

Diversity Gazette

Terms and Conditions: The Contract for Black Women Working in White Spaces

by Jasmine Johnson

The intersections of race and gender influence black women's experiences and behaviors within predominately white spaces. The behaviors that are acceptable within these spaces are modeled after white male standards of interpersonal engagement. These behaviors are white-normed and patriarchal in nature thereby negating authentic expression of those not white and/or male. (Acker, 1990) Black women's occupational mobility is largely predicated on their ability to be palatable to white people and their standards of expression and behavior. (Durr, M., & Harvey Wingfield, 2011)

Black women are expected to be nurturing and supportive of white emotional fragility playing the "mammies" of the workplace. Their emotional labor is expected even in times of attacks on their persons. In the same breath, they are often seen as people to be managed, reminded of their rightful place, and deemed incapable of performing higher-level tasks. (Hochschild, 1983)

*Mammy is a racial caricature of African American women stemming from the Jim Crow era and can still be seen in modern media. "Her wide grin, hearty laughter, and loyal servitude were offered as evidence of the supposed humanity of the institution of slavery." (Pilgrim, 2000)

Section 1: Appearance

Adjust your appearance to fit the "norm" which doesn't include you anyway.

Do not use the following to express your individualism:

- a.) Hair.
- b.) Nails.
- c.) Clothes.

In 2019, the CROWN act (**C**reate an **O**pen and **R**espectful **W**orld for **N**atural hair) was produced to protect against discrimination based on hairstyle exclusion practices that specifically targeted protective styles in the workplace and public schools. This type of protection was inspired by black woman hair being 3.4x more likely to be perceived as unprofessional. (Collective, 2019)

History of the Gazette

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Section 2: Performance

- a.) Smile! Even if it isn't true to how you feel.

Black woman adapted the ability to modify personas and mannerisms to fit the environment. Performance is essential to socio-economic-psychological survival. (Lloyd, 2023)

Section 3: Emotional Labor

You are responsible for the comfort of those around you. Do not take up too much space. Be qualified enough to be useful but not threatening.

You can do this by:

- a. Letting coworkers or clients get away with micro and macroaggressions. If you want to keep the peace.
- b. Adjust to white fragility and avoid fitting into a stereotype.
- c. Prioritizing the comfort of others over your well-being.

By signing this you are agreeing to earn sixty-three cents for every dollar earned by a white (non-Hispanic) man. (Roux, 2021)

Sign here: _____

Reflection

As I reflect on my experience as a black woman working at the UNC and more specifically at the UNC School of Government, I run into two conflicting thoughts. The first is the amazing people and opportunities that I have encountered here that are unlike any other. The initiative, tenacity, and vision for a better future that I see in the actions of the students, staff, and faculty give me hope for a truly equitable society. This presence is the reason I came and most importantly the reason I am staying. While I have many people to learn from here, I think about my first teacher in life.

In the summers between elementary school years, I stayed with the smartest person I have ever met, my Grandma Bert. She read the paper everyday to quiz us about the words or global events. We learned strategies through complex games and storytelling as we volunteered to help others in the communities each weekend. Grandma Bert recognized the value of community which she embedded in everyone she encountered.

The dreams my grandmother told me about through sunken eyes and sleepless nights after persisting decades of violent resistance for the rights of Black people were not those of fame and fortune. What she wanted most for family was safety and opportunity. Her tired hands wrote letters to me in a phonetic spelling she taught herself since school was not an option for her up until my college years. Even though she did not have her own college experience, she knew education had lifechanging value.

The second thought that weighs on me is the somber reality that this space was built with the intention of keeping people like her out. People who were smart beyond their

years and pillars in their communities but were bound by history that would repeat itself past her lifetime. There were countless efforts that deeply affected the black community that the institution consistently fails to recognize or atone for. I have contributed positively to the community through my work in this institution, but how is it contributing to my community?

Terms and conditions is a short train of thought inspired by dichotomy. I wanted to share some of the layers that affect my experience in the work I love. My conclusion is that two truths can coexist.

- 1.) I am proud of what I do.
- 2.) The institution needs to change and is changing.

To my fellow Black SOG, know that you are a meaningful part of this community, and we could not be where we are without you. Even if you do not see me, just know I am rooting for you always.

To SOG, I leave you with these words...

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

-Martin Luther King Jr.

The long-term success of a community depends on its culture. We must keep in mind that support is the first function of a community. It's more than cheering for someone when they succeed; it's coming together in times of trouble or celebration, and not allowing the seeds of differences to grow division.

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