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Looking Through a Glass Darkly: *Reflections on Power, Leadership and the Black Female Professional*

Introduction

Well before civil rights legislation and equal opportunity policies created cracks for some African American women to make their way into leadership positions within corporate, academic, and legal arenas, African American women forged paths of leadership and power in religious, civil rights, and local community organizations, as well as through less formal channels. African American women led as abolitionists risking freedom and life to end slavery on personal and national levels. They led as late 19th and early 20th century clubwomen gathered to protest negative treatment and perceptions of African American women and to ensure the franchise and educational opportunities for all African Americans. They also led as anti-lynching and anti-rape activists including Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Rosa Parks and through serving as "surrogate mothers" to extended family and community members (P. Collins, 2000; Giddings, 1984, 2009; Gilkes, 2001; McGuire, 2011). Indeed, African American women's leadership is as old as their presence in the United States. If truth be told, this visible leadership of African American women — often in response to the grave injustices fomented by racism and sexism — was used to frame them as insufficiently feminine vis-à-vis White women and as a threat to African American men's ability to demonstrate traditional masculinity (P. Collins, 2000; Giddings, 1984; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Wallace, 1979). Indeed, even as leaders in public and private spheres, African American women's positions often were seen as illegitimate and used for castigation rather than praise. This visibility in an era where there were distinct spheres that placed men in public arenas and relegated women to the privacy of the home was used to further distance

African American women from being seen as appropriate, capable, and competent in their roles in society. This continues today.

Overview of Critical Race Feminism and Intersectionality

While the gains of mainstream feminism meant that women's experiences and strategies concerning leadership started to be integrated into research literature, the reference points remained centered on Whites. African American women were often not considered in early conversations around women professionals (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Kanter, 1977; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Turner, 2002). It is only more recently that African American women's experiences in leadership have been intermittently included in studies on gender and leadership. Parker and Ogilvie (1996) contend that African American women have a unique positionality that cannot be subsumed under solely racialized or gendered understandings of leadership. As such, the intersections between and among social statuses need to be considered in any theoretical framing.

Though a growing presence among leaders in (still) predominantly White and male corporate, legal, military, academic, and non-profit institutions, there is a lacuna in academic research and thought regarding African American women's presence and experiences (Stanley, 2009). We take up the question: If leadership is defined as White and male and if too many popular and academic constructions frame all the women as White and all the Blacks as men (Hull et al., 1982), then what of African American women who fit none of these? What advice do we give struggling, early career Black professional women and those in a mid-career plateau?

In *Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality*, African American scientist and feminist scholar, Evelynn Hammonds, explains that "as theorists we have to ask how vision is structured and following that, we have to explore how difference is established…. This we must apply to the ways in which Black women are seen and not seen by the dominant society and to see how they see themselves…. (1994:141)." For some African American women, the hostility, alienation, and other interactional and institutional barriers are such that they may force some African American women to abandon chosen paths and desired roles (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Sands, 1986; Turner, 2002). Here, however, we turn our attention to those African American women who do manage and negotiate those places of leadership never intended for them. Underrepresented and rarely recognized, African American women in professional and leadership positions often find themselves viewed (and viewing) through a funhouse mirror that casts only warped distortions of themselves (Hobson, 2013). In this paper, we use a *Critical Race Feminism* viewpoint to consider these multiple gazes as we take up Hammonds' call and explore the notion of African American women professionals looking through a glass darkly and finding few accurate reflections of themselves.

