



Advancing
African-American
Women in the
Workplace:
What Managers
Need to Know



ABOUT CATALYST

Catalyst is the leading research and advisory organization working to advance women in business, with offices in New York, San Jose, and Toronto. As an independent, nonprofit membership organization, Catalyst uses a solutions-oriented approach that has earned the confidence of business leaders around the world. Catalyst conducts research on all aspects of women's career advancement and provides strategic and web-based consulting services on a global basis to help companies and firms advance women and build inclusive work environments. In addition, we honor exemplary business initiatives that promote women's leadership with our annual Catalyst Award. Catalyst is consistently ranked No. 1 among U.S. nonprofits focused on women's issues by The American Institute of Philanthropy.

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**ADVANCING AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN
THE WORKPLACE:
WHAT MANAGERS NEED TO KNOW**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & KEY FINDINGS

Introduction

Since 1997, Catalyst has released a continuous stream of research that sheds light on the career experiences of women of color in corporate management. Through widely-disseminated research reports, speaking engagements, events, and media interviews, we have raised corporate America's level of awareness on this issue.

But when Catalyst addresses groups or meets with corporate clients and members about issues relating to women of color, we find that companies and managers want more. We are frequently asked about the unique experiences of specific racial/ethnic groups that are included in the women-of-color category. In response to this need, Catalyst presents this report on African-American women in corporate management, providing companies and managers with the strategies they need to take advantage of this information. It is the third report in a series, the first two focusing on Latinas and Asian women in the workplace.

Our extensive knowledge about African-American women in the corporate workforce comes from many sources—our research projects; proprietary advisory services engagements; relationships with our member companies; relationships with senior African-American corporate advisors; and a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data. For this report, our quantitative findings come from 963 African-American women survey respondents in F1000 companies. The qualitative findings are from 23 focus groups with entry- and mid-level African-American women. These respondents participated in Catalyst's larger 1999 study, *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers*.¹ Survey data also come from a follow-up study,² done in 2001, with 369 African-American women participants from the earlier study.

In sharing our knowledge about African-American women, as well as our recommended action steps, it is Catalyst's hope that we will help companies and managers recruit, retain, and advance this important segment of the workforce.

Note: From this point forward, the use of the term "African-American" refers to people of African descent who live and work in the United States.

Working with African-American Women: What Companies Need to Know

Much like other racial/ethnic minority groups, African-American women face challenges to advancement in the corporate world, as is demonstrated by their low representation in influential leadership roles. For

¹ Catalyst, *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers* (1999).

² Catalyst, *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Three Years Later* (2001).

example, the percentage of corporate officers who are African-American women in the Fortune 500 was a miniscule 1.1 percent in 2002 (106 African-American women corporate officers out of a total of 10,092).³ Despite these small numbers at the top, African-American women represent an important and growing source of talent. The following steps outline the business case for focusing on this segment of the workforce.

Tap a growing talent force.

- In 2002, the number of African-American women in the workplace totaled 8,469,000, 5.8 percent of the labor force.⁴ By 2010, approximately 11,050,000 African-American women are projected to be in the workplace for a total of 7.0 percent of the labor pool. This is an increase of 59.3 percent from 1990.⁵ In 2002, a total of 2,412,000 African-American women held administrative and managerial positions for a total of 5.1 percent of all management, professional, and related occupations.⁶
- In 2001, 73,204 African-American women received a bachelor's degree. African-American women represented 5.9 percent of those getting B.A.'s, which was the highest proportion among individual race/gender groups (3.7 percent going to Latinas, 3.5 percent going to Asian women, and 3.1 percent going to African-American men).⁷
- The number of African-American women getting master's degrees increased 149.5 percent from 1991 to 2001—from 10,700 to 26,697. This increase is larger than that of the number of white men and women receiving M.A.'s in the same period. White men getting M.A.'s in the same period increased 10.1 percent (from 114,419 to 125,993), while white women getting M.A.'s increased 32.5 percent (from 146,813 to 194,487).⁸

Connect with a large and growing market.

- African-Americans' buying power is predicted to increase from \$318.3 billion in 1990 to \$921.3 billion in 2008—an increase of 189.4 percent. This increase is significantly higher than the growth rate for whites, which is 127.6 percent.⁹
- By the year 2008, African-Americans' share of the consumer market will be 8.2 percent, larger than any other racial group's except whites. (Note: Because Hispanics belong to multiple racial groups, they cannot be broken out for this comparison.)
- U.S. companies spent \$1.5 billion in advertising to African-Americans in 2000.¹⁰

³ Catalyst, *2002 Catalyst Census of Women Corporate Officers and Top Earners of the Fortune 500* (2002).

⁴ Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished 2003.

⁵ Howard N. Fullerton, Jr. and Mitra Toosi, "Labor Force Projections to 2010: Steady Growth and Changing Composition," *Monthly Labor Review* (November 2001).

⁶ Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished 2003.

⁷ National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics* (2002).

⁸ NCES.

⁹ Jeffery M. Murphy, "The Multicultural Economy 2003: Minority Buying Power in the New Century," *Georgia Business and Economic Conditions*. Vol. 62, No. 2 (Second Quarter 2003): p.10.

¹⁰ "Multicultural Marketing," supplement to *Advertising Age*, (November 19, 2001): p.514.

Key Findings

The key findings from Catalyst's research on African-American women are listed below. Each chapter outlines findings in detail and provides relevant action steps for companies and managers. As a manager, it is important for you to understand and respond to each of these findings in order to tap the talent of this increasingly important segment of the workforce.

Women of color are not a monolithic group.

Women of color (African-American, Latinas, and Asian women) are clearly not a monolithic group. The personal and professional profiles of the African-American women research participants are quite different from those of Latinas and Asian women. African-American women also face issues growing out of their unique history in the United States.

- More than one-half of the African-American women surveyed have a graduate education, though they are less likely than Latinas or Asian women to be from middle- or upper-class households. Their professional status indicators are similar to those of Latinas, and higher than those for Asian women (attainment of supervisory roles, line positions, and senior hierarchical levels).
- The unique historical experiences of African-Americans in this country, which include slavery, influence their relationships with others in the workforce. One legacy of slavery is the differential experiences of those who are light-skinned/less ethnic (more white or "European" in appearance) vs. dark-skinned/more ethnic (more "African" in appearance).
- Light-skinned/less ethnic African-American women are more likely to be satisfied with pay and opportunities for advancement than are dark-skinned/more ethnic women.

The "concrete ceiling" is difficult to shatter.

Whereas white women frequently reference the "glass ceiling" as blocking their advancement up the career ladder, women of color often characterize the barriers they encounter as comprising a "concrete ceiling"—one that is more dense and less easily shattered. The underpinnings of these barriers include stereotypes, visibility, and scrutiny; questioning of authority and credibility; lack of "fit" in the workplace; double outsider status; and exclusion from informal networks. African-American women sometimes set boundaries and use "guardedness" in response to work challenges.

- African-American women report encountering very persistent and intractable negative race-based stereotypes. They report that their authority and credibility are frequently questioned, and that they do not consistently receive institutional support.
- African-American women in the study walk a fine line—attempting to address their lack of connection with others in the workplace, while sometimes responding to scrutiny from coworkers by being guarded in how much they reveal about themselves. Race is a particularly difficult topic for African-American women to discuss with coworkers. Because of the African-American historical legacy of slavery, legally enforced racial segregation, and discrimination based on skin color, African-American women see race

as a sensitive topic. Many in our study make race discussions off limits, perhaps because some white colleagues do not approach the topic of race with the gravity that the women feel it deserves.

- Many African-American women perceive that their relationships with white women in the workplace are conflicted, a finding not as frequently reported by Latinas and Asian women.

African-American women contribute unique perspectives.

African-American women in the study are able to leverage their strengths to succeed in the workplace, by exceeding performance expectations, communicating effectively, connecting with mentors, building positive relationships with managers and others, and using their cultural backgrounds to enhance their job performance. Being “outsiders” actually seems to help their performance in some ways.

- African-American women often successfully form relationships with others at work. Among women of color, African-American women are the most likely to have a mentor.
- Many African-American women report being “bicultural,” i.e., shifting behavior from one context to the other (work vs. community) and using their cultural backgrounds to enhance job performance (e.g., values of teamwork, resourcefulness, fairness, equity, spiritualism). African-American women are more likely to report a greater connection with community groups than Latinas or Asian women.
- Because African-American women are typically not in the inner circle of power, they often recognize the subtle (or at least unacknowledged) privileges accrued by those in power (which may be invisible to the empowered). For example, they may recognize that rules are applied loosely to the “in” group, and strictly to the “out” group, and therefore more conscientiously follow standard procedures. Alternatively, African-American women may embrace their outsider status to challenge norms about how things are done (such as maintaining a direct communication style in an indirect culture).

