Despite their growing presence in organizations and educational settings, women still face significant inequities in salary, promotional opportunities, and experiences of harassment (Budwig 2002, U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993). More specifically, half of all working women are harassed over the course of their working lives (Fitzgerald & Shullman 1993). This makes sexual harassment the single most common occupational hazard facing American women today.

In an attempt to understand why sexual harassment is so pervasive, feminists have examined patriarchy and the role of male dominance (Koss et al. 1994, McKinnon 1979, Morgan 2001). They have done so because sexual harassment occurs most frequently when men have positions of social and/or structural power over women, when women enter occupations traditionally dominated by men, or when women challenge definitions of masculinity and femininity (Brogan et al. 1999, DeCoster, Estes, & Mueller 1999, Gruber 1998, Gutek 1985, Vartia & Hytyi 2002).

While mainstream feminist research treats all women as the same, multiculturalists warn that not all women experience oppression in similar ways (Collins 1998, 2000, hooks 1989, 1990, Hurtado 2003). Specifically, as a result of the combined effect of both male and racial domination, black women may be targeted in unique ways (Buchanan & Ormerod 2002, DeFour 1990, Martin 1994, Murrell 1996, Texeira 2002). Although previous research has increased our general knowledge about the harassment of women, little is understood of the nuances of race regarding it.

Men's studies and masculinity research have theorized a connection between racial and sexual dominance. Conceptualizing masculinity as a socially constructed hierarchy, they note a rank ordering in which some masculinities are more privileged than others (Carey, Connell, & Lee 1987, Connell 2000, Hearn 1996, Messerschmidt 1993, 1998). At the top are white men, who reap the greatest benefits of both masculine and racial privilege. Located further down are subgroup hierarchies defined by race. While white women and black women may have their own hierarchies, theirs are excluded from the masculine hierarchy altogether. Privileged status within these hierarchies is often maintained through the harassment of those lower in the hierarchy as well as those located outside it altogether. Therefore, harassment of black women also reflects the specific location of the perpetrator within both the masculinity and racial subgroup hierarchies. These factors further demonstrate the additional complications resulting from intersecting systems of domination (Collins 2000).

The work of research—even critical research—is racialized and gendered. It is dominated by both whites and men. While the thoughts and experiences of white women have dominated sexual harassment studies, those of white men have dominated the study of masculinity and male dominance. In the following pages I offer a challenge to the status quo of research on sexual harassment and male dominance. Drawing upon culturally sensitive methodologies, I use the words of black women to analyze their unique experience of sexual harassment, recorded in a series of semistructured focus groups.
RACIALIZED SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Racial and sexual harassment have traditionally been studied as separate experiences and by separate sets of researchers. Research on sexual harassment rarely includes racial harassment and vice versa. Moreover, despite their commonalities as forms of workplace harassment, these two bodies of research rarely inform one another. As a result, the nexus of race and gender, embodied by black women, has fallen through the cracks and as a consequence been inadequately studied.

Nevertheless, the recognition of sexual harassment as a serious social problem was based upon the complaints of black women. In fact, one of the first cases to establish sexual harassment as a form of discrimination, and therefore as illegal, was filed by a black woman, and her complaints included both sexual and racial forms of harassment (see Meritor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson 1986; Vinson v. Taylor 1986). Furthermore, in 1991, Professor Anita Hill’s testimony of harassment by then Supreme Court justice nominee Clarence Thomas awakened the American public to the unique experience of black-on-black sexual harassment (Hill 1997). Nevertheless, analysis of their experiences have been generalized to apply to all women, and their unique experience of racialized sexism has been ignored.

When women of color are the targets of harassment, multiple systems of oppression and dominance are involved (Collins 1998, Crenshaw 1995, White 1999). Specifically, black women experience male dominance from both white and black men and racial dominance from white women and white men. In addition, because formal organizational power does not mitigate their status as members of two oppressed groups, black women in positions of authority are at a greater risk of contrapower harassment than either black men or white women (Rospenda, Richman, & Nawyn 1998).