Critical Race Feminism (CRF)

Definition and Theoretical Structure; Its Importance as a Theoretical Lens

Critical Race Feminism with its focus on femininity in the context of race is well suited epistemologically to straddle the multiple positions engendered in being African American women, highlighting the reality of sexism and racism that frames the lives of real people (Crenshaw, 2009). Although no established criteria officially list the tenets of CRF, it does follow a particular theoretical perspective which places race and gender subordination as its

primary analytical foci, while appreciating its place in a multitude of inequities. CRF brings the concept of race back into feminist discourse by championing the voice of Black women to challenge racism and sexism in a masculine world (Wing, 2000). Many African American feminists have chided traditional feminist discourse as monolithically White, unreflective of the day-to-day experience of African American feminism. They wish to challenge the de facto assertion that women only have one voice and that voice is by default White (Lorde, 1984). CRF tells a tale of multiple race and gender positions (among many others) rendering Black women's experiences within the world, visible.

CRF emerged from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and shares many of its emancipatory goals. Just as CRT was born from the need to create a racial perspective in Critical Legal Studies (CLS) in the late 1980s, CRF has exposed the need for a feminist critique when exploring racial inequality. Therefore, CRF situates itself under a panoply of experiential takes on domination such as *Latino Crit* that focuses upon the Latino/a experience of marginality, *Queer Crit* that centralizes the outsider experience of the LGBTQ community, and *Tribal Crit* that examines the deleterious effects of U.S. colonization on indigenous people. These takes aim to explore the deeply multifaceted environment of inequality which privileges those of White European heritage who are male and straight at the top of society, while the Other(s) remain — as Derrick Bell so aptly described — damned as a perpetual face at the bottom of society's well (Bell, 1992; Crenshaw, 2002; McKinley & Brayboy, 2013; Parker, 1998). Just as with CRT, emancipatory social justice is a primary aim of CRF: one that is attained through an understanding of the overlapping interrelations of gender, class, race, and sexuality in society. CRF grounds itself in the reality of the invisibility of gender/race subordination of Black women. The historical plight of Blacks in professions has led to White apathy to racism and a feeling that nothing can be done. Instead, modern notions of White anti-racism have coalesced into an attitude of *racelessness* that is lauded as progress; instead, it is colorblindness that perpetuates racial indifference at the same time it institutionalizes inequality in the professional workplace. Institutions cannot identify what they will not see nor hear what they cannot understand, leaving Black female professionals muted in the effort to redress their liminal position. In this sense, the theoretical value of CRF is to provide a voice to explore the grievances of the raced and gendered "Other" to allow these claims to be taken seriously in the institutional setting and to make true race and gender equality, while simultaneously understanding that this path is long and hard with no easy detours. It is here that subtle aspects of discrimination must be addressed if organizations are, in some way, able to achieve reconciliation with Black professional femininity.

Power

Since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been growth in the number and visibility of members of marginalized communities — including women of all races, racial and ethnic minorities, and LBGTQ people of all races who are in leadership positions. This growth, however, has not been pervasive through all ranks. Leadership positions occupied by marginalized groups have been largely relegated to the lowest rungs of organizations with fewer occupying positions in the middle and fewer still at the very top. As such, people of color, in general, and African American women, in particular, remain underrepresented in the highest positions of power within organizations across industries. This is evident when looking at a 2011 report that shows that although 34% of African American women are employed in management, professional, and related occupations, African American women represent 1%

of corporate officers and 1.9% of Fortune 500 board positions. Work by Lucas and Baxter also reveals that White men constitute approximately 33% of the workforce, but possess 75% of board seat positions and 95% of chair positions in large, Blue chip companies (Lucas & Baxter, 2012; Taylor & Nivens, 2011). Additionally, according to a 2016 report from *Catalyst* (a nonprofit organization dedicated to gender inclusion in the workplace), African American women comprise 7.4% of all employees, 3.8% of first- and mid-level officials and managers, 1.2% of executive and senior-level officials and managers, and 0.2% of CEOs within S&P 500 firms. The traditional White male leader remains ascendant both numerically as well as in assumptions about who leaders are and who leaders should be (Byrd, 2009; P. Collins, 2000; Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008).