Challenges remain for African-American women despite diversity programs.

In response to the growing diversity of the workforce, U.S. organizations are increasingly likely to create and implement diversity policies—about 75 percent of the Fortune 500 companies have a formally stated diversity program.¹¹ Despite this, African-American women judge diversity policies as having limited benefits and are pessimistic about their own opportunities to advance to senior management.

- While some African-American women feel that diversity policies have been successful—particularly in helping organizations improve diversity of workforce representation—most feel that diversity policies are not effective in helping to create inclusive work environments. Most African-American women find their company policies ineffective in addressing racism.
- African-American women are the most likely of all women-of-color groups studied to see their opportunities to advance to senior positions declining over time, in spite of the existence of diversity policies and practices.

¹¹ Society for Human Resource Management, *SHRM Survey of Diversity Programs* (August 1998).

CHAPTER 2: PROFILE OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN PARTICIPANTS

Women of color are clearly not a monolithic group, varying on many personal and professional indicators. To provide context for the rest of the report, here we profile African-American women research participants on personal and professional demographics, family socio-economic status, family involvement, unique issues concerning history in the United States as well as skin shade and appearance, and satisfaction with work.

Demographics of Women of Color

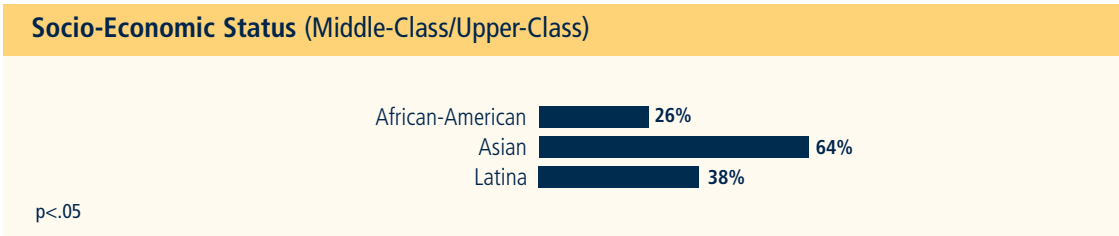
As the table on the next page illustrates, women of color—African-American, Latina, and Asian women—are not a monolithic group, varying widely on country of origin, education, and professional status.

- The majority of African-American women surveyed (95 percent) were born in the United States, in contrast to Latinas and Asian women.
- 92 percent of African-American women reported their ethnicity as African-American; the remainder identified themselves as African Caribbean or African.
- More than one-half of the African-American women (52 percent) have a graduate education, a higher incidence than for Latinas, and lower than for Asian women.
- These professional status indicators of African-American women are on par with Latinas' and higher than Asian women's:
 - ◆ Hierarchical status (13 percent of African-American women are within one to three reporting levels of the CEO.)
 - ◆ Managerial responsibilities (57 percent)
 - ◆ Line positions (27 percent)

Demographics of Women of Color		
Personal	Professional	Perceptual:
Average Age:	Graduate Education:	Satisfied with Pay:
■ African-American: 40	■ African-American: 52%	■ African-American: 48%
■ Asian-American: 38	■ Asian-American: 59%	■ Asian-American: 45%
■ Latinas: 39	■ Latinas: 38%	■ Latinas: 55%
Born in U.S.:	Within Three Reporting Levels of CEO:	Satisfied with Opportunities for Advancement:
■ African-American: 95%	■ African-American: 13%	■ African-American: 33%
■ Asian-American: 34%	■ Asian-American: 6%	■ Asian-American: 33%
■ Latinas: 73%	■ Latinas: 12%	■ Latinas: 40%
Bilingual:	Supervisory Responsibilities:	Satisfied with Career Progress:
■ African-American: 13%	■ African-American: 57%	■ African-American: 53%
■ Asian-American: 77%	■ Asian-American: 41%	■ Asian-American: 47%
■ Latinas: 78%	■ Latinas: 58%	■ Latinas: 62%
	Line Positions:	Existence of Stereotypes:
	■ African-American: 27%	■ African-American: 56%
	■ Asian-American: 21%	■ Asian-American: 46%
	■ Latinas: 27%	■ Latinas: 37%

Family Socio-Economic Status

One-fourth of African-American women (26 percent) indicate that they grew up in middle-class or upper-class households. This is significantly lower than for other women of color, particularly Asian women.

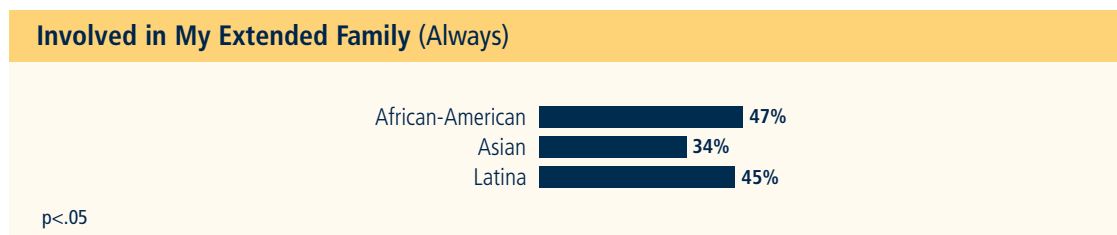


Current Family Status and Dependent Care

Compared to Latinas and Asian women, significantly fewer (52 percent) of the African-American women study participants are married, but they are about equally as likely to have children. Relatively fewer African-American women have elder care responsibilities (15 percent) than Asian women (23 percent) or Latinas (19 percent).

The Family Status of Women of Color			
	African-American	Asian	Latina
Married	52%	71%	65%
Have children living at home	45	48	49
Have elder care responsibilities	15	23	19
Have dependent care responsibilities	13	11	15

African-American women's involvement with extended family is on par with that of Latinas and higher than that of Asian women.



African-American women with families report facing unique work/family issues compared with white women. One woman notes:

"As an African-American family, we had more things that we had to think about in relocating our family to a new community.... You can't presume as a black family, moving into that neighborhood, that someone's going to be as willing to watch your little black children as [they] may be to watch little white children."

Some African-American women who do not have "traditional" family arrangements, such as single mothers, report facing stereotypes:

"I have three children, I'm divorced, and that's all a part of who I am to [my company]. I'm a baby-maker, I'm lazy, I'm trying to get by with a little bit—that's who the company says I am."

Historical Background

The African-American experience in the United States is uniquely linked to the social and historical context. While many researchers do not consider race as having biological validity, it clearly continues to have social meaning. Those of different races have vastly different experiences, and racial categorization is linked to power and status differentials. Contributing to the uniqueness of the African-American experience are the following historical elements:

"...slavery; legally enforced racial segregation and discrimination based on skin color; rigid, caste-like boundaries for racial identification; and persistent lower-class status relative to whites and other immigrant groups."¹²

¹² James M. Jones, *Prejudice and Racism*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 1997): p.17.

Throughout history, African-Americans have been discredited on the grounds that they are irrational, emotional, childish, less intelligent, and less fully evolved than whites.¹³ Racial discrimination against African-Americans is a major part of American history that continues to influence present-day relations between African-Americans and whites in a variety of settings, including the workplace.

African-American women can be viewed as “double minorities”—they are African-Americans as well as women. Their relationships with white men and women have also been shaped by history. Historically, white men needed white women in a way that they did not need women of color. They sought white women as wives and as mothers of their children; by contrast, women of color did not fulfill white men’s need for “racially pure” offspring.¹⁴ As a result, white women were privileged by white men more than women of color were, a circumstance often recognized by women of color.

The Importance of Skin Shade and Features

One legacy of slavery in the United States is that African-Americans vary widely in appearance, from light in skin shade, for example, to dark.

In several studies, skin shade has been found to impact socio-economic outcomes and education among African-Americans. African-Americans with light skin are more likely than their dark-skinned counterparts to have higher incomes¹⁵ and more years of education.¹⁶ Researchers have concluded that these status differences are partially the result of more rewards and opportunities being given to those who are more similar to whites in terms of skin color and other physical features.¹⁷ Skin color privilege also manifests itself in the corporate work environment, as is evident in this quote from a senior-level African-American woman:

“I brought to [management’s] attention that you can be too black—too dark-skinned to make it. They were outraged and claimed, ‘That’s not the case.’ I said, ‘Look around. Look who’s making it.’ I say that the corporation is just like a plantation. We laugh about this, my girlfriends and I... Management was outraged when I pointed it out. They were [saying], ‘Well how about [this person], and how about [that person]?’ I said, ‘They are not dark-skinned black people, okay? In fact, let me show you what I mean.’ Then I took my boss and [walked] the halls. Afterwards he was [saying], ‘Gee, you might have a point there. But it’s not like we’re doing it consciously.’ I said, ‘It’s so ingrained and subconscious that it’s done without your even being aware of it.’”