The legacy of race and sexual relations from the time of institutionalized slavery continues to shape how black women experience sexual harassment, as well as how it is perpetrated (Adams 1997). During slavery, black women’s bodies were a bartered commodity, and their reproduction was an economic necessity for white slave owners. As a result, the rape of black women served dual purposes: as a method of creating wealth, and as a form of social control (Davis 1998).

During slavery, stereotypes of the mammy, Sapphire, and Jezebel were institutionalized, and their images continue to permeate American culture (Collins 2000, Simms 2001, West 1995, 2000). Such portrayals have successfully woven themselves into individuals’ beliefs, with many describing black women with negative traits associated with these images (Donovan 2002, Hudson 1998, Weitz & Gordon 1993). Access to legal and social services is limited as a result of these stereotypes, and their endorsement by black men is associated with the use of violence toward black women (Gillum 2001, Campbell et al. 2001).

Despite the relative absence of research on the combination of racial and sexual harassment, an emerging literature supports the proposition that racialized sexual harassment exists and produces perceptions and outcomes uniquely experienced by African American women (Buchanan 1999, Collins 1998, 2000, DeFour 1990, Wyatt & Riederle 1995, Murrell 1996, T. West 1999). Buchanan and Ormerod (2002) propose that the harassment of African American women is likely to be unique both in its perception as well as its form. Specifically, the nature of sexual harassment is likely to draw upon aspects of race, whether subtle or overt, when directed toward women of color. For example, although white women may be referred to as sluts or whores, an African American woman is more likely to be called a black whore, creating an experience that combines aspects of both gender and race. Therefore, the experience of events as both racist and sexist is not solely an issue of the target’s perception—it is an accurate interpretation of a racialized sexism event.

Additional studies support the relationship between racial and sexual harassment. For example, Mansfield and colleagues (1991)
found that African American tradeswomen had extensive gender-based and race-based harassment, suggesting that to some extent the two experiences co-occur among women of color. In their studies of African American women firefighters, Yoder and Aniakudo (1995, 1996, 1997) found that respondents refused to define their experiences as solely racial or sexual, asserting instead that their experiences fused both forms of harassment simultaneously. In their study of black college students, Mecca and Rubin found that “for many African American women, the issue of sexual harassment seems inextricably intertwined with racism” (1999:817), and a unique category of harassment emerged in which sexual attention was based on racial stereotypes of African American women’s sexuality or on physical features thought to vary by race (e.g., that black women have large behinds). These studies demonstrate that sexual harassment, when directed toward women of color, often fuses racial and gender domination and may be better defined as racialized sexual harassment (Buchanan & Ormerod 2002, Martin 1994, Teixeira 2002). Furthermore, experiencing this combination of harassment is likely to have a deleterious effect on targets.

METHOD
Giving consideration to the many concerns listed, this chapter’s analysis focuses on black women’s experiences of racialized sexual harassment. Particular attention is paid to the systems of structural oppression that create and maintain domination over women of color by pre-facing the needs and desires of men and Caucasians. Thirty-seven African American women participated in one of six focus group interviews. They came from both a large and a midsized city in the Midwest. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 56 years (M = 39.3). Most participants were highly educated, with 40 percent having graduate degrees; 23.3 percent were either part- or full-time graduate students, an additional 10 percent had completed college, 30 percent had some college education and/or an associate’s degree, and only one person ended her formal education with a high school diploma or GED. The women also represented a wide range of professions: they were nurses, mental health and social service case-workers, elementary and high school teachers, accountants, librarians, secretaries, engineers, college administrators, university academic advisors, executive directors/managers, city housing coordinators, delivery personnel, therapists, and research assistants. Their positions included those in government, private industry, and self-owned businesses. Thus, despite their commonality as black women, demographically speaking, there was considerable variation among them.