As Stanley (2009: 552) points out, race, gender, and power in the United States are such that African American women fall so outside the conception of leadership that when they are "in predominantly White organizations, power dynamics may cause disempowering experiences for African American women that can occur in the form of challenging, resisting, resenting, undermining, or even ignoring a person's authority." When thinking about African American women's power within organizations where they work, Pettit (2009: 639) refers to the power that African American women hold in their leadership roles within White-dominated organizations as "borrowed power because whiteness is still the final authority (639)." This authority is disempowering for African American women. It also can compel what DiAngelo (2011: 55) names as "White fragility" — an "insulated environment of racial privilege [that] builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress." When racial stresses, provoked through discussions of race, race-based disparities, or racism occur, DiAngelo asserts that White fragility activates and causes defensiveness in Whites' attitudes and behaviors until the power pendulum swings back in their favor. Racial stresses occur when Whites' expectations are not met as could be the case when 1) stereotypes are challenged; 2) people of color are centered rather than marginalized; and 3) in the collision of these such as when African American women occupy leadership roles. As Whites retain political, economic, and social power, they also preserve the power to ensure that any disruptions that occur are but temporary and that status quos are maintained. Indeed, when moments of Whites' discomfort around race occur, White fragility responds with a "socially-sanctioned array of counter-moves against the perceived source of the discomfort, including: penalization; retaliation; isolation; ostracization; and refusal to continue engagement" (DiAngelo, 2011: 61). In addition to the fragility of African American women's power within organizations, White fragility causes a number of forms of distress for African Americans who are exposed to this (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

Bell and Nkomo (2001) describe this pressure that African American women face (as they want to be authentically African American women in a workplace culture that demands that they sublimate) as an "invisibility vise." This invisibility vise poses a major strain to African American women who are caught within it and leads to perceptions that include isolation, disrespect, devaluation, overburdening, and feeling torn between race and gender as well as community and career (Turner, 2002). This invisibility can also limit their access to networks and mentoring; their contributions are neither viewed as worthy of promotion nor increased compensation. Simultaneously and paradoxically, while invisible, African American women are also hyper-visible in that their scarcity in numbers, perceptions about their incompetence and un-deservingness, and the controlling images that precede them lead to

intense surveillance and monitoring (Holder et al., 2015). Myths about African American being hypersexual, for example, lead some African American women leaders to feel they had to manage misperceptions that they had gained prominent positions through their sexuality rather than their intelligence and hard work (Byrd, 2009). In this, they seek to distance themselves from the controlling image of the jezebel who uses her deviant sexuality to curry favor, gain financial rewards, and acquire access to power (P. Collins, 2000).

In order to fully appreciate — and remedy — this disempowerment and to claim actual rather than borrowed power, as CRF posits, an intersectional approach is necessary. Intersectionality calls us to recognize the ways that the totality of our statuses and locations — race, gender, social class, nationality, sexuality, ability status — shape our realities, experiences, perceptions, and treatment across social interactions, institutions, and structures (Crenshaw, 1989). For African American women, the impossibility of unraveling their interwoven statuses into a single stranded understanding of race or gender, for example, means that these must all be jointly analyzed; their lived experiences cannot be understood or extrapolated through the experiences of other groups. Patricia Hill Collins' (1998; 2000; 2004; 2006) work has been pivotal to the establishment of intersectionality in academic and popular discourses. Through an intersectional, African American feminist lens, P. Collins (2000: 274) envisions power as both a "dialectical relationship linking oppression and activism, where groups with greater power oppress those with lower amounts" and "as an intangible entity that circulates within a particular matrix of domination and to which individuals stand in varying relationships." This complementary definition creates space to see power as it is experienced, embodied, transferred, and transmuted. It also enables a view of power as interlocking, multivalent, and relational. Equally without an awareness of the benefits of an intersectional approach, we must accept the very real risk that subordination will in fact reproduce and reinforce itself in mono-vocal gendered, antiracist strategies that ignore feminist practice, and similarly race oblivious feminist resistance that inadvertently subdues people of color. We must see race as a site of alliance between men and women as gender should be a site of coalition for Black and White anti-racists (Crenshaw, 2009).

