenured professor	1	2	1	0	4
Ever promoted:					
Yes	1	2	1	1	5
No	2	1	0	2	5
Marital status:					
Single	0	1	0	1	2
Married	3	2	1	2	8
Children:					
Yes	2	0	1	2	5
No	1	3	0	1	5
Years:					
Less than five	1	1	0	2	4
Five or more	2	2	1	1	6

2.7 Results

Faculty and staff reflected on their daily interactions with their coworkers, and the challenges they face in advancing their careers. Their responses indicate the presence of racial and gender dynamics including expectations about work-family obligations, and having a strong social network and support system. Their responses allowed for a more in-depth discussion about organizational culture, and their feelings of social closure and satisfaction with their position.

Table 2 presents the dominant themes from the interviews, number of participants reporting each theme and the cumulative frequency of each theme among all participants. The dominant themes reflect many of the findings from past research including, participants struggle to balance work and family life, social networks advantages, limited promotion opportunities, and social closure. The most frequently occurring theme which was discussed a combination of 68 times by 9 of 10 participants (six African American women/men, three white women/men) was that of racial and gender symbolic processes. This includes the use gender and racial stereotypes towards women and African-Americans. Social closure, including both personal experiences and observations of closure, was the second most common theme, reported a total of 57 times by 9 participants (six African American women/men, three white women/men). All ten participants (six African-American women/men, four white women/men) discussed the effects of social networks a combined 40 times in the data. Six participants (four African American men/women, two white men/women) talked about limited promotion opportunities a total of 32 times, and eight participants (four women, four men) reported dealing with matters of work-life balance 24 times in the data.

Table 2. Summary of Themes by the Number of Participants and Frequency

Themes	No. of Participants	Frequency
Racial/gender symbolic processes	9	68
Problems of social closure	9	57
Experience of racial/gender exclusion	6	26
Perception of racial/gender exclusion	3	7
Effects of social networks	10	40
Perception of promotion opportunities	10	32
Challenges of work-life balance	8	24
Family responsibilities	6	9

3. Symbolic Processes

3.1 Gendered stereotypes and mistreatment:

All four women discussed stereotypical comments being made about their gender or talked about their gender being influential in work outcomes. In one case, a white woman talked about feeling belittled because of a comment made by male colleague who perceived her to have less quantitative skills than him in a request to teach a mathematical course. In another case, a male faculty, recalled a female faculty member he worked with feeling frustrated by students constantly referring to her as Mrs. instead of Dr. while he did not have the same problem. Although this was not the participant's personal experience of discrimination, it depicts the awareness he has of the day-to-day microaggressions women face.

3.2 Modern Racial Prejudice:

The concept of Modern Racial Prejudice explains the low-level positions African Americans often hold in comparison to their white coworkers, while making their position of vulnerability easier for employers to make decisions about who to fire (Wilson and McBrier's 2005; Wilson, Eitle, Bishin 2006). All six of the African American participants talked about cases where their race played a role in their feelings of vulnerability in the workplace. The faculty members and staff held varying interpretations for why they believed they were in positions of vulnerability. Two of the males and one female talked about although being qualified, they have had to work harder to re-enforce their qualification for the position or in the woman's case, having opportunities denied and attributing them to race.

One professor explained that this stemmed from the lack of representation of black faculty in higher education, but that it motivated him to do better. Although he works in a racially homogeneous department, he said he did not feel any racial tension or issues with his colleagues and in fact often discusses issues of race with his colleagues. He explained, "I do think people will sort of acknowledge [that I am] ideologically a little bit different." A white male faculty made a comment in relation to this saying, "One of my colleagues might talk about a certain set of issues, and it might get some more traditional white students in the class thinking that he's only saying that because of his race. So I would say I don't have to deal with some of the extra annoying little things that might happen by virtue of being a racial minority or being a woman."