The focus group approach was chosen for two primary reasons. First, focus groups facilitate honest dialogue about sensitive topics of conversation (Madriz 2000, Wilkinson 1998, 1999). Perhaps more important to this study, focus groups are more culturally congruent for African American women than are many other forms of data acquisition. In particular, focus groups capitalize upon a group narrative, similar to the folk narratives and communal sharing common to collectivist communities. Therefore, focus groups are a truly innovative approach to examining harassment and may uniquely allow aspects of male and racial dominance to be further explored among women of color.

Each focus group began with an overview of the general topics to be discussed, a review of the rights of participants and the role of the moderators, a reminder that participation was voluntary and confidential, a request that each participant honor the privacy of other group members, and a discussion of how the data and audiotapes of the sessions would be handled in the future. Moderators followed a general protocol to guide the discussion, which asked about unwanted race-based and sex-based behaviors experienced personally or described to them by other African American women. The terms racial harassment and sexual harassment were not used unless mentioned by participants; instead, moderators used those terms generated by participants (e.g., inappropriate behavior). Further, to ensure adequate coverage of each topic across focus groups,
one-half of the focus groups began with racial harassment and the other half with sexual harassment (counterbalancing).

Working within the grounded theory tradition, focus groups were organized until theoretical saturation had been achieved (Charmaz 2000, Glaser & Strauss 1967, Krueger 1994). In other words, at the conclusion of each group discussion, the moderators examined the topics and themes and then used this information to modify the discussion protocol for the next focus group. After six focus groups it was determined that little or no new information was being gleaned and theoretical saturation had been reached, and the data collection phase of the project ended.

Data analysis progressed in two stages: (1) line-by-line microanalysis and (2) conceptual ordering analysis. This process identified more salient conceptual categories for theory development and defined their properties as well as their relationships to one another (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

RESULTS
The harassment experiences reported by participants centered around two core theoretical propositions. First, the nature of their harassment was best defined as racialized sexual harassment, with examples reflecting intersecting systems of domination in which both racial and gender oppression were present. Although the nature of many of the examples explicitly combined both, the perceptual experience of participants also reflected their knowledge of this intersection, even under ambiguous circumstances. The second core finding was the impact of slavery and the ways in which its legacy continues to influence contemporary manifestations of harassment and dominance. Examples reflected various negative stereotypes specific to black women. In particular, many drew upon the historic image of the Jezebel, which originated during slavery, as the sexually insatiable black woman. Also, women noted that role expectations of black women as servants had remained stable and that harassment often occurred when they violated these presumptions. It should be noted that although these core theoretical propositions are addressed in turn, this is not to give the appearance of independence. For example, harassment often exploited stereotypes of black women, which emerged during slavery, while harassing them in ways that combined race and gender simultaneously. Therefore, these propositions are better represented as a venn diagram, reflecting their interdependence and relationship to one another.

The first core theoretical proposition demonstrated the ways in which racial and sexual harassment intersect to form a distinct type of harassment called racialized sexual harassment. When given the opportunity to discuss harassment, black women in this study shared several common experiences, ranging from the sexualization of their clothing to presumptions about their competence and hygiene. These experiences demonstrate the unique ways in which racial and gendered dominance intersect when the targets are both black and female. Several examples follow.

Several women reported comments that sexualized their dress and appearance in a racially charged manner. These comments ranged from relatively innocuous statements about their appearance, such as hinting that an outfit would be worn by a prostitute, to direct comments about the color and style of clothing as exotic or offensive. For example, one participant reported the following interaction with a white female supervisor:

My husband and I were getting ready to go out after work and I changed at work and put on a red dress. A bead nurse said, "You looking like you're getting ready to go stand on the corner." Don't assume just because I put on a red dress that I'm a whore, because there are a lot of white ones out there too.