Controlling Images and the Black Lady

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) discusses the concept of "controlling images," which have served to paint African American women as outside and threatening to White/mainstream American ideals encompassing sex, mothering, femininity, and work. These images can be discrete and overlapping, contradictory and coherent. They include descriptions of African American women's deviant sexuality (as evidenced in the mammy and jezebel images), poor parenting (as evidenced in the mammy, matriarch, and welfare mother images), gender inappropriateness (as evidenced in the matriarch, welfare mother, and Black lady images), lack of work ethic (as evidenced in the welfare mother image), and overly ambitious (as evidenced in the Black lady image). Collectively, they are then used to paint unflattering, mythological, and powerful pictures of African American women that potently shape and confine their representation symbolically and literally in places including popular culture, political rhetoric, policy decisions, and professional settings. In the wake of those controlling images deployed against them, it is African American women who "represent the ultimate Other who defines the presence of White or male subjects" (Patton 2000: 132). As these images cast them as inadequately feminine, African American women as "Other" also bring into sharp relief the construction of White femininity. These offer ideological cover for

exploitation and domination based on racial, gender, class, and other statuses that have defined the U.S. since its inception and continue today. Whereas these controlling images serve as a master status for all African American women — regardless of personal characteristics, experiences, and positionalities — African American women face a particular set of constructions and experiences in their professional lives.

The "Black lady" controlling image is particularly relevant to the current work. According to P. Collins (2000: 81), through the deployment of this image, African American women in professional spaces bear the weight of several of her other controlling images as this extended quote demonstrates:

> [T]his image seems to be yet another version of the modern mammy, namely the hardworking Black woman professional who works twice as hard as everyone else. The image of the Black lady also resembles aspects of the matriarchy thesis – Black ladies have jobs that are so all-consuming that they have no *time* for men or have forgotten how to treat them. Because they so routinely compete with men and are successful at it, they become less feminine. Highly educated Black ladies are deemed to be *too* assertive — that's why they cannot get men to marry them.

Reminiscent of the image of welfare mother, P. Collins then asserts that the Black lady is depicted as dependent upon the government; she is often deemed to be unprepared, an underqualified, affirmative action recipient, or a diversity hire in today's parlance who is displacing Whites in general, and White men in particular, in positions that should be theirs. Threatening White men's naturalized economic and leadership positions makes her an obstacle to patriarchy and male dominance. Indeed, African American women striving for, or already in, powerful positions are often regarded through the lens of P. Collins' (2000) "Black lady." In recounting the experiences of legal scholar Lani Guinier — whose nomination by Bill Clinton for Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights was derailed by the conservative attacks that mischaracterized her as a "quota queen" in an era marked by growing disdain for affirmative action, in particular, and civil rights legislation, in general — Hartman (1994: 441) notes that high-achieving African American women are portrayed as the "overachieving and out-of-control black lady, sister to the feminazi….to reaffirm one of the founding truths of the white republic — black bodies are excluded from the 'we the people' that established the citizen subject."

These controlling images are made visible in the treatment of African American women in leadership roles who face exclusion, lack credibility, are often dismissed, and have advanced ideas often attributed to others (Holder et al., 2015). Controlling images and their aftermath provoke what Harris-Perry (2011) termed "a crooked room." Harris-Perry (2011: 29) reminds us that "when they confront race and gender stereotypes, black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up" in order to find their center, maintain integrity, and survive in situations inimical to their best interests. Navigating these means that African American women must take on additional burdens that will "straighten the shame-producing images of the crooked room" (Harris-Perry 2011: 265).