Another aspect of vulnerability was discussed by two of the African American women whose concern was the lack of personnel in their office. They explained that this was due to the budget cuts at the university; however, they also expressed that their department was affected more than others. One woman explicitly stated that part of the reason could be that they are a department with only minority staff, and worried that being in such a lonely and isolated environment could have an impact on her health. In less than ten years since she started working in her current position, she said she went from having twelve colleagues, to only one other.

3.3 Unique situations:

African Americans overall shared more stories than whites of being in challenging or uncomfortable situations which they attributed to their race. There were two white male faculty members, however, who talked about their unique experiences in dealing with racial and gender matters. One male said that since he has been working in his current

position, it was rare to see white and black students working with one another. His comment was received with backlash by a black female, who he said made him feel belittled. "I felt like because I was white and because I was making this observation [...] even though it's founded on something that I've actually lived ten years where I could count on my hands how many black students I had [...], down here it's a whole different world just to see white and black students walking across campus together. I'm like wow that's totally foreign to me."

Another white male faculty attributed his encounter with the law enforcement as being one of social class discrimination. He said, "I got pulled over by the police for like a tail light being out or maybe going a little bit too fast [...] and [the] police officer pulled me over [...]. I actually thought that was social class discrimination going on there because I was driving an older vehicle and I think that the police also have a certain stereotype of working class and lower income people. I see plenty of vehicles driving around without a tail light and not necessarily getting pulled over." He went on to explain, however, that perhaps the situation might have turned out differently had he been a person of color and that he is now more aware of how encounters with the police can be dangerous given what he has seen over the years.

The same faculty shared another story of what it felt like to be in an area where he was not surrounded by other white people. He said, "I went to the store and I realized I'm the only white guy in the whole store. For me it was a reminder of the patterns of segregation that exist and people were probably surprised to see me in that store because there is a huge segregation pattern. Obviously white people weren't going to that particular plaza and I think that it helped reinforced to me how segregation plays out." In another instance, he was with a colleague at a gas station where he noticed he was the only white person there. He said, "there were lots of people standing around the store area and getting gas and I looked around and I said well, it's 10:30, 11 o'clock at night, it's dark and I'm the only white guy." When his colleague noticed this, he said 'I probably shouldn't have brought you to this.' He went on to explain, "and to be honest, it was not a good thing for him to do because he looks like an upper middle class professional type of guy and it was a rougher kind of neighborhood. In the same way that it would not be good for me looking like I do to go to a biker bar. It would be the functional equivalent [...]. Clearly at that point I was the minority, I was the outside guy, it's always good to go out and experience what other people might be experiencing."

4. Problems of Social Closure

4.1 Work location and environment:

African Americans overall reported more accounts on the experiences of social closure in comparison to whites. A common problem that was brought up was the location of the university as being in a closed and unwelcoming environment. Numerous stories were shared of feeling isolated or being targets of racism and discrimination.

For one black male, several racial incidents happened causing him to seek residence in another town and almost caused him to quit his job. He explained, "on three different occasions someone called me a nigger. I was walking to campus and these kids just yelled out at me. About a year later, I was on campus, I was walking back to my apartment and these guys in the truck went by and somebody yelled out 'you need to go home, nigger' shouting these sorts of stuff. I was really angry, but what I discovered was, [...] aside from campus, I didn't like being in town. I didn't want to go anywhere, I didn't want to go eat anywhere, it just made me uncomfortable. I just stayed inside because I was afraid someone was going to yell something [...]. It seemed like people were trying to tell me, we don't want you here. I didn't want the stress of trying to deal with that and my job. I can deal with my job, but you know when the job is over I want to relax, I want to go home." He resolved this issue partly by speaking with his supervisor to accommodate his work schedule after moving, which he explained the supervisor did not hesitate to do and was understanding and supportive throughout the process. This could be compared to the earlier story in the case of the woman who struggled to receive accommodation for her work schedule due to her role as a mother.