In this report, we use “ethnic” features to refer to superficial, appearance-related physical traits commonly assumed to be associated with racial group membership. “European” features are commonly associated with straight hair, a small nose, thin lips, and light eyes, while “African” features are associated with short,

¹³ Linda Burnham, “Race and Gender: The Limits of Analogy,” in *Challenging Race and Sexism: Alternatives to Genetic Explanations*, edited by Ethel Tobach and Betty Rosoff (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1994): p.145.

¹⁴ Aida Hurtado, *The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996): p.9-13.

¹⁵ Margaret Hunter, “‘If You’re Light You’re Alright’: Light Skin Color as Social Capital for Women of Color” in *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (April 2002): p.175-193.

¹⁶ Margaret Hunter, “Colorstruck: Skin Color Stratification in the Lives of African-American Women.” In *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Fall 1998): p.517-535.

¹⁷ Mark E. Hill, “Skin Color and Perceptions of Attractiveness Among African-Americans: Does Gender Make a Difference?” In *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (March 2002): p.77-91.



kinky hair, full lips, and a wide nose.¹⁸ Scholars suggest that African-American women with more “African” or “non-European” features are viewed less favorably than those with more angular, “European” features.¹⁹

To understand the experiences of African-American women that may be based on physical attributes, we compared two groups of women who differed on how they rated their skin color and the ethnicity of their features.

Women were asked to rate their skin shade on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 being “very light” and 7 being “very dark.” Women also rated their facial features on a 7-point scale, 1 being “very European” and 7 being “very ethnic.” This information was combined to create two groups, those who indicated they have:

- lighter skin and less ethnic features
- darker skin and more ethnic features

This categorization scheme accounted for 65 percent of the total African-American women survey sample (628 out of 963 African-American women). The remaining 35 percent are women who rated themselves in the middle or who did not respond to these survey items.

We used this information to assess whether skin color and ethnic appearance are linked to African-American women’s perceptions and experiences at work.

Light-skinned/less ethnic African-American women tend to be more satisfied with their pay (56 percent) than dark-skinned/more ethnic women (46 percent).



Light-skinned/less ethnic women are also more likely to be satisfied with opportunities for advancement, compared to those with dark-skinned/more ethnic features (35 percent vs. 28 percent).



¹⁸ Angela Neal and Midge Wilson, “The Role of Skin Color and Features in the Black Community: Implications for Black Women in Therapy,” in *Clinical Psychology Review*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (1989): p.325-326.

¹⁹ Yanick St. Jean and Joe R. Feagin, *Double Burden: Black Women and Everyday Racism* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998): p.76.

What Managers and Companies Can Do

The following recommendations will help you build a knowledge base about the experiences of African-American women in your company and highlight their importance to your business.

- Assess your company and understand the demographics of your workforce. You can learn a lot from statistics about representation, recruitment, turnover, retention, and advancement of various employee groups. Statistics also show the size of the untapped talent pool in your company. Your Human Resources department should have at least some of these measures and be able to share them with you.
- Become familiar with your company's diversity practices. Some companies have programs in which the progress of targeted groups is monitored through analysis of Human Resources data.

How Human Resources Measures Can Be Used in Managerial Accountability —IBM's Accountability Program

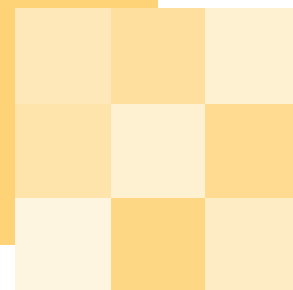
IBM has been reporting to its Board of Directors on the status of global workforce diversity for the past eight years. These reports focus on the status of women as well as multicultural women. For its U.S. workforce, IBM reviews representation and promotion, sets hiring objectives, and monitors retention of women and people of color. Hiring goals are based on the population in the feeder groups and require good faith efforts on the part of managers. The goals are also established by business units and categorized by racial/ethnic subgroups. In addition, senior management annually conducts reviews of selected executives, women, and minorities viewed as being high-potential, with each business unit head. The intent of these reviews is to assess progress, finding out whether representation is at the same level or whether it is worse than the previous year. These accountability measures help ensure global workforce diversity.

- Make sure you and your staff understand the business case for recruiting, retaining, and advancing African-American women in the workforce. Brainstorm the links between your company's goals, factors that influence the bottom line, and diversity. Then gather data to confirm and refine your business case.
- Be sure you and your staff are aware of the diversity among African-Americans in terms of their backgrounds and experiences. Try not to generalize about people as part of a group.

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- Create an open dialogue with your employees. Make sure you understand how individual employees define “family,” and use an inclusive definition when planning work-related social events. Work with Human Resources to ensure that policies and programs are available for extended-family-member dependents.
- Find out about your company’s benefits and programs designed to help employees manage family responsibilities (i.e., family leave, flexible arrangements, resource and referral programs, dependent care programs, employee assistance programs). Learn about the growing issue of elder care and offer support to help employees fulfill elder care responsibilities.

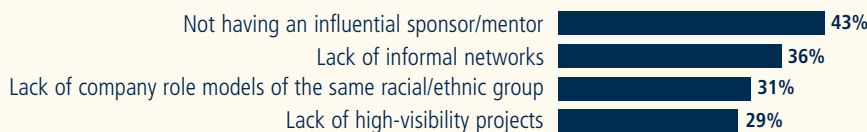
CHAPTER 3: THE WORK TERRAIN AS EXPERIENCED BY AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN



Whereas white women frequently reference the “glass ceiling” as blocking their ascent up the career ladder, women of color often characterize the barriers they encounter as comprising a “concrete ceiling”—one that is more dense and less easily shattered.²⁰ This chapter examines the underpinnings of such barriers for African-American women. They include stereotypes, visibility and scrutiny, questioning of authority and credibility, lack of connection with influential others, lack of “fit” in the workplace, double outsider status, and exclusion from informal networks. We also address how many African-American women set boundaries and use “guardedness” in response to work challenges.

The common theme among most barriers perceived by African-American women is a lack of connection with influential others: not having an influential sponsor/mentor, lack of informal networks, lack of company role models of the same racial/ethnic group, and lack of high-visibility projects.

Most Common Career Barriers (Great Extent/Very Great Extent)



Stereotypes

Underlying their lack of connection to others in the workplace, more African-American than Asian women or Latinas say that many stereotypes exist at work about women of their racial/ethnic group. More African-American women also report racist comments being tolerated in the workplace.

In My Company, Many Stereotypes Exist About Women of My Racial/Ethnic Group (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



p<.05

²⁰ Catalyst, *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers* (1999).

In My Company, Racist Comments Are Tolerated (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



p<.05

African-American women report facing negative stereotypes. One woman explains:

"One day, my coworkers were teasing me about how much luggage I take when I go somewhere. I said, 'You don't have to worry about that next time, because for Christmas, my children bought me a nice piece of luggage.' One of the directors said, 'Gee, where did they pick that up? On the street?' Then he started laughing. He said, 'You know I'm only playing with [you],' and my response to him was, 'What do you mean?'"

African-American women describe stereotypes about being confrontational, which they perceive are based on interpretations of direct communication styles, as the following quote illustrates:

"It's the confidence that we have because we know what all in addition we've had to do. So we come in so prepared that it's like, don't touch me. I think [my white coworkers] perceive it as having a chip on your shoulder."

"We express ourselves [in an] animated [way], and that is perceived as emotional and out of control—somebody that frightens whites."

Visibility and Scrutiny

Consistent with prior work on women and tokenism,²¹ the African-American women in our study report that they are more visible than other employees, and that their actions come under greater scrutiny from majority employees.

"There's an underlying feeling I get when dealing with management—white males or non-black managers; they think you can't do it. Then when you do deliver, they try and catch you on little things like misspellings or using the wrong term and then [act like], 'I knew you didn't have it.'"

"If my colleague is not at his desk, it's just assumed that he's busy. But if I'm not there, people will think, 'Did she leave early today?' We're not given the benefit of the doubt."

As a result of this greater visibility and scrutiny, many African-American women report being cautious in their work behavior. One woman notes:

"When it comes to down time, and everyone is shooting the breeze, you have to be very cautious if people are watching you. You need to make sure you're the first one to break away to go and do the work."

²¹ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: BasicBooks, 1977): p.206-242.

Challenges to Authority

Many African-American women report that their authority is often questioned by those they interact with, both within and outside work settings. Some African-American women report receiving support from their management, while others do not.

“Whenever there was a design change or a technical change, it would always be questioned by the designers or the contractors who don’t even work for the firm. My supervisor got to the point where he was tired of them coming to him [instead of me], which should have occurred initially.”

“I was the first black woman analyst they had seen at electronics and imaging. I was replacing a white guy, and the product manager could not accept that I was now his contact. He [went] to the guy that I replaced and asked him for numbers and information every day. And so, fortunately, this white guy and I had established a good relationship over time. He said, ‘I don’t have them, you’ve got to go see B.’”

