

Free to Be Me?

Black Professors, White Institutions

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This study examines the identity negotiation and communication strategies that Black professors employ when interacting in predominantly White institutional settings. Data were collected through a focus group meeting, individual interviews, and surveys. The first sample of participants included eight African American professors (three men and five women) who all taught for the same mid-size, predominantly White institution in the rural southeast. The second sample of participants also included eight Black professors (four male and four female), but they represented five different predominantly White institutions. Findings suggest that Black professors do not negotiate their identities to the extent that they communicate in ways that are significantly different from their normal communication behavior; however, they do communicate in strategic ways in an effort to be viewed as professional, credible, and approachable, by both their colleagues and their students.

Keywords: *identity negotiation; communication strategy; Black faculty; Black professors*

There have been numerous studies conducted on various aspects of the professoriate (Austin, 2002; Cimbala, 2002; Gappa, 2002; Gorham, 1988; Hardy, 2002; S. D. Johnson & Roellke, 1999; Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985; Kember & Kwan, 2000; Koerner & Petelle, 1991; Nasser & Fresko, 2002; Russ, Simonds, & Hunt, 2003; Westheimer, 2002); however, few have focused on issues facing Black professors (Allen, 2000; Baker, 1991; Gregory, 1995; Hendrix, 1998; Moore & Wagstaff, 1974; Moses, 1997; Patton, 2004; Pope & Joseph, 1997), and fewer still have focused on the identity negotiation and communication strategies employed by Black professors as a result of these issues. This study addresses the identity negotiation and communication strategies that Black professors employ when interacting in predominantly White institutional settings (e.g., the classroom, faculty meetings, campus events, etc.). In essence, this analysis serves as a follow-up to previous literature that suggests that many Black professors on White campuses do not feel free to “be themselves” among students and colleagues, and

it follows literature that speaks of the challenges Black professors face at predominantly White institutions (PWIs).

Research Question 1 asks, What are some of the challenges Black professors face teaching at predominantly White institutions? Research Question 2 asks, To what extent do Black professors, who teach at predominantly White institutions, negotiate their identities and/or alter their communication styles?

Background

When a Black professor begins teaching at a PWI, he or she must often combat long-standing stereotypes and prejudices held by members of the dominant community, as many Whites, and other groups alike, continue to view Blacks stereotypically. In fact, research reveals that when Blacks fail to conform to stereotypical views, Whites often view them negatively nonetheless. For instance, Wilder (1984) examines the “typical member” versus the “exception to the rule” and reveals that pleasant contact with persons who appear to be highly typical of an outgroup (i.e., confirming previously held stereotypes) leads to more favorable evaluations of the overall outgroup than does contact with atypical persons. In other words, this suggests that Whites would prefer to interact with the undereducated “comic Negro,” as described by Finkenstaedt (1994), than with the highly intellectual Black scholar—as he or she is atypical. Similarly, Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) reveal that White students tend to have more negative attitudes toward Blacks when Blacks are not cast in stereotypical roles.

With regard to some specific stereotypes, related to Black professors in particular, the notion that Blacks are not intellectually capable remains common. For instance, students at PWIs regularly question the credibility of Black professors and hold them to more stringent standards than they do White professors (Hendrix, 1997). Moreover, although Hendrix’s analysis focuses on Black male professors, this stereotype tends to be directed at both male and female Black professors. In fact, Weitz and Gordon (1993) contend that the White students view Black women as primarily loud, aggressive, argumentative, stubborn, and bitchy. Harrison (2000), on the other hand, notes that as a Black man, he regularly encounters surprised looks when he introduces himself as an academician rather than as an athlete.

In addition to battling stereotypes, Black faculty must battle many other challenges on White campuses. First, Blacks have the lowest faculty progression, retention, and tenure rates in academe (Moses, 1997). Specifically,

of nearly 400,000 tenured faculty across the nation, less than 3% are Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Researchers believe that one of the primary reasons for this discrepancy is that Black faculty are held to the same standard of evaluation as are White faculty. For instance, Black faculty who teach at top research institutions are not only expected to publish several times a year, but they are expected to publish in particular journals, those most widely accepted by White scholars (Gregory, 2002). Yet, it is common that Black faculty do not publish in such journals, and those who attempt to submit to such journals are often rejected based on their topic selection. This is problematic because Black scholars tend to research topics that address the issues of people of color. Moreover, Gregory (2002) asserts that Black scholars are more inclined to perform qualitative research, and most predominantly White journals favor quantitative research. Similarly, Branch (2001) contends that Black faculty are often told to be more objective in their research and remove the emotion from their writing, which the author interprets as an attempt to silence the Black voice, because emotion is a common characteristic of Black communication style (Kochman, 1974). Branch (2001) states, "Placing ourselves in our research was viewed as less academic, sloppy research, 'soft' research, or not research at all."