On a different occasion, the same faculty told a story of a negative encounter he had with the local police when he first started working in his current position. He was being questioned for driving without a license plate, and said that the police acted aggressively towards him and he felt harassed by him as he attempted to explain to the police why he had temporary tags on his car. He went on to say that had he been married, he might have made stayed in town. He explained, "when stuff like that happens, you can't really keep it inside. You know you need to let that go and to get that stress out of your system. And oftentimes stuff like that would happen and I would go home and I would be alone, and it would sort of simmer, it would fester. I can call and talk to people about it, but I think if I had someone with me, that might have been better."

4.2 The Intersectionality Of Race And Gender:

All three African American women interviewed discussed the role of race and gender as being intertwined in their experiences. One participant described extensive cases where her race and gender served as a barrier to her experiences of consistent mistreatment and stereotypes. "It's been very clear a racial hierarchy has been established, I would say that race is very prominent [...] now that takes on a different meaning as a black woman. I exist in an intersectionality, and at times, has kept me marginalized, not supported, and given the proper credit that it deserves. I do think gender and race work hand in hand, especially for black women." She described instances where she was sabotaged by a white male employee who attempted to lie to the superintendent by using stereotypical descriptions of her. She said, "a white male, indicat[ed] that I forced him to pick up paper, that I scared him and threatened him when I walked in the room, that I consistently talked about black and white issues and that frightened him."

In another instance, the same woman talked about having the chief of staff at another workplace tell her that the conversation could not go forward until her executive director, a white female, was present in the room. She explained, "so if I think of hierarchy, under those circumstances, he [was] calling for my employee, my subordinate to be at the table when I am the chief of the department [...]. I believe that was to position her and to denigrate my role." In her case, she spoke of race as playing a dominant role in her experiences and negative encounters in various workplaces.

Another African American woman spoke of her race and gender being somewhat advantageous to her mobility. She said, "I think that I have been granted some opportunities because of my race. I think one of the things I've found in Higher Ed is that it seems like there's a lot of women in Higher Ed at certain levels. You don't see a lot of women administrators or at the vice president level. I think that because of my race it's probably given me the leg up on some individuals because everybody's always looking to diversify [and] some way they can increase the underrepresentation of certain individuals on their campuses. I'm a female and I'm African American, if you need to kind of increase both of those areas, I could fill the field for both of those. So I do believe that in some of the positions, that has afforded me an opportunity to move up."

4.3 Effects of Social Networks

Participants mostly talked about social networks within their respective departments. Male faculty discussed more often than not of having informal ties with their colleagues and doing activities outside of work such as going out to football games or getting drinks with one another. For female faculty, their relationships with their colleagues was described as being more formal, their interaction was mostly work-related and the topic of hanging out outside of work did not come up in their interactions with other faculty or staff.

The lack of informal social networks of women is likely because of the minimal representation of women some departments have as one faculty explained, "I feel like there's a little bit more clubbiness [between the male faculty] as far as they will just informally decide to go out to lunch and they don't invite me or the other woman in the department. I think that may be partly because of my gender that it's just easier for them to decide to go with each other. There used to be another woman teaching here [...] we used to have more faculty so I did go to lunch with her." When a male faculty member, in the same department was asked whether some faculty hangout out with some more than others, he responded that the department is not large enough to have cliques. A similar issue regarding lack of representation was made apparent by some participants who discussed working in a racially homogenous department. In this case, there was only one African American male in their department.

In a department where there were more women, and only two male faculty, the males expressed having tighter bonds with their colleagues. Despite this, one of the males made the point that the women in the department took him more serious and showed him more respect because he is a man. When asked how he knew, he explained, "I think that there is a certain male privilege that a lot of gay guys have to deal with because of our minority sexuality. I think that we have to become aware that we own a certain privilege because of our sex. [...] I can pick up the phone and call somebody and they're going to answer me because I have a male sounding voice or somebody might go out of their way to do something for me because I am male. But then I'm like do they know that I'm actually gay? Would they act the same way if they knew that I was gay? I think that probably all that is not verbal, probably about body language, micro facial movements and physiological changes and things like that."