At times, there is clear institutional support for African-American women who are being undermined. One woman explains:

“There was a black manager on the other side of the business who was promoted. My boss sent an email to her direct reports that said: ‘You are going to hear about this woman getting promoted. Even though her title says director, she is still at the manager level.’ When word got out that that’s what she’d done, clearly undermining this person’s authority, they told her to go find a job.”

Lack of Credibility

Accompanying the undermining of African-American women’s authority is the questioning of their credibility. Thirty-two percent of African-American women surveyed agree that white colleagues perceive them as under-qualified, compared to 22 percent of Latinas and 14 percent of Asian women. Some study participants, such as the woman quoted below, clearly link double standards to the historical experiences of African-Americans in the United States:

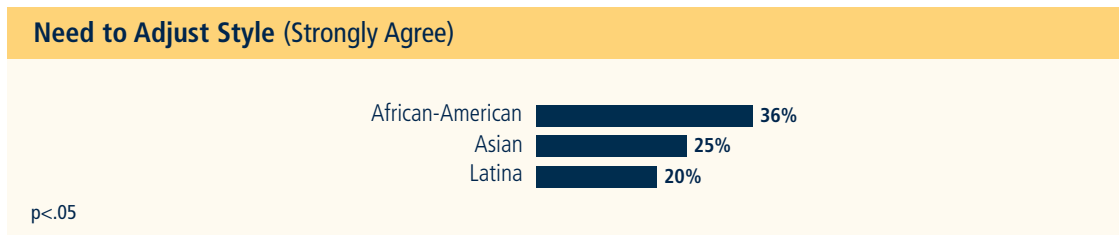
“When [you] are trying to move up, [you’re] trying to change perceptions, which is very difficult because those perceptions are hundreds of years old. You’ve got to work harder. You’ve got to be there longer, and there are unspoken rules about the time you come in and the time you leave. You have to make sure you honor that rule because someone else whose perception is that they’re already competent can leave at four and come in at ten. But if you do it, you’re already down there at the low receptionist level so you’re going to make it even worse.”

Some African-American women report encountering the assumption that they are not qualified:

“Being in an area of technology, [people] have said, ‘I’m surprised to know that your background [is] that extensive. I didn’t know you were a technician. I didn’t know you knew all cabling specs. I didn’t know you had some engineering background.’”

The Question Of “Fit”

Related to the lack of connection African-American women feel with others in the work environment is lack of “fit” with the dominant work culture. African-American women are more likely than Latinas or Asian women to feel that they have to make many adjustments to their styles to fit in.



Eighty-six percent of the African-American women surveyed report often or always conforming to corporate standards of appearance; many feel it is necessary to change their style of dress to fit in. One woman explains:

“Culturally, most of us don’t dress quite as casually as [whites] do.... For four years, I was in the field working in engineering and I wore what I wanted to wear. But now I’m in corporate headquarters, sitting right there with my supervisor. I’ve toned down because I want a raise, plain and simple. When in Rome, you do as the Romans do, and I’m in Rome.”

Many African-American women report that they have to carefully consider how to wear their hair.

“You’re proud of your black heritage. Anything you do that shows your blackness is something that makes them uncomfortable. Part of the problem whites have with the braids is their perception that you’re radical or too bold. They translate that into your work. Braids mean power to people.”

In spite of efforts to conform, some African-American women feel that they cannot achieve a good fit in the workplace.

“There’s no place that black women fit in, period. You’re too this, you’re too that, you’re too light or you’re too dark. Your hair isn’t long enough or it’s not short enough.”

“Double Outsider” Status

The lack of fit perceived by African-American women appears to be rooted in the “double outsider” status African-American women have, of being dissimilar from white men (traditionally the most powerful group in organizations) based on both race and gender.

As the following quotes illustrate, African-American women report feeling disadvantaged compared to African-American men—for being women.

“I think it’s easier for black men to understand and to do the man thing. If they get past colleagues being afraid of them, they do a good job of the golf and this and that. Male bonding.”

This is Copyrighted Material

"I sense a lot of times that the opportunities go to the men—an African-American man over a woman a lot of times—just because the higher level jobs are being held by men now and they just still tend to be comfortable."

Despite the commonality of gender, many African-American women do not feel a bond with white women in their workplaces. African-American women observe that white women have an advantage in being more closely linked with white men in the workplace. They often report conflicted relationships with white women, and these comments occur more frequently in African-American women's focus groups than those of Latinas or Asian women.

"Staff are used to interacting with white women. They have their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters, so they can have a level of comfort around them that they can't necessarily have with us. They tell us all the time they are uncomfortable with black women. It becomes our job to make them comfortable."

"The white females that I've come in contact with continually regard me as a competitor. There's really no affinity there. I have more open dialogue and discussions with Asian females and Hispanic females."

Participation in Informal Networks: Exclusion and Guardedness

Consistent with other women of color, more than one-third of the African-American women surveyed report exclusion from informal networks as a barrier to advancement. As one woman describes:

"We don't interact with white coworkers on a social basis. People play golf; they go out and have a couple of drinks. Now, we might not even want to do that, but we're not even included so that we have that opportunity if we wanted to socialize with them outside."

For African-American women, the flip side of exclusion from whites' networks is their lack of enthusiasm in interacting past certain boundaries with whites. African-American women are much more likely than Asian women or Latinas to keep their guard up. As one woman explains:

"One difference I can think of between any white employee and black employees is their personal lives that they bring into work. White employees bring a whole lot of their personal lives. Everybody knows about their marriage, everything that's going on in their life. Black employees don't talk about those things."

I Limit Disclosure About My Personal Life at Work (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



African-American women's guardedness appears to be related to the greater scrutiny they come under, compared with majority employees. African-American women feel that they are subjecting themselves to even greater scrutiny—and possibly negative outcomes—by being forthcoming about their personal lives.

"I remember the other day, my second line man mentioned something to me about my car. He was like, 'You're always having problems with your car.' He said it as if it were a judgment of me. So I said to myself: 'Remember, you should never share your personal business.'"

Some African-American women report that colleagues are threatened when the women reveal they are on par with them.

"When they find out you take real vacations, they look at you like, 'We've got one of those kinds: a person who could be equal.' I had two bosses that I had to battle with. I had to watch what I shared with them because they started to look at me differently, like 'You can't be on my level, you can't have any money, you can't do anything, and you can't know anything.' So I don't share my views."

Establishing rapport by sharing one's personal experiences is often key to building relationships. Not doing so is a barrier to fitting in. African-American women are often well aware of the negative consequences of withholding personal information, but often find advances from coworkers too intrusive to respond to.

"They think something is wrong with you. They want to know all the time everything about your personal life. [They] will ask, and then when you don't tell them, it's like something's wrong with you."

Setting Boundaries with Colleagues

African-American women see race as a sensitive topic with an extremely complicated history, and some in our study make it clear that it is inappropriate—if not disrespectful—for white colleagues to discuss race with them. These women make race discussions off limits, as a way of setting boundaries and maintaining self-respect.

"People feel really comfortable talking to me almost about anything. But they never cross the line and talk to me about race."

"I don't discuss race with people. I don't make self-deprecating jokes period, because it has the same effect. It doesn't matter where it comes from, and I make a very conscious effort; I don't discuss race. My fear is that people will feel comfortable—and that's happened to me in other work environments. They feel like they can ask you questions about your hair and 'Do you sunburn?' And I don't have those discussions and I don't address those kind of questions."

To have meaningful dialogues about race, coworkers of African-American women must understand that these types of discussions need to move beyond the topics illustrated in the quote above.

What Managers and Companies Can Do

Those with “outsider” status tend to face more pressure to fit in and come under greater scrutiny in the work environment, which makes the work environment more difficult for them to navigate. You as a manager can make the work environment more inclusive and open by supporting the authority and credibility of your staff, examining and addressing your own biases, not making stereotypical comparisons, and accepting a variety of inclusive behavioral styles.

You can support your African-American women staff members’ authority and credibility by doing the following:

- Become aware of stereotypes, if any, attributed to the African-American women staff members in your company. Challenge any stereotypical assumptions about the competence and skill of these women.
- If others make dismissive or disparaging remarks about your staff, immediately challenge them.
- Recognize that being from a majority culture carries with it a certain level of status and privilege, and that sometimes those from majority cultures have a difficult time accepting the authority of someone from a traditionally disenfranchised group (e.g., African-American women).

Creating a Dialogue About Race—Texas Instruments

Dallas-based Texas Instruments seeks to expand the dialogue between members of different races by supporting a local organization called Dallas Dinner Table. Every year on the Martin Luther King, Jr. national holiday, the independent nonprofit conducts a series of roundtable discussions around the topic of race. The goal of the event is to significantly improve race relations by creating an emotionally safe environment for the host and participants so everyone is encouraged to share honestly and openly.