For these reasons, among others, Turner and Myers (2000) argue the need for change in promotion and tenure policies. The authors contend that faculty should be acknowledged and rewarded for additional demands, such as those that Black faculty face when being asked to diversify numerous committees and teach numerous classes. B. J. Johnson and Harvey (2002) add that Black faculty view these heavy workloads to be the primary barrier against their progress toward promotion and tenure. In addition, Turner and Myers state that Black faculty should be rewarded for the extra time they invest in teaching and service activities, such as assisting Black students on campus. Research contends that the goals of Black faculty differ from those of their White counterparts, in that "Black faculty value teaching more and have different research interests than other faculty" (Astin, 1982; Graves, 1990). Finally, Turner and Myers assert that Black faculty should be specially acknowledged and rewarded for their unique research.

With regard to Black women's issues with promotion and tenure, Gregory (1995) states that Black female faculty are concentrated among the lowest ranks of academe, they are promoted at a slower rate, and they tend to be paid less than their Black male and White female counterparts. Several factors contribute to this. As previously noted, White males still hold more than 50% of faculty positions across the nation (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999); therefore, Black women tend to have difficulty finding mentors to help

them through the tenure and promotion process. B. J. Johnson and Harvey (2002) contend that senior faculty often fail to show new Black faculty the ropes when Black faculty become employed by a White institution.

Black female faculty also face difficulties achieving promotion and tenure due to their research choices. According to Burgess (1997),

Research on women's issues and interdisciplinary areas such as women's studies and ethnic studies is often especially discounted during tenure review, with the result that African American women, who tend to participate more in both of these areas than their White colleagues, are doubly disadvantaged. (p. 230)

Another difficulty that Black professors face at PWIs is isolation and marginalization. Although some literature suggests that Black faculty self-segregate themselves as do Black students at PWIs, McKay (1983) posits that the experience of isolation and marginalization is due to the fact that Black faculty are often the only people of color in their respective departments. Hence, the voices of Black faculty are often "muted," as a result. In addition, Abercrombie (2002) speaks of isolation from other Blacks on PWI campuses when crisis emerges. Abercrombie tells of his own experience having to defend his integrity after a student misquoted his answer to the question, "Why does racism exist?" He referred to scholarly theories of White male fears of Black males and from then on was accused of spouting racist ideologies. Abercrombie expresses his disappointment that few Black faculty supported him through the ordeal, stating,

The most disheartening part of this ordeal was that I did not have five Black administrative or faculty members contact me through my entire crisis. In fact, most Black professionals were simply afraid to identify with me. They did not want to be associated with me if I were guilty, they did not want to get labeled, and/or they were afraid of the wrath of White people. (p. 52)

Hence, the author suggests that Black faculty are isolated because, in many cases, they cannot afford to be allied; they must protect their own unstable professional positions.

A fourth difficulty that Black faculty face is that they are so often over-committed. Black professors are expected to sit on far more committees than are their White colleagues because they tend to be the only face of color available to add the appearance of diversity to the group (Turner & Myers, 2000). In addition, Black students on PWI campuses tend to place high demands on Black faculty because they too are marginalized and desperate for mentors. According to Allen (2000), this demand is especially high for Black female

faculty who tend to be viewed as “mammies,” expected to nurture and care for everyone. In fact, Allen asserts that students will travel from various other academic departments seeking mammy to take care of their problems. Moreover, Burgess (1997) argues that such demands make the promotion and tenure process even more difficult for Black female faculty because it decreases the amount of time they have to work on scholarly activities. In fact, the author contends that Black women are assigned service-oriented tasks more regularly than are other faculty.