Black women, through action and thought, redefine the narrative of the crooked room. Without choice, they existentially embody past and present tropes such as the welfare queen or sapphire to survive. Yet at what cost? Across social class, the racialized and gendered socialization that African American women experience in their homes and communities tends to inculcate within them traits associated with power and leadership,

such as autonomy, confidence, and independence (P. Collins, 2000; Ladner, 1972; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). As these have been created around and by White men, indeed, African American women's leadership styles share a lot of traits with White men's (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). Simultaneously, however, African American women are also socialized to have caring, nurturing, and self-sacrificing leadership traits (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996) in tandem with White women. As a result, and incorporating those elements of leadership that are not particularly associated with White men or White women, Parker & Ogilvie (1996) advocate for the recognition and study of a distinctly African American, women-based idea of leadership. Rather than assume that African American women's leadership is emulative of White men's, it is instructive to view it through a prism of creative resistance to domination and marginalization (Byrd, 2009; P. Collins, 2000; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). It is also instructive to bear in mind that those traits, like directness, often valued in leaders are devalued and conflated with controlling images to provide proof positive that the loud, angry, African American woman is the reality rather than a stereotypical myth (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). Furthermore, the ability to gamble that is often seen as a necessary component of a risk-taking leadership in general does not read the same across leaders. An exemplar of this is found in a recent experimental study where African American women were rated more harshly after failures than were White men in the same scenario (Rosette & Livingston, 2012).

Leadership

Black women are often perceived as a round peg in a square professional hole. They simply do not fit. Lucas and Baxter (2012) assert that women in general suffer in the labor market and often self-select not to participate in leadership positions. For those who decide to do so, their position is seen as inauthentic. This reality becomes more pronounced where women of color are concerned since they do not fit the established paradigm of the White male. From an institutional viewpoint, this pits African American women against the establishment; they exist in a somatic sense as a living embodiment of opposition to many organizational values. Tropes of Black femininity remove traits of institutional authenticity and are often seen as unwomanly, unreasonable, overtly confrontational, and therefore unsuited to much of business practice. Thus, pressure on the institutional suitability of the Black female professional emanates from all sides.

Multidimensional Discrimination From Superiors / From Subordinates

While there is often discussion of the discrimination that African American women face in the workplace, this is not limited to those above them in the organizational hierarchy. There are also suggestions (Brake, 2013) that workplace discrimination does not only occur from superiors to subordinates but also from subordinates to superiors, placing African American women in a double bind where their competence, professionalism, and authority are questioned by both those who would hire, evaluate, and promote them and by those who report to African American women in leadership roles. Other work confirms that African American women leaders report a lack of respect from a number of levels within their organizations. Research finds that they experience greater levels of resistance to their authority from those they report to, those who report to them, and from their colleagues (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Byrd, 2009). Similarly, for those in finance, legal, and academic settings, challenges to authority come from all sides including clients and students (Byrd, 2009; Holder et al., 2015; Turner, 2002). In these cases, and recalling the earlier discussion of

borrowed power, African American women's authority is subverted and is more symbolic than actual, leading to what can be termed as an "outsider-within" status (Byrd, 2009; P. Collins, 2000).