The dinners are held in private homes or restaurants with each dinner attended by participants of diverse backgrounds. Participants are discouraged from focusing on institutional, political, or community-level “solutions.” Rather, the dinners are designed to encourage communication about race relations and the impact of ethnicity on relationships, educate participants about perspectives held by others related to race relations, and empower citizens to develop relationships with people from a variety of racial/ethnic groups.

2004 is the second year that Texas Instruments has helped support the event and encouraged employees to participate.

- Do not allow colleagues or subordinates to undermine a staff member's authority. If someone goes over your subordinate's head and comes directly to you, send the person back to your subordinate.
- Challenge any misattribution of performance. For example, if one of your staff members has just completed an excellent project, and someone attributes the project to another staff member, immediately correct that person.
- Process and respond to feedback that you get from others about your staff's performance, but do not publicly make negative statements (e.g., generalization and labeling).

Providing a Solid Performance Management Process—Verizon's Performance Management Plan

Verizon's Performance Management Plan is designed to promote the ongoing performance dialogue between supervisor and employee that is critical to increased performance results. The plan provides supervisors with a common framework for developing and evaluating employee performance within the context of the Verizon core competency framework and also supports Verizon's Pay for Performance philosophy by providing a measurable basis for the relationship between rewards and individual achievements. The plan includes the following key elements:

- Performance planning:
 - ◆ Performance objective setting
 - ◆ Performance development planning
- Performance coaching and feedback
- Assessment of results achieved against performance objectives
- Evaluation of employee proficiency in competency areas that contribute to job success

This plan helps employees align themselves with the Verizon competencies, which are considered essential to employee success and are applicable to all management employees. The competency areas are broadly focused on Business and Industry, Customers, Leadership, and Results. Included in these competency areas are specific criteria related to diversity, ethics, written communications, and project management.

The Verizon competency framework is closely tied to all phases of the performance management process related to year-end assessment. Verizon's competencies also drive employee development overall, where they are integrated into "180 degree" (supervisor and self) competency assessments designed to identify development opportunities, select learning resources in various formats, and create employee development plans.

- Provide constructive feedback, based on behavior in specific situations, directly to your staff members in private. As needed, coach your staff members on more effective behaviors that would improve performance.
- Acknowledge outstanding performance of your staff members in meetings and in conversation with the leadership of your company.

Raising Awareness of Biases and Addressing Them—Training in Micro-Inequities at JPMorgan Chase

JPMorgan Chase partnered with key academic institutions and consulting partners to develop a program called “Micro-Inequities: The Power of Small,” a leadership initiative that focuses on the impact of “micro-messages” in the workplace. Its premise is that each of us sends thousands of powerful, yet subtle, messages to our colleagues every day that have a strong impact in shaping others’ ability to perform at the top of their game. These micro-messages can be as subtle as a supportive head nod, a disapproving head turn, a casual wink of encouragement, or a blank look of indifference. When a manager communicates different messages to different people based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or organizational level, these messages can affect things such as productivity, morale, and turnover. Participants in this program learn strategies for how to become aware of, discuss, address, and prevent micro-inequities, as well as ways to use positive micro-messages to drive performance.

- Acknowledge, examine, and address your own biases—we all have them. This is often uncomfortable, but it will allow you to adjust your behavior to address any bias that you surface. As much as possible, you should get comfortable with being uncomfortable as you ask yourself the following:
 - ◆ How inclusive are you about socializing with those from different backgrounds (e.g., including everyone in out-of-office gatherings)?
 - ◆ Do you include African-American women in the information loop (invite them to important meetings, copy them on important emails)?
 - ◆ What priority do you give to providing institutional supports to staff members who are from backgrounds different from yours?
 - ◆ Do your expectations for the performance of your African-American women staff vary from those for your other staff?
 - ◆ Do you assume competence just because a staff member has similar cultural knowledge, speech, and behavioral style as you? Are you sensitive to biases favoring African-American women who look lighter-skinned or more “European” over others?
 - ◆ Do you acknowledge the superior expertise of your staff, including African-American women?

Giving All Employees an Opportunity to Develop Their Expertise—Fannie Mae's Job Rotation Program

The Office of Diversity, Health, and Work Life formally assumed responsibility for Fannie Mae's Job Rotation Program in 1999 to give employees an opportunity to develop needed and/or desired skills, to give managers the opportunity to fill short-term staffing needs, and to officially track progress. Since that time, 196 employees have participated, 39 of whom have been African-American women.

Program Staffing Opportunity: A manager uses a rotational employee to acquire just-in-time support to meet short-term projects and business objectives. The business unit receiving the employee's services pays the employee's salary and benefits.

Skill Development Opportunity: A rotational opportunity is utilized to increase the skill sets of a high-potential employee. Such rotations are initiated at the request of the employee's manager. The employee's salary and benefits are paid jointly by the rotational employee's regular business unit and the business unit receiving the employee's services. In some cases, a "swap" may be designed where managers or directors may switch jobs so neither unit loses staff resources.

All job rotations are reviewed, approved, and posted through the Office of Diversity, Health, and Work Life Initiatives, and employees who apply for the program cannot have performance issues. In addition, all rotations are at least three months to ensure that there is value added to the employee and business unit.

- Resist the temptation to make stereotypical comparisons. Managers of work groups with a sole African-American woman sometimes over-generalize and perceive the employee as representing all African-American women. Linking one person to an entire group overshadows that person's unique traits and accomplishments, and makes it hard for a manager to fairly assess performance and potential. Managers also sometimes compare African-American women solely to others in their racial/ethnic group as a way of understanding them. Such comparisons limit understanding of the African-American woman as an individual.
- Accept differences in behavioral and work style from all employees (to the extent feasible in your company). Foster an environment where direct communication styles, and other styles that differ from the norm, are invited and accepted.

CHAPTER 4: ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE

African-American women are able to leverage their strengths to succeed in the workplace by exceeding performance expectations, communicating effectively, connecting with mentors, building positive relationships with managers and others, and using their cultural backgrounds to enhance their job performance. In some cases, being an “outsider” actually seems to help their performance in some ways. African-American women are also more likely to report a greater connection with community groups than Asian women or Latinas.

The most frequently cited success factors by African-American women are high-visibility projects, exceeding performance expectations, good communication style, and having an influential sponsor/mentor.

Most Common Success Factors (Very Important/Extremely Important)



Exceeding Performance Expectations

Eighty-six percent of the African-American women surveyed cite exceeding performance expectations as key to success (which is not surprising given challenges to credibility reported in the previous chapter).

“You have to really have that confidence in yourself and in your credibility. And you have to get that experience and that exposure. If you’re shaky in an area, figure it out on your own—you have to come to the table with the right skills. And if you don’t have them, you’ve got to go get them.”

Communication Style

More than 90 percent of the African-American women surveyed cite good communication as a success factor. They tend to maintain and leverage their direct communication styles; some believe they challenge organizational norms by doing so.

“I tend to be very direct. I’m bumping up against the unwritten rules about being indirect. My upbringing has led me to respect people, no matter what their place in life is. That is also in conflict here. You’re to hold managers in high esteem; I don’t see it that way. My preference is to say it as I think it.”

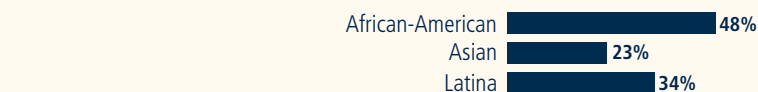
Connecting with Mentors

Three-quarters of African-American women report having a mentor as key to success. Among the women of color surveyed, African-American women are the most likely to have a mentor: 38 percent of African-American women surveyed have a mentor, compared with 33 percent of Latinas and 27 percent of Asian women.

More than one-half (54 percent) of African-American women's mentors are also African-American: 32 percent of their mentors are African-American men, 22 percent are African-American women, and 29 percent are white men. The least likely race/gender category for mentors of African-American women is white women, at 16 percent.

Mentors of African-American women are reportedly more likely to give advice on race issues than mentors of Asian women and Latinas—one indication of the greater salience of race to African-American women's work experience. Mentors of African-American women also are more likely to provide advice on gender issues in the workplace (e.g., strategies for communicating with male managers and appropriate dress).

Mentor Provides Job Advice on Gender Issues (Great/Very Great Extent)



$p < .05$

Mentor Provides Job Advice on Racial/Ethnic Issues (Great/Very Great Extent)



$p < .05$

Having a variety of mentors is reported by some African-American women as a very effective strategy.

"One of my mentors is really tough on me. And then I have some that are really sweet and nice. You have to mix them up. You need some people who are tough on you and keep you going; you will not advance in this company without sponsorship."