With regard to blatant acts of racism and discrimination, again, Black women tend to have harsher experiences than do Black male professors. Pope and Joseph (1997) offer accounts of Black women being harassed and/or verbally abused by students. The authors contend that White male students are the most common harassers of Black female faculty because the mere presence of Black female scholars challenges some White males’ long-held beliefs about the inabilities of both minorities and women. In fact, McKay (1983) recounts her experience with a White male student who approached her and stated that he was so angry at some of the points she made in her lecture that he considered “punching her in the nose.” McKay also describes instances when White male students verbally attacked her, challenging her authority and qualifications to administer grades. Finally, the author notes that she has also received sexual advances from White male students, which she describes as an “expression of the greatest disrespect.” Furthermore, Davis (2002) describes some of the comments that she received one semester on student evaluations, which read, “Davis’ lips are so big she has to carry her chapstick in a water bottle”; “Class would have been more interesting if the bitch would have lectured with a bone in her nose and a plate in her lip”; and “If you make me go to the Malcolm X Library one more time, I’ll take you to the David Duke Library.”

Whereas the majority of the literature published about Black professors teaching at PWIs has focused on such issues as those just outlined, one can presume that these experiences are not uncommon. Furthermore, one can presume that many Black scholars expect similar challenges when they begin teaching on any predominantly White campus.

Communication Strategies

Little has been published with regard to specific communication strategies employed by Black professors; however, there has been some analysis of the communication strategies of other Black subgroups. Orbe (1998) examines the communicative practices of members of nondominant groups,

with particular focus on African American men, and discovers nine strategic categories outlining three primary goals and/or reasons that members of cocultural groups communicate with members of dominant groups in the ways that they do—to assimilate, accommodate, or separate. In addition, Orbe discusses the variance in why group members might choose some communication practices over others. Factors include preferred outcome (one's desired effect), field of experience (one's background), abilities (one's communicative skill), situational context (one's perception of appropriateness of behavior), perceived costs and rewards, and communication approach (one's personal style).

Other research on various African American subgroups asserts that communication interactions between Blacks and Whites are often problematic. In fact, Hecht and Ribeau (1987) offer seven strategies commonly used by Blacks to improve their interactions with Whites. The strategies include asserting a point of view (expressing disagreement), open-mindedness (being less judgmental), avoidance (ignoring unpleasant remarks), nothing can be done (taking no action), give in (apologizing or accommodating), interaction management (more talking, listening, turn-taking, and questioning), and other orientation (having more patience with the other person). The strategies are further divided to represent those that are self-focused, other-focused, or focused on both interactants. Using these strategies, Martin, Hecht, and Larkey (1994) discover that Blacks more commonly tend to view the need for improving interracial interactions as the responsibility of both parties involved, and they more often employ the strategies that focus on self or are shared by self and others. Whites, on the other hand, more commonly emphasize strategies that place responsibility on the other interactant.

Finally, studies of African American executives working for predominantly White organizations offer similar findings to those above, in addition to noting the regularity by which these executives employ code-switching tactics (Dawson, 2001; James-Hughes, 2003; Lindsey, 1998; Matthews, 1997; Parker, 1997; Sidlo, 1996).

Racial and Ethnic Identity

Whereas the above section outlines a few analyses concerning Blacks' communication styles and strategies, this section examines racial and ethnic identity development and the negotiation of those identities.

There have been numerous studies on the development of Black identity. The Communication Theory of Ethnic Identity (CTEI) was developed by Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau (1993) as one way to address the development

of one's ethnic self. The theory of Nigrescence—also known as the Black Racial Identity Model—on the other hand, offered four specific stages of Black identity development: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization (Cross, 1971).

According to Cross (1971), each stage of Black identity development is characterized by self-concept issues concerning race, and each stage has different implications for a person's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. In addition, within each stage, an individual must make complex choices as to whether Blacks or Whites will be treated as one's primary reference group. For instance, during the pre-encounter stage, Whites are the primary reference group. A Black individual who is in the pre-encounter stage idealizes the dominant White worldview and views himself or herself in terms of Whites' perceptions. In short, such an individual considers Whiteness as superior to Blackness. A Black person in the pre-encounter stage is most likely to put down other Blacks and deny his or her own Black identity (Cross, 1971). During the encounter stage, an individual is confronted with racism in such a way that it becomes impossible to deny his or her Blackness any longer. The encounter stage is essentially a reality jolt. The immersion-emersion stage, then, is characterized by withdrawal into Black culture and into the Black community. Blacks become one's primary reference group. An individual in this stage seeks out everything Black and seeks to exclude his or her interactions and encounters to Black people. An individual begins to study Black culture and history, might join groups that are exclusive to Blacks, might change his or her name to one that is more representative of the new-found ethnic identity, and might change his or her appearance so that it too reflects Blackness. Cross (1971) calls this an attempt to become "authentic" or the "right kind" of Black person. In addition, this stage is often characterized by a "hate Whitey" mentality, wherein Whiteness becomes directly associated with racism and oppression. Finally, the last stage—internalization—is characterized by a more stable Black identity, wherein displays of ethnic identity become more genuine and natural as opposed to trying to "appear" Black. Moreover, Blacks in this stage of development recognize that pro-Black does not have to mean anti-White. The identity is no longer about hating Whites; it is about loving Blacks and loving oneself.