Race was another topic discussed to explain how social networks were formed. One African American woman said that her social network consists of all African American women with whom she felt more connected and with whom she shared a lot in common. She remembered being a college student at a predominantly white university, and having to rely on her social network of African American women as a support system for one another. This indicated that she applies a similar tactic in a same way professionally. Another pattern that occurred between African Americans more generally is being placed in minority committees or organizations that puts all minority faculty and staff under one umbrella. They mentioned being recruited to support black students on campus or facilitating diversity training programs.

One participant became emotionally saddened when sharing his personal story of having an African American husband whose race has been a barrier for him and his family. He explained that he has a certain level of security and reliable social networks because of his race. He said, “if anything I get more things because I'm white and I do feel guilty about that. He went on to say, “I feel guilty because I go and visit his family and I'm like the only difference here is that they're fucking black. My family has a network of people they can rely on to like help make these repairs and things. [His family has] worked just as hard as my parents, but my parents have been given other things because of their whiteness that his family didn't receive. And that breaks my heart. That makes me feel really really guilty.” His use of the word guilty implied some feelings of responsibility for the problem his husband faces, but also a level of understanding of his experiences.

4.4 Perceptions of Promotions

Promotion was a sensitive topic particularly for those who did not receive promotion. This ranged from unit-B faculty, new part-time faculty or adjunct professors, and those titled instructors. They expressed frustration and anger towards the promotion and tenure process but mostly blamed the lack of school funding as being the primary issue affecting their chances of promotion. The data collected shows an even split between males and females, and blacks and whites who received promotion. Tenured or not, however, male participants talked more often about feeling supported and encouraged by their colleagues to seek higher positions or promotion than women, who talked about feeling isolated from the process and often discouraged in comparison to their male counterparts. Furthermore, males who received promotion described the tenure and promotion process as purely merit and performance-based, or did not discuss any bias or unfair advantages in the process. None of the black women interviewed were tenured professors, with the exception of one staffer. Men's social networks are more strongly organized than women's, therefore, they share are able to share promotional insights and strategies with one another. This is often done in informal settings such as outings where men converse about personal life, but more importantly discuss beneficial job information (Faulkner 2009).

In one of our conversations, an African American woman, with a PhD, in her ninth year teaching the majority of the courses with help from only one other person, her supervisor, stated that she could have been tenured at another university had she stayed longer. When asked why she did not take up that offer, her reason was that her children were enrolled in school and she did not want to move them far away. This is also an example of work-life balance conflicts. Another African American, however, stated that she had not been in her position long enough to be eligible for promotion, but that she had received promotion at a previous workplace, where she often felt overlooked. She told a story of being asked to be removed by a white man who did not clearly state why he did not want to work with her, and also talked about white males getting special attention from other white male leaders, almost in a mentorship role, while she did not receive the same treatment or opportunities. One explanation for this is that in addition to raced and gendered stereotypes, African American women in positions of authority are often subjugated to mistreatment by their white male colleagues even when working in high-ranking positions (Lloyd-Jones 2009; Ford 2011).

The only white woman who was interviewed reported receiving promotion and being tenured; however, stated that she saw her male counterparts being encouraged to apply to be department chair or for a university administration position while she was not being encouraged in the same way. All women in the study also worked in departments where they were either the only woman, or among a few.

4.5 Challenges of Work-life Balance

For many participants, the critical problem of work-life balance centered on the issue of working long hours and not spending enough time with family or conflicting working schedules. All three women who reported being married and having children expressed having to balance work and family life. For some, this meant not having enough leisure time to spend with their children, or having to deal with family matters that affected how they did their job. One faculty, a white woman, stated, “it was important to me to be able to spend a lot of time with my young children [...] some of my colleagues and my supervisor saw my role as one where I should be around more often [...] some of my colleagues complained about me behind my back to my supervisor.” She explained that she resisted the idea of being around nine to five on Monday through Friday and sought compromise with her supervisor who eventually accepted to accommodate her work hours. She stated “it was explicitly acknowledged that my gender as a mother was part why that would be accommodated.”