Connecting with Managers and Reaching Out to Others

Many African-American women report achieving positive relationships with managers and coworkers. They also report receiving support and coaching from other women of color in the workplace.

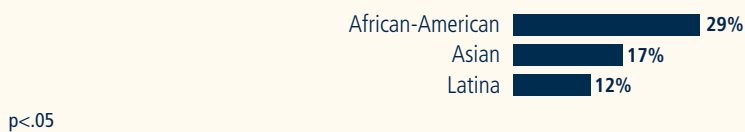
"An African-American submitted a resume to another African-American. She took the time to go through this resume and correct everything. She went through every sentence and every word and corrected everything, and told the person, 'Now redo it and get it back to me.' I was so impressed."

Relationships with managers are reported as positive when the manager respects and values the African-American woman employee's skills.

"My boss is the best I've ever encountered, because of his management style. He has said, 'I count on you for your directness, because then I know what's really going on.'"

Managing others' preconceptions of them as women of their racial/ethnic group is more crucial to African-American women than to Latinas or Asian women, as they form relationships in the workplace.

Managing Others' Preconceptions of Women from My Ethnic Group as a Strategy to Advancement (Extremely Important)



Some African-American women are able to manage preconceptions very politically. For example, one woman leveraged her manager's rather tokenistic perception of her:

"[My] manager was very supportive, but for a really funny reason. I was a novelty to him. He had never had a black person work with him. I did a good job, I was articulate, so he wanted to move me along. But it was, 'Here's this novelty.' That's how my latest manager is. I take advantage of that sometimes. Why not?"

In contrast to the "guardedness" reported by many African-American women, more senior-level African-American women (one to three levels below their CEOs) savvily protect their privacy, while satisfying the organizational requirement for "sharing:"

"I've had [people in my office] who have said, 'I ain't gonna do that.... I'm good at what I do, but I am not going to sit down and have a cup of coffee with them. I am not going to lunch with them. I am not going to chit-chat about what I did over the weekend with them.' And I say, 'If you don't, they're going to make up stories. So you'd better give them what you want them to have.' Because that's the culture—people come in and they chat about what they did last night. Don't look at it as an infringement on your private space. Create your corporate space. You [create a corporate space by giving] them the image you want them to have, not [necessarily] what reality is."

Unique Perspectives and Values of African-American Women

Many African-American women view their experiences and cultural backgrounds as making them fairer and more sensitive to the needs of other employees. This is due in part to the "outsider within" perspective,²² which refers to bringing the knowledge and experience gained from being an outsider to one's role

²² Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully, "Tempered Radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change," in *Organizational Science*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (September-October 1995): p.589.

as an insider (professional or managerial employee). Having an outsider perspective can help one more readily recognize issues of unfairness and exclusion. One participant explains:

"African-Americans are good listeners; we know how to build relationships and strong bonds between our peers. We include more people in the communication link, both vertically and horizontally. White managers tend to be a little more exclusive.... They have their favorites."

From their perspectives as outsiders, African-American women may be quicker to recognize subtle, or unacknowledged, double standards. For example, some participants report that rules are applied loosely to the "in" group, and more strictly to the "out" group, which in turn leads to more conscientious performance.

"We are the ones who watch policy and procedure and do it right. We don't go around the back door; we don't usurp someone else's power and do other kinds of things. We follow it by the book. Because that's all we have to hang onto."

In addition to their "outsider" perspective, African-American women reported having a more "collective" than individual perspective, which they see as a link to their cultural backgrounds. For some, this also leads to enhanced job performance, in their view.

"African-Americans tend to be more nurturing, more team-oriented, community-oriented.... I've noticed that other colleagues who are not African-American think about themselves first. They only think of the team when they get financially rewarded for it. They'll talk team while they're stabbing you in the back. We will make personal sacrifices for the benefit of the group."

Connection with Community/Cultural Group

To connect with other members of their racial/ethnic group and maintain a connection to their culture, some African-American women attend ethnic/cultural events and conferences targeted to members of their racial/ethnic group.

- Thirty percent of African-American women often or always attend conferences and meetings targeted to their racial/ethnic group, and 44 percent often or always attend ethnic/cultural events, both significantly higher than for Latinas and Asian women.

I Attend Conferences/Meetings Targeted to Racial/Ethnic Groups (Often/Always)



p<.01

I Attend Ethnic/Cultural Events (Often/Always)



Many African-American women make it a point to connect with other organizations, such as churches, and to give back to their communities.

"You do work in the community; you take on leadership roles as boards of directors; you do other kinds of things outside of the workplace to fill in the gaps around what you don't get at work.... It's really important for me to have a balance in my life between work and home, church, family—that kind of thing."

African-American women see their community focus as distinguishing them from others at work.

"I feel a need to give back and to service the community. Those are really important to me, and many black women invest a lot of time and a lot of themselves in that. Balancing that with work and with other priorities is an issue that I don't think white men deal with on the same level."

Biculturalism Among African-American Women

Finally, reflecting both the connection many African-American women keep with their communities and the effort they make to navigate the corporate environment, many discuss the importance of shifting back and forth between cultures. They report being able to engage in the work environment and in contexts outside of the workplace, consistent with Bell et al.'s work on "biculturalism." In Bell's work, bicultural African-American women report coping with different norms at work vs. community by adopting different styles.²³

Bell's model suggests that biculturalism consists of maintaining a strong sense of one's racial/ethnic identity while simultaneously demonstrating competencies, skills, and behaviors with which whites are comfortable. This skill allows African-American women to navigate various social contexts and roles while maintaining a sense of ethnic pride.

"I think most African-American people will say you're so conditioned to manage the dual cultures, and duality of your life, that it's second nature. When you're at work, you wear that hat. You're not going to interact socially with people at work like you do with your family or your friends. With my family, I'm actually speaking a different language."

"I think with whites overall, there's a much higher identity with the job. It seems to have a much bigger impact on their total identity, even outside of work. Whereas with African-Americans, we come in and then we go back into our community. [We're] not whatever [we] are here."

²³ Ella J. Edmondson Bell and Stella M. Nkomo, *Our Separate Ways: Black and White Women and the Struggle for Professional Identity* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 2001): p. 230-233.

What Managers and Companies Can Do

You can help develop your staff members by working with them on career goals and advocating for them:

- Establish explicit performance expectations and clearly communicate these criteria to your employees. These criteria may help expose African-American women to high-level individuals and high-visibility assignments.
- Develop comprehensive professional relationships with your African-American women direct reports to include mapping out goals and assisting them with navigating organizational politics. Evaluate their job performance fairly and equitably, with a focus on results. Provide honest, helpful feedback on work relationships (e.g., feedback on teamwork and interpersonal relationships).
- Be an advocate for your talented employees:
 - ◆ Speak up during discussions about advancement, and advocate for employees who may be unnoticed. Be sure to include African-American women on high-potential slates.
 - ◆ Recognize and reward achievement.

A Model of Career Development for African-American Women—IBM's Multicultural Women's Symposium

In response to recommendations from its Women's Task Force and an internal analysis that identified the need for developmental programs, role models, and mentoring opportunities for women of color, IBM hosted a series of symposia. The Multicultural Women (MCW) Subcommittee is an interdepartmental group composed of individuals from Global Diversity, Executive Development, and Executive Resources. The Subcommittee, along with an external firm, developed the framework for the symposia. The MCW Subcommittee hosted two symposia in 1998, which targeted women who were not yet executives but had the potential to become executives within one to two years. IBM has offered this program five times and a total of 150 women have completed the program. The 2003 symposium focused on the MCW Next Generation who are lower in the pipeline, but have been identified as potential future leaders. The objectives of the symposia were to:

- Enhance skills to leverage the diversity of multicultural women and achieve superior business results and personal goals.
- Celebrate achievements, contributions, and personal milestones.
- Expand strategies for organizational and personal empowerment and leadership.
- Examine the "relationship factor" to facilitate individual and executive success.
- Provide networking opportunities among high-potential multicultural women.

At IBM, the number of MCW executives in the United States rose from 17 in 1995 to 84 in 2003.

- Develop mentoring programs utilizing top management officers as mentors.

The Implementation of a Comprehensive Mentoring Program—Fannie Mae's Corporate Mentoring Program

Fannie Mae defines mentoring as a partnership that gives people the opportunity to share professional and personal knowledge, skills, and experience. To institutionalize mentoring as a core value, Fannie Mae created the Corporate Mentor Program and its four components, which are specifically targeted to encourage the advancement of highly qualified employees, specifically women and minorities. In 2002, a total of 426 people participated in the program, 141 of which were African-American women.

The Mentor Speaker/Issues Forum provides a forum by which employees within the leadership ranks are invited to speak on issues affecting women, men, and career development. All employees are invited to attend.

The Peer Mentor Program assigns current employees to newly hired employees on a short-term basis to help the newcomers become familiar with the people, culture, facilities, and activities at Fannie Mae.