Cross (1995) later extends the stages of Nigrescence theory to revisit the assumption that the pre-encounter stage automatically involves self-hate. In fact, Cross moves away from the notion that any of the early stages of Nigrescence are dysfunctional, by redefining Nigrescence into a "re-socializing experience." Cross (1995) calls Nigrescence "a transformation of a pre-existing

identity [a non-Afrocentric identity] into one that is Afrocentric.” Hence, not all Blacks, as previously presumed, are in need of the Nigrescence re-socializing process, because some are socialized to have a Black identity at an early age.

Aside from the theory of Nigrescence, early investigations of Black identity analyzed some of the ways in which Black children were socialized and purported that Black self-hate was a common phenomenon (Clark & Clark, 1947; Radke & Trager, 1950). This notion was not uncommon among social science researchers of the 1940s and ’50s and it added fuel to Cross’s (1985) criticism of early socialization and identity research, in which he argues that group identity or racial group orientation (RGO) is not necessarily correlated with personal identity (PI). For instance, early researchers presumed that the selection of a White doll in doll tests among Black children automatically equated to Black self-hate (Clark & Clark, 1947), but Cross (1985) reveals that prior to 1960, only one PI study had been conducted, as compared with 17 RGO studies, and no empirical correlation had been found. Cross (1985) further argues that RGO studies used “forced choice” methods, wherein children were compelled to select one doll or the other.

Later, once one’s Black identity has been established in adulthood, issues emerge about the negotiation of that identity. For instance, with regard to the delicate balance between one’s Blackness and one’s role as a Black professor on a predominantly White campus, research suggests that Black faculty must carefully and consciously negotiate their identities. In fact, reports suggest that some Black professors use very purposeful actions within the classroom to project confidence, credibility, knowledge, and other desired characteristics. Hendrix (1998) discusses professors’ review of their vitas on the first day of class, review of their research activities, use of informal or calm voice tones, and purposeful methods of entering the classroom. Moreover, according to Jackson (2002), Black faculty often must sign “cultural contracts” to survive in the predominantly White academy. Jackson defined a cultural contract as

an agreement between two or more interactants who have different interpretations of culture and who have decided whether to coordinate their relationship with one another so that the relationship is deemed valuable to both.

Essentially, Jackson (2002) offers the term cultural contract as a metaphor for what Black faculty often face in the academy and the limited choices they have in reaction to that state.

The author presents three types of cultural contracts: ready-to-sign, quasi-completed, and co-created. Ready-to-sign contracts are described as those that are nonnegotiable, whereby Black faculty are essentially given one option—comply with and adopt a White epistemology if you want the relationship to work (i.e., if you want to maintain your position). Quasi-completed contracts, on the other hand, suggest that the White administration of a given PWI “straddles the fence” in terms of their commitment to hearing diverse voices. It implies that for the relationship to work and Black faculty employment to continue, both the Black faculty and the White administration must negotiate their identities. Finally, co-created cultural contracts fully acknowledge and value diverse voices. Jackson (2002) contends, however, that few Black scholars enjoy this level of appreciation at PWIs. In sum, the author calls cultural contracts “the end product of identity negotiation.” Moreover, Jackson clarifies that one cannot assume that a “signed” contract implies mutual satisfaction. He purports that many Black professors are forced to sign (i.e., forced to negotiate their identities to preserve their livelihood).