African American women's access to this borrowed power is predicated upon how well they are seen as representatives of organizational objectives and how well they fit within the organizational culture. Reminders of their marginality reinforces their outsider-within status (P. Collins 2000) and threatens their grasp on authority. One way this occurs is that African American women are often literally not viewed as looking like professionals or leaders. This is evidenced in research that cites African American women who recall being mistaken for students when they are actually faculty; secretaries when they are actually managers; and assistants when they are actually leaders (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Terhune, 2008). African American women who cannot or do not resemble a standard based on Whiteness are penalized in workplaces for failing to convey so-called professional images. They experience a particular "disadvantage in crafting this professional image due to negative stereotypes, lower expectations, and workplace norms that run counter to their cultural values and that reward white male standards of behavior and appearance" (Rosette & Dumas, 2007: 407). This image is not only symbolic, but embodied. As scholars note, it is easier for White women to demonstrate an image conceived as both attractive and professional (Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Weitz, 2001). One example is hair. Several African American women have filed lawsuits, for example, against their workplaces after being reprimanded, passed over, or dismissed for the ways they wear their hair. In 2014, the Pentagon issued an edict banning a number of natural hairstyles — that is, hairstyles worn by African American women, such as twists, dreadlocks, and cornrows, that require no chemical or other extensive treatment to alter its inherent texture. After outcry from quarters including a letter signed by then Congressional Black Caucus Chair Marcia Fudge and more than 12 of her women colleagues, the "biased and racially insensitive" policy as the letter described it was rescinded (Bates, 2014). Indeed, professional African American women have a host of perceptions and biases regarding their hair that White women do not. Research indicates that while some White women do not place any importance on their hair when it comes to professionalism, no African American women agreed (Weitz, 2001).

The innocuous notion of hair belies its representational importance — its potential symbolic harm to the professional status quo. This feature must be controlled in African American femininity if a path to a leadership position is sought. Thus, as Carbado and Gulati have emphasized, one's identity must be worked. For African American women, this involves curbing ethnic identity: hairstyles must be traditional and deportment harmonized. Traditional becomes a coded institutional speech act urging the importance for the Other to get as close as possible to the White male ideal of professionalism. Ethnic gender identity is subsumed for the greater institutional good, molded to acceptable White male institutional norms (Carbado & Gulati, 2000, 2003).

Certainly, "even though White women report negative attributions about their performance relative to White men, Black women are negatively differentiated from White women even when their identity is successfully worked, creating an even wider performance attribution gap between White men and Black women" (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996: 201). Offering support for the adage that African Americans must work twice as hard to be seen as half as good as Whites, studies show that African American women professionals think they are held to higher standards than their White counterparts (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Byrd, 2009; Holder, et

al., 2015). Similarly, another study shows that compared to White men, African American women had to have higher levels of educational and work experience to arrive at the same station as White men (Elliot & Smith, 2004). When they do take up leadership reins, many African American women who hold positions with some leadership or managerial element are often "ghettoized" in roles that are seen as "Black" such as those promoting diversity, serving African American clients or audiences, or in support roles rather than those with more revenue-producing and decision-making foci (P. Collins, 2000; S. Collins, 1997; Holder et al., 2015).

Functional Narcissism – Can Black Female Success Ever Look Like White Male Success? Should It?

As a function of homosocial reproduction (Elliot & Smith, 2004; Kanter, 1977; Rivera, 2012), leaders select and reward others whom they identify as like *them*. This has profound implications for African American women professionals who are in organizational settings led by White men who continue to make the lion's share of decisions on recruiting, hiring, mentoring, sponsoring, and promoting the next cadre of leaders. This process of homosocial reproduction means that White men shape organizational structures and leadership hierarchies in ways that replicate White male-dominated spaces, creating cumulative disadvantages for everyone else that only increase as higher levels of power are at stake (Elliot & Smith, 2004). Homosocial reproduction means that in a zero-sum game, White men are seen as more deserving of an investment or expenditure of capital from their higher-placed ties, leading to the continuance of advantages such as leadership opportunities for White men. This effect is amplified as career ladders are ascended such that networks pay more for White men and less for African American women when climbing to the top (Elliot & Smith, 2004). Other research demonstrates a lack of return on networking for people like African American women who are regarded as Other. The benefit of interactions in informal work situations such as holiday parties, team-building activities, and post-work dinner and drinks, are higher for demographically similar individuals than when these occur across varied demographics (Dumas et al., 2013). This can also be harmfully internalized as African American women perceive the Othering they experience as amplified feelings of their dissimilarity from those in the in-group. African American women may respond by limiting interactions with others in their workplace to only those that are essential, increasing their contact with others with whom they share a common racial and gender status, or self-isolating (Dumas, et al, 2013; Ibarra, 1995). This also inhibits the size and potential payoff of diverse social networks. As both White men and African American women maximize their social networks with similar others, inequality continues.