The E-Mentoring Program was introduced in 2002 to assist mentor/protégé pairs in utilizing email as the primary mode of communication. This program removes geographic barriers that exist in traditional face-to-face mentor/protégé relationships by allowing pairing across regions and locations and eliminates scheduling problems.

The Mentor/Protégé Matching Program consists of formal and informal one-on-one relationships between mentors and protégés that help enhance professional and personal growth, improve skills, and increase networking opportunities. In 2002, a total of 188 mentor/protégé pairs participated in the program with African-American women representing 33 percent of the total.

- If your company has career or leadership development programs, advocate that your high-performing African-American women participate. Not only will they benefit from learning the content of the program, they may have opportunities to establish relationships with high-profile employees.

Recruiting and Mentoring African-American Women—General Electric's Leadership DELTA

GE's effort to strengthen the leadership pipeline for African-American women has resulted in a unique partnership between the company and a traditionally African-American sorority. In contrast to many non-African-American sororities, whose members are engaged most intensely during undergraduate years, African-American sororities have comparatively stronger infrastructures beyond college. As a result, they represent robust networks of professional women who are leaders in various aspects of our society. Knowing this, GE strategically partnered with Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. to create Leadership DELTA.

Leadership DELTA is an innovative program that annually partners, on average, 20+ high-achieving undergraduate African-American women with African-American female executives both from GE and other companies as mentors. The participants are typically pursuing degrees in math, science, or technology. The mentors and mentees attend a leadership conference at GE's training and development campus where they participate in a variety of workshops and activities that build personal leadership skills. Mentoring relationships and activities continue outside of the conference for a year. Participants are also expected to take what they learn at the conference back to their colleges and universities and present it to their local chapters. As a result of this program, GE has extended full-time employment offers to a number of participants prior to graduation and Delta Sigma Theta has increased the leadership capacity of its members.

- Work on developing a rapport with your African-American woman staff members that goes beyond the immediate work. Get to know them as individuals—their values, personal interests, and out-of-work activities.
- Over time, build relationships with your staff members characterized by trust and mutual respect. In this way, you can pave the way to discuss sensitive areas such as problematic work situations that might be related to race and gender. The more your relationships are based on trust and respect, the more willing your staff members should be to discuss sensitive areas. Try to avoid missteps by seeking coaching on how to have conversations about sensitive topics.
- If your staff members are active in community work, you can help them leverage this strength by recommending they share with coworkers their accomplishments in these and other non-work-related areas. Through such sharing, they may be more likely to be perceived as approachable and friendly, and can also project a positive and multi-dimensional image.

CHAPTER 5: DIVERSITY EFFORTS IN THE WORKPLACE

In response to the growing diversity of the workforce, U.S. companies are increasingly likely to create and implement diversity policies—about 75 percent of the Fortune 500 companies have a formally stated diversity program.²⁴ This chapter examines African-American women’s perceptions of the impact of diversity policies on their work environments and on workforce representation. Most African-American women find their company policies ineffective in addressing racism. African-American women are the most likely of all women-of-color groups studied to see their opportunities to advance to senior positions declining over time, in spite of the existence of diversity policies and practices.

Perceptions of Diversity Policies’ Impact on the Work Environment

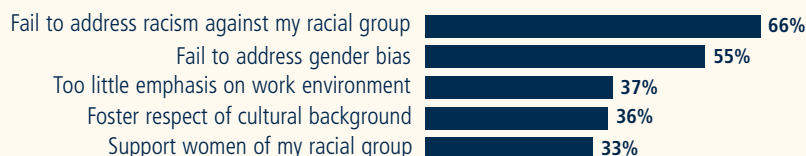
About one-third of the African-American women surveyed indicate that diversity policies have helped create environments supportive of African-American women (33 percent), and have fostered respect for their cultural background (36 percent). Some see their companies making strides in creating inclusive environments:

“We had a diversity conference last August. People are actually having a dialogue about what race really means to this company. While I agree they’re baby steps, they are steps.”

However, many more African-American women—66 percent—believe that diversity policies have failed to address racism against members of their racial/ethnic group. This is much higher than Latinas’ and Asian women’s level of agreement—at about 40 percent—underscoring the salience of race to African-American women in corporate environments.

As the following table indicates, about one-half (55 percent) of the African-American women surveyed also agree that diversity policies have failed to address gender bias in the culture. This is similar to Latinas’ and Asian women’s ratings.

Perceived Effectiveness of Diversity Policies (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



²⁴ Society for Human Resources Management, *SHRM Survey of Diversity Programs*. (August 1998).

Some African-American women perceive a lack of commitment to diversity by the company.

"I'm on the public relations side. We had a fabulous brochure about diversity. It was written well and had all the right words [and] pictures. But it didn't follow through in the culture. We say all the right things, we've got lots of initiatives...but the bottom line is that we don't walk the talk."

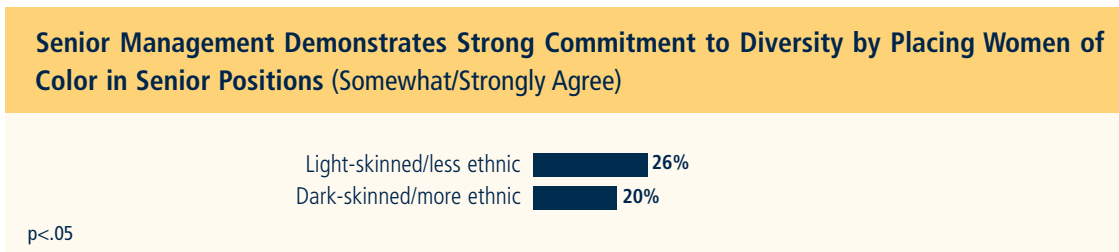
Perceptions of Diversity Policies' Accountability and Impact on Workforce Representation

Almost one-half (45 percent) of the African-American women surveyed believe that their senior management has done a good job in hiring a diverse workforce.

However, fewer (25 percent) believe that diversity policies in their companies focus on career development. Eighteen percent of African-American women believe their managers are held accountable for achieving diversity goals and are rewarded for meeting those goals. Only 21 percent and 23 percent, respectively, believe their managers receive adequate training on managing a diverse workforce and demonstrate commitment to diversity by placing African-American women in senior positions.



Dark-skinned/more ethnic African-American women are less likely than light-skinned/less ethnic women to believe senior management is committed to placing women of color in senior positions (20 percent vs. 26 percent).



Interestingly, light-skinned/less ethnic women are more likely than dark-skinned/more ethnic women to agree that company diversity efforts fail to address racism against their group (72 percent vs. 64 percent).

Company Diversity Efforts Fail to Address Racism Against My Group (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



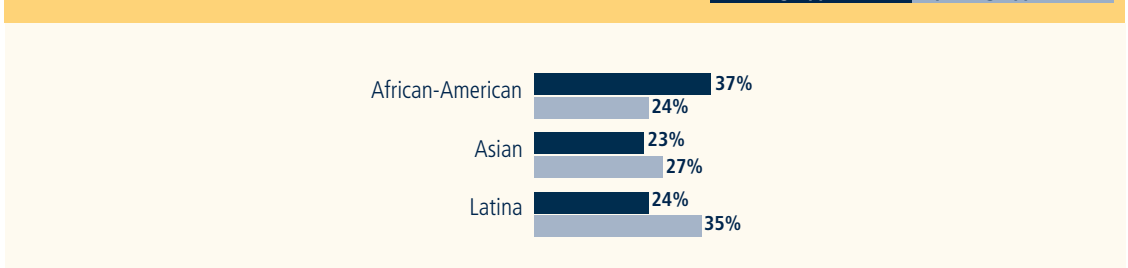
Perceptions of Declining Opportunities

In Catalyst’s 2001 follow-up survey of women-of-color participants from our 1999 study, African-American women indicate they are less likely to feel that opportunities to advance to senior management positions in their companies have improved (24 percent), compared to their responses in the original survey (50 percent). The responses could have been affected by economic circumstances, as the follow-up survey was administered during an economic recession.

However, African-American women are unique among women of color in perceiving decline outpacing improvement. More African-American women feel that opportunities have declined (37 percent) rather than improved (24 percent)—the opposite pattern for the other two groups. For example, Latinas were more likely to say their opportunities had improved (35 percent) rather than declined (24 percent).

In the intervening three years, many African-American women have been promoted at least one level. One explanation for their pessimism about opportunities is that promotion brought many closer to the “concrete ceiling.” Perhaps the closer they got, the more clearly they perceived its existence. This ceiling appears to exist for African-American women to a greater degree than it does for Latinas and Asian women—in spite of the increase in the existence of diversity policies and corporate efforts to create inclusive work environments.