Researcher’s Standpoint

This analysis focuses on the experiences of Black professors teaching at PWIs. I became interested in this phenomenon during my own experience teaching at a PWI. My first full-time teaching position, after completing my master’s degree at a historically Black university (HBCU), was at a predominantly White, mid-size university in the rural southeastern United States. The university enrolled between 15,000 and 16,000 students, of which only 5% were African American. The faculty at that time was only about 2% Black, which included those of African American, African, and Caribbean descent. I taught in the speech communication department where I was the only African American faculty member.

At that time, I was fresh out of an academic program and full of ideas and ambition. I had only been teaching, as a graduate student, for 2 years. I was young and I was excited, but I had no idea what I was facing. First, I encountered surprised, or what I might qualify as amazed, stares as I entered the classroom on my first day. Many students kept those looks on their faces for several weeks into the semester. I perceived it to be shock by the notion that I was really the professor—a young, Black female—for the entire semester, not just acting as a substitute. The novelty of my presence seemed to continue within the department, as the secretary stated that she was happy that I did not have “an attitude,” as she suspected I would

before meeting me. I never asked directly what gave her the impression that I would, but I did presume that it related to the stereotypical view of Black females often portrayed in the media. My colleagues, on the other hand, were gracious and kind, for the most part, and tried very hard to come up with “ethnic” topics to discuss with me whenever they saw me. In fact, over the 3-year period that I taught there, some got so comfortable with me that whenever they discovered that a new, single, professional, Black male (which was even more rare than Black female sightings) had been hired on campus, they would rush to my office and begin strategizing on the ways that I might land a date. At the time, I was single and I had once made it clear to a colleague who asked if I had ever considered dating outside of my race that I had not and would not. Hence, their mission was clear: Find this young woman a suitable suitor of her own race.

Still, aside from these relatively few racial encounters with colleagues (ones that I would not call discriminatory or threatening but simply curious), I felt that my greatest challenges were with students, who seemed for my entire 3-year term to question my qualifications, capability, and credibility. In fact, based on some of their in-class antics, I could not help but wonder if what was happening in my classroom was happening in the classrooms of my White colleagues, or was it just me? I also began to wonder if other Black faculty were experiencing similar challenges. Although few of their behaviors were blatant, in terms of racist comments or gestures, I still felt that I was being challenged. For instance, one of my public speaking classes was particularly rowdy and I had difficulty settling them down and being taken seriously. So much so that at the end of the semester, on one of my class evaluations, a student wrote that I had no control of my classroom. In another speech class, a White male, for the entire semester, sat in the back row and stared at me, never participating in class discussions unless I called on him, and his first speech was entitled, “How to Disassemble an M-16 Rifle.” I took his behavior to be an intimidation tactic, and I was determined not to be intimidated. Therefore, after that first semester, I altered my laid-back style, attempting to be more stern and serious, only to be evaluated at the end of that semester by one student as being on a “power trip.”

Some scholars posit that Black professors on White campuses are not necessarily discriminated against as much as they perceive themselves to be, because they are simply more sensitive, in some cases too sensitive, to race (Allen, 2000; McKay, 1983). Hence, I kept most of these suspicions to myself and continued to work very hard to have positive interactions with students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Yet, I did not let go of the question, Am I seeing what I think I’m seeing and is it because I am Black? Instead, 4 years

and four PWIs after completing my master's degree, I carried that question with me when I returned to graduate school to pursue my PhD. Currently, I have been teaching for more than a decade. I have taught for nine institutions of various types—predominantly White, predominantly Black, all female, 4-year institutions, and community colleges—and I remain fascinated by the unique experience of being a Black scholar.

Method

This study represents a small portion of a larger project. Participants include 16 professors of African descent, teaching at approximately seven institutions.

Three methodological approaches were used; focus groups, surveys, and telephone interviews. First, eight Black faculty participated in a focus group. Second, open-ended survey questions were sent via e-mail to each focus group participant, and five of the eight who completed questionnaires were interviewed by phone. Third, additional survey questions were sent to eight Black faculty, who had not participated in the focus group. Two of those professors stated that they preferred to be interviewed by phone, whereas five others returned the completed survey questionnaire via e-mail (see Tables 1 and 2).

Findings

The primary research question asked, To what extent do Black professors, who teach at predominantly White institutions, negotiate their identities and/or alter their communication styles? As previously noted, Jackson (1999) finds that several Black students attending PWIs do not acknowledge negotiating or altering their identities under any circumstances, because they feel that it is important to maintain the properties of their culture. In this analysis, however, participants were split. Nine stated that they do negotiate their identities regularly, whereas seven stated that they do not.