Those African American women who do rise within organizations do so through merit rather than connections as they must earn higher educational credentials and employment experience to compensate for the lack of mentoring and sponsorship that White men enjoy. This reversal of the conventional wisdom on meritocracy that posits White men as benefitting from their hard work and African American women as benefitting from affirmative action handouts goes unrecognized. Accordingly, as African American women "move up organizational chains of command, their out-group, or 'other,' status often becomes more evident, leaving them more susceptible to informal processes of exclusion and assessment as symbols of an 'other' category rather than as individuals" (Elliot & Smith, 2004: 369).

In fact, many White male captains of industry actually display the psychological disorder of functional narcissism that should, in fact, place them firmly as group outsiders. Such traits include a grandiose sense of importance, obsession with success/power, belief in their specialness, and a lack of empathy — all resulting in promotion and compensation disparity. These attributes are enshrined in the mythos surrounding successful businessmen such as Steve Jobs or Donald Trump, characteristics that are somehow indicative of success. This disorder is valued in White men and in some men of color as the essence of how to achieve professional success; it acts as the gold standard of the market commodification of our world — one that is gendered male and raced White. So how can the African American professional woman navigate this landscape? Can she ever embody these traits of success? Is it in her advantage to do so? Earlier in the article, we highlighted the danger of the sapphire trope should she be outspoken, career-focused, or too independent. Black professional women walk such a tight rope of authenticity that if she falls off, she will negatively embody the traits of a functional narcissist, and so be doomed/deemed to be "Pseudo Man," un-female (automatically masculinized) and therefore the antithesis of real (White) femininity. In essence, she will be inherently deemed unsuitable to the professional workplace let alone to positions of leadership (Brake, 2013; Hobson, 2013).

Discussion

The question may be asked "What do we tell Black professional women?" In the workplace? Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, has risen to prominence with her neo-feminist assertion that women must lean into their careers to find success and fulfillment. Having gained notoriety with a popular 2010 TED talk and a subsequent best-selling book three years later on the need for more women leaders, Sandberg admonishes women for leaning back, for not being present at the corporate table, and dropping out of work. Firstly, she suggests that it is the agency of women that is all important to career success. Women, therefore, must be present physically at the corporate table-making decisions with men on equal footing. Secondly, in the private sphere of the home, she must make her partner a real partner — one who shares equally in all domestic/child-rearing duties. Thirdly, Sandberg demands that women "do not leave before, you leave." She alludes here to the supposed tendency of women to mentally opt out of the career ladder when they start to consider having a family. At the core, she calls for women not to underestimate their true value and therefore self-select to drop out of the workplace.

This narrative has sparked resistance from a number of established feminists who take issue with much of Sandberg's theoretical positions. Bell Hooks give a pointed critique of "leaning in" — highlighting its colorblind underpinnings. The problem of limited female achievement is perceived as a White female problem with White female solutions. The intersection of race and gender is simply ignored. Further, by ignoring the structural aspect of sexism in society, Sandberg ignores a mainstay of established Feminist thought: that of the need to challenge patriarchy in both the public and private spheres wherever found. Female success, then, is truly aided by men as well as women choosing to resist a patriarchy wrapped in the garb of age-old, colonial assertions about race, class, and gender. Worse, as alluded to earlier, feminist practice that eschews intersectionality risks perpetuating race and gender inequality — a charge that Hooks, among others, squarely level at Sandberg (Hooks, 2013). Discussions on and about leaning in and the inability of Black women to do so due to race and gender inequities serve to entangle Black women in a cycle of internalized blame for career immobility. This perpetuates a cycle of diminishing self-worth

which hides structural sexism from women and replaces it with a narrative of personal inability. It removes the impetus to engage in structural reform of the raced and gendered patriarchal status quo and push for institutional, structural, and policy changes. Instead, exhortations to lean in places the onus to change on women at an individual level, as a magician's trick, so as to leave the established order well alone.