Perceptions of Environment and Decline in Opportunities for African-American, Asian, and Latina Women, 2001



Suggestions from African-American Women for Improving Career Advancement

The African-American women focus group participants offer several suggestions for companies about improving their career advancement. Several suggest improving access to mentors and networks. Many also cite the key roles of managers and career planning:

“There could be career planning, so folks can have an opportunity to have these different assignments [that would] give them the breadth of experience and the preparation they need to move up through the ranks.”

“Change the managers.... Do not promote just the technical sectors, promote someone who really wants to be a manager, understands people, wants to coach and counsel.”

To improve diversity programs, many suggest improving accountability:

“You should be accountable for results.... You have organizations of 300 people and 85 percent are white males; someone needs to be held accountable.”

“Unless it starts with dollars tied to it and managers having accountability, in my opinion, it’s not a diversity program.”

Some suggest procedural changes in companies that would improve adherence to diversity practices:

“The more diverse committees can be, in terms of who is making the decisions around selection of people, the faster you’ll see progress occurring.”

In terms of improving both workplace inclusiveness and career advancement opportunities for African-American women, some women discuss the need for leaders to have a deep commitment to change. These women explicitly encourage leaders to address the issue of race:

“They’re going to have to face this issue of race and what it means.... Until then, they can put anything in place they want; that doesn’t mean anything. Because of the subtle behaviors, the denial of opportunity will continue until something happens, starting at the top of this organization, that lets them understand what kind of institution this is, their part in it, and what they need to do about themselves and the organization.”

What Managers and Companies Can Do

Many companies' diversity initiatives may be perceived as ineffective because individual managers do not fully support or implement them. The following steps will help you strengthen your company's existing diversity efforts.

- Analyze Human Resources data, such as the number of promotions, to determine if African-American women are in fact benefiting from diversity initiatives.
- Establish appropriate systems of measurement and hold leaders accountable for diversity progress.
- Establish a benchmarking team to identify best practices.
- Participate in an ongoing formal diversity effort, i.e., Diversity Council, Diversity Task Force, or Employee Networks.

Addressing Women-of-Color Issues in the Workplace—General Electric's Multicultural Women's Initiative

In December 2000, General Electric conducted a two-day session assembling more than 80 percent of its U.S. executives who were women of color (with African-American women comprising the largest group). The purpose was to address the issues women of color face at GE and devise recommendations and action plans to aid in their advancement. Building on the thinking of this group, GE launched a Multicultural Women's Initiative to help advance multicultural women across GE.

One component of the Initiative is an intensive two-day training offered annually to high-performing multicultural women. The 2003 workshop was organized as a nuts-and-bolts, hands-on series of workshops that covered topics such as seeking performance feedback, mentoring, sponsorship, and networking. The sessions addressed many of the challenges these women face day to day. Participants learned how to identify and approach potential mentors and encourage a relationship if a participant feels she is being tapped as a possible mentee. Additionally, participants engaged in a variety of activities, such as role-playing and simulations, to help develop networking and other skills. The workshop also addressed more controversial subjects in a candid and fact-based way. The session included in-depth discussions about specific stereotypes associated with women of color from different ethnicities and how to deal with them.

Feedback from the session has been extremely positive, with several participants rating it as the most impactful training they had ever attended. Internal tracking of participants revealed that at least three attendees were promoted within six months of the training.

- Link diversity to business issues whenever possible.
- Initiate or participate in brainstorming sessions with your team or your peers to identify more concrete steps you can take to level the playing field.
- Examine and monitor Human Resources processes to ensure that they produce diverse outcomes.
- Address any resistance staff members have to diversity initiatives. Openly discuss the business benefits of diversity initiatives. Backlash often emerges when majority groups fear they will have fewer opportunities if another group gains opportunities, or that they will lose their dominant positions. Diversity initiatives should be positioned as beneficial to both employees and the company, a win-win for both.

Implementing Diversity Initiatives in Organizations—General Mills' Diversity Initiative

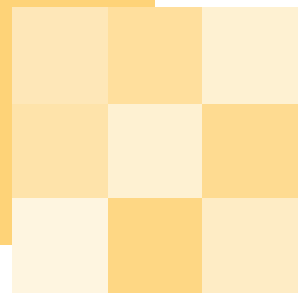
General Mills' comprehensive diversity initiative includes a clear business case, quarterly reviews, employee development plans, and training for women and people of color, which enables participants to clarify obstacles and to develop both short- and long-term career plans. General Mills offers a yearlong, corporate-wide mentoring program for newly hired people of color, in which the new hires are matched with experienced managers who act as their mentors. The company also has seven employee affinity groups that provide opportunities for development, networking, and information sharing among group members.

CEO Steve Sanger holds direct reports accountable for providing appropriate developmental experiences to each high-potential woman or person of color so she/he is ready to move to more senior positions. Senior management is accountable for meeting their annual representation goals. General Mills increased its number of African-American women from only one vice president in 1993 to seven officers and directors or 2 percent of all 554 officers and directors in 2003.

The initiative is effective for African-American women because of:

- Strong business rationale that bolsters support for the initiative within the organization
- Quarterly CEO review of workforce representation and progress toward achieving corporate goals
- Evaluation of climate surveys by gender and race as well as by division or function
- Mentoring for newly hired people of color
- Employee affinity groups for women and people of color
- Managerial accountability for meeting annual representation goals and helping to prepare women and people of color for more senior positions

CHAPTER 6: RESOURCE LISTING



Web Sites

The Riley Guide: Resources for Women, Minorities, and Other Affinity Groups and Audiences

<http://www.rileyguide.com/diverse.html>

Hire Diversity: Resources for African-Americans

<http://www.hirediversity.com/african-american.asp>

ImDiversity.com

<http://www.imdiversity.com/careercenter.asp>

The Multicultural Advantage

<http://www.multiculturaladvantage.com/>

National Urban League

<http://www.nul.org>

Professional Organizations for African-American Women

National Council of Negro Women

<http://www.ncnw.org>

National Coalition of 100 Black Women

<http://www.ncbw.org>

National Association of Negro Business & Professional Women's Clubs, Inc.

<http://www.nanbpwc.org>

Black Career Women

<http://www.bcw.org>

Black Data Processing Associates

<http://www.bdpa.org>

Black Broadcaster's Alliance

<http://www.thebba.org>

Ebony West

<http://ebonywest.com/jobweb.htm>

Executive Leadership Council and Foundation

www.elcinfo.com

Minority Corporate Counsel Association (MCCA)

<http://www.mcca.com>

National Action Council for Minorities in Engineering

www.nacme.org

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

<http://www.naacp.org>

National Association of African-Americans in Human Resources

<http://www.naaahr.org>

National Association of Black Accountants

<http://www.nabainc.org>

National Association of Black Journalists

<http://www.nabj.org>

National Association of Black Procurement Professionals

<http://www.nabpp.org>

National Association of Black Telecommunication Professionals

<http://www.nabtp.org>

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ALSO BY CATALYST

Catalyst's landmark, multiphase studies on the impact of racial and ethnic status on opportunities and barriers for women of color in corporate management have resulted in the publication of the following reports. Order your copies at www.catalystwomen.org.

Advancing Asian Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know (2003)

The second in a series of three, this report focuses on the most significant challenges for Asian women in the workplace and what managers and companies can do to overcome these barriers.

Advancing Latinas in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know (2003)

Catalyst presents this report on Latinas in corporate management, and the strategies companies and managers need to take advantage of this information.

Making Change: Moving Women of Color Up the Ladder (2002)

This publication outlines the steps needed to advance women of color in the workplace by addressing the unique experiences of women of color, the challenges they face, and steps for managers.

Women of Color in Corporate Management: Three Years Later (2001)

A follow-up to our 1999 study of women-of-color managers and executives, this report provides the first longitudinal look at the experiences of women of color.

Women of Color Executives: Their Voices, Their Journeys (2000)

This reports tracks the careers of six women-of-color executives, including an analysis of interviews with 35 women of color, and provides recommendations for companies.

Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers (1999)

This report provides companies with an in-depth overview of the findings from Catalyst's three-year project. It includes strategies for better recruiting, advancing, and retaining women-of-color managers.

Women of Color in Corporate Management: Dynamics of Career Advancement (1998)

From the women's own perspectives, this report includes descriptions of success factors, barriers, advancement opportunities, and the role of affirmative action in the career development of women-of-color managers.

Women of Color in Corporate Management: A Statistical Picture (1997)

An analysis of occupational and demographic information for women of color in managerial/administrative jobs as defined by the U.S. Census and as compared with white men, white women, and people of color.

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120 Wall Street, 5th Floor
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fax/ 212-514-8470

SAN JOSE

2825 North First Street, Suite 200
San Jose, CA 95134
tel/ 408-435-1300
fax/ 408-577-0425

TORONTO

8 King Street East, Suite 505
Toronto, Ontario M5C 1B5
tel/ 416-815-7600
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