Among those who stated that they do negotiate, several interesting comments were offered. DG began by clarifying that to her, identity meant more than just race; it also included such factors as age, gender, and social, political, and religious beliefs—all of which she believes are negotiated between her and her students. She sees identity negotiation as going both ways. She called it a “two-way tug-of-war,” whereby she might offer or share something of herself and who she is, which students might reject, and then she must go

Table 1
Focus Group Participants

| Name | Academic Discipline | Years of Teaching Experience | Gender | Teaching Experience at an HBCU | Degree | Other Pertinent Factors |
|------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|-------------|--|
| CT | psychology | 6 | female | no | PhD | runs a community organization for African American youth |
| DP | communication | 5 | female | no | MA | plans to begin a doctoral program during the 2004-2005 academic year |
| JG | English | 32 | female | yes | PhD | holds an administrative position as director of the honors program |
| JP | nursing | 24 | female | yes | PhD & RN | has worked in the field in addition to teaching |
| JS | kinesiology | 4 | male | no | PhD | former athlete |
| NI | sociology | 9 | male | no | PhD | ordained minister |
| TS | social work | 2 | female | yes | PhD pending | has worked in the field in addition to teaching |
| WC | business/operations management | 4 | male | no | PhD | Korean-African American |

Note: HBCU = historically Black college or university.

Table 2
Additional Survey Participants

| Name | Academic Discipline | Years of Teaching Experience | Gender | Teaching Experience at an HBCU | Degree | Other Pertinent Factors |
|------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|--------|--|
| DG | communication | 3 | female | yes | PhD | current colleagues were once her professors |
| KC | communication | 6 | female | NA | PhD | NA |
| RJ | communication | 10 | male | yes | PhD | has published work on identity negotiation |
| JD | counseling | 15 | male | NA | PhD | NA |
| SH | communication | 8 | female | yes | PhD | NA |
| TA | communication | 7 | male | no | MA | teaching for a Christian college |
| OA | communication | 5 | female | yes | PhD | has taught for a predominantly White institution only on a part-time basis |
| TH | interdisciplinary studies | 4 | male | NA | MA | NA |

Note: HBCU = historically Black college or university; NA = information not available.

back and alter what she has offered. For instance, she explained that she has a naturally laid-back style that she has had to alter because some students were not taking her seriously enough. Similarly, KC stated that she digresses somewhat from her “core self” and values, and she is very careful in selecting her terminology, such that she avoids using political or religious terms.

Both RJ and SH discussed their use of code-switching as an identity negotiation tactic that they use regularly. SH stated,

I definitely feel like I have to negotiate from my true self more so than I would at an HBCU. The students (of color and otherwise) are more accustomed to a more Caucasian style of communication which I would describe as less passionate, more indirect, removed, and just lucid.

In addition, CT admitted to altering her personality and her style for the sake of successful interactions with Whites. In fact, CT was the first to introduce the notion that “there is a way to be, and then there is a way to be with White people,” and she stated that she discusses this notion with various Black students who she mentors, both at the college and throughout her community. There was one instance CT offered, however, when she co-taught a class entitled *Psychology of Black Literature*, whereby the other professor was also Black and so were many of the students. Hence, she proclaimed that “now we goin’ be who we really be,” and in describing the overall experience, she stated,

It was a completely different dynamic . . . it was so affirming to teach. It was so . . . for my own soul, for my own self-expression, for my own mind and heart it was so gratifying to teach, and it felt completely different from what I normally do.

On the other hand, several of the participants involved in this analysis argued that they do not negotiate their identities because it is important to be “real” and true to themselves, in addition to being true to their students and colleagues. WC asserted,

I’ve always been told Black people have to work harder than White people in order to succeed. I’ve never believed it, and through elementary school I always knew I was, if not the smartest person in the class, I was one of the smartest people in the class and so I always felt like I’m smart enough, I’m not going to work harder just to prove that I’m smart enough, if they don’t believe that I’m smart enough, then that’s just too bad for them. . . . If this is all the work that they’re doing, I’m certainly not going to do any more. . . . I

know how to interact with White people, and basically it's the same way that I interact with anybody else, because I don't feel like I should alter myself to make them happy, if they're not happy that's just their problem, they still have to take my class and they still have to pass it.