It is in this way that Sandberg makes a patriarchal bargain as conceived by Kandiyoti (1988) where women successfully strategize within masculine "rules of the game" but must ultimately acquiesce to gender inequality to gain limited power. By ignoring patriarchy while strategizing corporate success for women, Sandberg chooses to allow the continued proliferation of gender domination to go unchallenged, which by default shores up the male power structure. Indeed, it is in the interest of the project of White masculine domination to allow such a bargain as a form of interest convergence. Women, for example, are currently perceived to be entering the legal arena in record numbers proving the success of corporate diversity agendas (at least for white women), but this ignores the fact that women tend to congregate in the area of family law in much larger numbers because patriarchy in the law suggests that women and family naturally conflate (Sommerlad & Sanderson, 1998; Berger & Robinson, 1993). This, in turn, feminizes/ghettoizes family law as undesirable to real male lawyers who enter corporate law instead and get paid handsomely because they are valued more (Dudziak, 2009; Kandiyoti, 1988). Yet what of Black femininity in this bargain? Do they stand alone? We surmise that race and gender subordination place Black women in a precarious bargaining situation. Being stereotyped as sapphiric quasi-men in relation to true White femininity, they are regarded as a threat to White masculinity and undeserving of any quarter. Simultaneously, they can expect little tangible support from White women who are also in competition for what is left of the professional cake after White men have left the table.

Given that definitions and perceptions of competence and deservingness of mentoring, sponsorship, and access to positions of influence reflect the image of their creators — elite White men who act as gatekeepers — it is important to note that those who are perceived as imbued with leadership characteristics must be seen as equals and merit assessed by similarity to one's self (Rivera 2012). This places African American women at a particular disadvantage as reflected in Feagin and O'Brien's (2003) research on elite white males: "[T]hey do not recognize African Americans, especially as a group, as such sovereign equals… [and they] generally have difficulty in recognizing black men and women as being much like themselves"(14). At the same time, Whites disavow the presence of contemporary racial and gender discrimination in their rhetoric and increasingly their policies, preferring to believe that anti-discrimination laws and policies have paved the way for a purely meritocratic and unbiased landscape and attributing any remaining power and presence disparities to the individual and cultural failings of people of color of any gender and women of any race (Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; Rivera, 2012).

Conclusion

This paper utilizes a Critical Race Feminism perspective to show how as occupants of an outsider-within strata, African American women in professional and leadership roles are at the edge of inclusion and exclusion, of power and disempowerment (P. Collins, 2000). This allows a particular vantage point where prisms of gender and race offer a refraction point

that gives insight into the collision of controlling images, homosocial reproduction, and leaning in.

African American femininity has its own particular set of leadership characteristics which present a nuanced view of corporate citizenship and power relations.

So to look through a glass darkly at Black women professionals as this paper chooses to do is to engage a Du Bois-like double consciousness that is gendered in nature (Du Bois, 2005). It perceives the colorblind existence of Whites and its inherent advantages while also acknowledging the shadow racial hierarchy that places Blackness at the lowest rung. It does not ignore the intersection of gender that forms a double bind of the Black female warring soul that must struggle with being told they are past gender and race, while being simultaneously subjugated by racial prejudice and sexism in equal measure. It is a conscious decision to reject this worldview and instead see African American femininity as a valued resource. Firms could choose to engage in an emancipatory social justice agenda, radically transforming imbedded, patriarchal structures grounded in race that guarantee the success of white masculinity at a cost to everybody else. Acceding power to Black women professionals among many while promoting C-suite leadership positions to the gendered and/or raced Other, begin the process of righting an age-old wrong and places our corporate community on a path to real equity for all.

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