Another woman, African American, talked about her challenges of being a mother and a working professional as an issue of not having enough support from her husband. She said, “he is also a professor [...] he was in [teaching as a professor] it for a couple of years before me, I'd say three years. At this time he was working away from home [out of state] [...] He wasn't there to help.” Although there were only three women who reported having children, they all spoke of the impact of having a family, such as having to accommodate their role as mothers and professionals, setting aside specific times for family and work, and the challenges of raising children while working.

There were only two men who reported having children, and both of them mentioned having supportive wives. Although they did acknowledge having parental duties, most of their discussion centered around their work responsibilities such as having to work late hours in the office to finish up required work. One participant, a white male, first told a story of growing up in a traditional household where his parents encouraged him, the male, to either seek a well-paying career or to go off to college while his two younger sisters were not held up to the same standards. When discussing how he deals with family and work responsibilities, he explained that the division of labor favors him relative to his wife. He said, “as a mother she probably put a lot more time into it than I did and that's probably still a pattern these days.” The other participant, also a white male, said, “[my wife] was one of my best campaign workers. She's always been supportive of everything I've done.”

These cases provide a snapshot of the day-to-day interactions that participants regarded as problematic for achieving racial and gender equality. Participants recalled both the personal experiences and their observations of other's experiences in their organization.

5. Discussion

Consistent with Ridgeway's (2012) theory of gendered socialization, women spoke of prevailing gendered stereotypes when dealing with their male colleagues. Whereas women discussed compromising and accommodating for their role as mothers, men discussed work and life responsibilities as blended or complementary to their role as fathers. The women interviewed were in departments dominated by men, which may have shaped the culture of the departments and possibly influenced performance expectations. Male dominance in the departments likely also influenced women's difficulty with establishing strong social networks; therefore, those who had fewer allies, more often found themselves negotiating their role as mothers in order to meet work demands. This could also be extended to African Americans who were often the only person of color in their department.

African American women highlighted the intersectionalities of race and gender when they spoke of different racial and gender stereotypes and microaggressions, which is consistent with past research (Collins 1990; bell hooks 1990; Davis 1983; Essed 1993; Acker 2006). While some experiences were explicitly reported as resulting from race and gender discrimination, patterns such as lack of personnel in the office or feelings of isolation in the work environment commonly occurred among African Americans in general. As relevant literature suggests, spatial segregation impacts African Americans most, and further hinders their ability to make informal social connections or seek better job opportunities (Vallas 2003; Wilson, Eitle, Bishin 2006). In turn, they adopted various coping methods or assimilative strategies to deal with microaggressions. It is important to point out again that while the data table shows a high number of participants who reported racial and gender symbolic processes and problems of social closure, this number decreases when a distinction is made from those who reported experiences they attributed to their race and gender versus those who presumed racial and gender bias. What this means for a potential future study then is a better depiction of these internalized and interpretive differences.

6. Limitations

As is common with qualitative research, this analysis relied on the participants self-report of their experiences and the researcher's interpretation of those experiences. The numerical data presented Table 2 goes beyond the highlighted cases by providing insight into the prevalence of the dominant themes among the participants. Further, while this study used a small, non-representative sample, which may not necessarily represent the experiences of all women and African Americans, the findings are consistent with what has been found in the existing literature. Thus, despite the limitations, this study is important for understanding micro-level issues of race and gender in the workplace that a large-scale survey may not capture. In a sense, this is an indicator of the need for more qualitative studies, which allows for a more nuanced examination of the lived experiences of women and racial minorities.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the processes and practices that restrict women and African Americans from attaining high-level positions in work organizations. These findings indicate that African Americans and women still experience micro-level aggressions that affect their work outcomes and how they do their job. The key findings that centered on the themes of work-life balance, promotion, social networks, social closure, and symbolic processes prove

to be consistent with some of the previous studies and competing theories. Consequently, these accounts not only address the issues women and African Americans face on a day-to-day basis, but institutional procedures may also serve to reinforce social exclusion and promotion practices, that continue to limit the leadership roles for African Americans and women.

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