Similarly, JS, DP, and NI all agreed that it is more important to be real than to try to please the White majority. NI also admitted, however, that he used to operate under a "double consciousness" but no longer does. He stated,

I had this double consciousness. I'm getting it less and less, and I don't know whether that means I'm getting harsher, I don't want to work anymore, or whatever. I don't know what it is, but I'm finding more and more that by coming from my cultural strengths, I get along a lot better, than by attempting to be something I'm not. I'm not a very good actor . . . now that of course means that sometimes . . . in a mainstream White society it means that certain lines of communication may be closed to me and I, of course, wouldn't be able to know those because they'd be closed. I think certain things have opened because I am, to use your [JS] statement . . . "real."

Discussion

Before addressing the question of whether or not the participants involved in this analysis negotiate their identities, it is important to discuss their identities. Those Black faculty who participated in the focus group were asked on the e-mail questionnaire and during telephone interviews what adjectives they would use to describe themselves. WC described himself as Christian, biracial (Korean–African American), honest, trusting, a father of three, a husband, a professor, creative, intelligent, innovative, caring, and a problem-solver—many humanistic qualities. JG described herself as a Black woman, educated, culturally aware, spiritual, Baptist, family-centered, African-centered, extroverted, and optimistic—again, many humanistic qualities and some cultural qualities. JS described himself as stubborn yet open-minded, curious, humorous, personable, friendly, articulate, smart, loyal, a Black man, and spiritual. DP stated that she is content but not complacent, optimistic, loving, aggressive, competitive, and focused. JP described herself as energetic, proactive, a people-person, compassionate, insightful, wise, humorous, organized, positive, and a perfectionist. NI simply called himself a revolutionary and a survivor. CT stated that she is committed, enthusiastic, frank, dedicated, knowledgeable, and also a perfectionist. Finally, TS said only that she is tired.

Based on these descriptions of their identities, for the most part, these faculty are already as they wish to be viewed. For instance, most perceive themselves as intelligent and they wish to be perceived as such by students and colleagues. Hence, the strategies that they employed might not necessarily be a negotiation of identity but simply an effort to encourage others to see them as they see themselves. Moreover, several said that they remain “true to themselves” and they are “real.” In short, they rejected the notion that they negotiate their identities. An interesting question emerges, however. Seven of the 16 total participants say, “Yes, we consciously employ various communication strategies when interacting with predominantly White students and colleagues on PWI campuses,” but, “No, we do not negotiate our identities.” What is the difference? What is the difference between identity negotiation and employing communication strategies in order to be viewed in a particular way by students and colleagues? Are the two mutually exclusive? In addition, how might certain identity factors have influenced participants’ overall experiences?

First, with regard to the question of difference, one could argue that there is a difference, in that wishing to be viewed as one views oneself is not inherently an act of negotiating or altering identity. WC perceives himself to be intelligent and hopes that students and colleagues also perceive him to be intelligent. Therefore, he discusses research with his colleagues and provides a comprehensive Web site for students to reference outside of class. This is not identity negotiation. Identity negotiation would be if WC described himself as highly spiritual but hid his spiritual nature from colleagues for fear of being viewed as a religious fanatic. Based on focus group transcripts, however, it does not appear that any of the sort was happening with these faculty members. They did not appear to be masking or altering what they perceived to be their true natures. They were simply choosing which side of themselves to show in which contexts. Even with regard to their communication styles, it does not appear that they communicated with students and colleagues in a way that was out of line with their cultural characteristics—apart from some saying that they use more professional jargon in the classroom and more standard English, which isn’t necessarily out of line with their identities either—for no one reported that in casual settings they use Ebonics or Black English most commonly, nor did anyone suggest that they do not use professional jargon in other settings.

Similarly, among those who stated that they do negotiate their identities regularly, even they did not seem to be making significant alterations to self. DG isn’t as laid back as she would like to be; KC laughs at some jokes that she doesn’t find funny; SH isn’t as direct as she would like to be; CT is more

stern than usual; and DP dresses up so as not to be mistaken for a student. Yet, how different might such behaviors be from the behavior of any professional attempting to “fit in” to a campus or organizational culture?

With regard to the influence of some of the identity factors listed above on the overall experiences of participants and on their choices of communication strategies, there did appear to be some differences. For instance, from the very beginning of the focus group discussion, JS, WC, and DP asserted that they had not faced that many challenges in their encounters on the PWI campus. In fact, JS stated that he expected students to be “curious” about him, but in a positive way. He perceived that they would want to know him, and he was the only professor in the group to report that students—Black students in particular—regularly visited him in his office. Could this be due to the fact that he is a 20-something, tall, attractive male, who was a former athlete, and a great majority of the Black students attending the university are, in fact, student athletes? Moreover, because his field is kinesiology, which presumably attracts mostly athletes of all races, might those students identify with him simply based on athleticism and not race? In addition, he was among the few participants who stated that he does not dress up regularly. He stated that he usually dresses casually and sometimes wears the latest fashions in an effort to identify with students.

WC, on the other hand, asserted that even though he understood the expectation that Blacks had to work harder, he was not about to subscribe to that notion and did not seem to have encountered much challenge or resistance to his position in 4 years of teaching. Could this be because he was educated primarily in PWIs his entire life and because he is a very fair-skinned, biracial male? Then again, might there have been somewhat of a contradiction there? On one hand, WC stated that he does not feel the need to prove his intellect to anyone. Why, then, does WC also assert that he purposefully engages colleagues in intellectual discussions? Is that not, to some extent, an effort to prove intellect?

DP stated at one point during the focus group discussion that she is quite comfortable at the selected university. Largely because it is her alma mater and she was a student athlete, so she has connected with some of the many student athletes attending that university. Moreover, she is involved in the school’s summer program, which caters primarily to minority students, whereby she has opportunities, then, to interact with Black students, and usually the bonds she makes there continue throughout the regular academic year. In addition, although DP referenced her youth many times as a potential challenge to her ability to gain respect and credibility, it may, to a great extent, have helped her to identify with students better than some of

the other participants have. In short, she has three areas of commonality with students—she attended the university, she was an athlete there, and she is young. These factors may have made students more receptive to her, which in turn allowed her to be a bit more comfortable and relaxed.

Conversely, NI reported the vast majority of challenges discussed during the focus group meeting and he was the first to introduce the notion of “combat.” Might his experience relate to the fact that he is a very Afrocentric male, who wears African garb and has an African name? Similarly, TS, who described herself as “tired” and admitted that she will not likely remain at the university, also appears more Afrocentric than some of the other participants, wearing short dreadlocks. How might such factors influence both their behavior and students’ behavior toward them?

Finally, CT made a very strong statement that was discussed during the focus group meeting. She stated, “There is a way to be, and then there is a way to be with White people.” It is unfortunate that neither she nor any of the other participants were able to be more clear or specifically articulate what “way” that is. SH and RJ touched on it slightly. For instance, SH described Caucasian communication style as “less passionate, more indirect, removed, and just lucid,” whereas both SH and RJ spoke of the use of indirection to get their points across in interactions with students or colleagues—so as not to intimidate students or appear confrontational with their peers. Does this suggest that the way to be when one is with one’s own is to be intense, loud, and confrontational, as Kochman (1974) described Black communication, and the way to be with Whites is indirect, removed, and passionless?

In sum, this study was a worthy endeavor based on nearly 10 years of both personal experience and research. It contributes scholarship that has not previously been examined, and it bridges a gap between several fields of research.

This analysis examined communication strategies as they relate to interracial encounters. It was not intended to make a social or political statement about race relations. Yet, one cannot help but note, upon a close reading of this document, that the resiliency of Blackness also emerged as an important finding. In other words, Blackness in and of itself can afford a person a level of strength, power, and resilience that he or she might not otherwise gain from other identity factors. For instance, Black professors and countless other Black professionals working in predominantly White settings continue to face challenge after challenge after challenge, yet, they continue to persist and succeed and overcome. Although their numbers have not increased by leaps and bounds since the civil rights era, they have increased, and Black professors have not packed up and left PWIs. They continue to pursue positions there,

they continue to educate, and they continue to prove themselves to be strong scholars. Moreover, they continue to influence the perspectives of students of all racial backgrounds. Hence, this study gleaned far more than it set out to, and it offers a great deal to intellectual discourse. Overall, work in this area should continue for the benefit of Black scholars across the country, for the benefit of social psychologists, for the benefit of college administrators, and for the benefit of students interested in diversifying their college experience.

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