Though she was wearing plain tan slacks and a loose-fitting white button-down shirt, another woman was chastised by her white male supervisor because he considered her clothing to be too sexy. "I had on a white blouse and tan slacks and a week later he told me that I was not dressed appropriately. . . . I knew what he was getting at."
In another surprising finding, women reported negative comments regarding their shoes and accessories. These included comments about their color or the print on the material. The following example is an interaction between a participant and a white coworker: “I had on a scarf that was a kind of a safari print, and she asked me, ‘Why do black women always wear leopard skin print?’ and another day I had a particular pair of shoes that had a lot of color and she told me that my shoes were too exotic, they offended her.” In another example regarding footwear, a participant reported that she was not hired, ostensibly because of her shoes.

I applied for a job and this guy says, “I’m sorry, you got on the wrong shoes, and you just wouldn’t fit this job. You wouldn’t fit this job, come back when you get better shoes.” I looked around at the white girl that was working there and she had on sandals, flip flops, and I knew what he meant.

In sum, a theme emerged surrounding the style, color, and type of clothing and shoes worn by African American women. Often this manifested as a double standard, where at best, the appearance of African American women was held to a higher standard than that of Caucasian women. At its worst, clothing worn by African American women was often sexualized in a way that directly or indirectly focused on race. Specifically, the term exotic appeared as a way of simultaneously sexualizing clothing and denigrating it. At other times, certain styles, such as colorful accessories or animal prints, were specifically associated with African American women and then, presumably as a result of this association, were deemed offensive or inappropriate for the workplace.

In addition to examples about their clothing, several women discussed questions and comments about their personal cleanliness, particularly regarding hair care. These examples demonstrated a perception that black women were dirty, unkempt, and unusual. As one woman describes, “These women would just come and touch my hair—they touch what they think is odd.” Another woman explained her anger with repeated questions by white female coworkers regarding her hair and their assumptions that black women are unclean.

White women continually ask me, “how often do black women wash their hair?” and so I said, “you know this is like the third time you asked me how many times black women wash their hair, you already know the answer.” And then it becomes an issue of personal hygiene or whatever, like black women are dirty.

Regardless of their feelings about having to answer such questions, the women continued to struggle with such comments. They found repeated questions regarding black women’s hair care to be condescending and insulting, but struggled with a sense of obligation to educate whites on such issues. This placed them in the precarious position of wanting to answer their questions in the hopes of lessening the barriers between them, while resenting being placed in such a position and fearing that their answers would be used to further denigrate black women. Furthermore, despite hoping that white coworkers were well meaning, they could not ignore the feelings of objectification that accompanied such comments. They did not feel respected as individuals, but rather as objects of curiosity to be touched and probed at will. Their personal and physical space was violated and their discomfort ignored. In particular, they were disturbed by the interpretation that racial differences in skin and hair care reflected poor hygiene on the part of black women.

In addition to negative assumptions regarding their hygiene, another theme emerged: black women were presumed to be incapable of managing work-related tasks or holding positions of leadership. As the following quotes illustrate, presumptions of incompetence were sometimes present prior to hiring and reappeared in various settings.

I went on the interview and he said, “Well, the only reason I had you come in for an interview was to see if you really were all that you looked like on paper, because your resume was impressive. And I just...
wanted to see because I've never hired a black woman, and I don't really want to lower my standards to hire a black woman.

In the following example, a computer engineer describes repeated competence tests as a normal part of her work.

I teach computer-based classes to faculty, too. In one class of older white men—on a technical level they don't want to be taught by an African American woman. They don't think that I know what I'm talking about. During the first 5 or 10 minutes someone would ask me some question that had nothing to do with what I was teaching, but it was a really complex technical question and I answered it correctly and they were shocked.

As a result of living in an environment where their competence is continually challenged, participants reported feeling compelled to demonstrate additional knowledge and recognized that they were being subjected to repeated "competence tests" before being valued in their positions. Often these tests and assumptions of incompetence persisted over extended periods of time, if they ended at all. The assumption that black women are incompetent and incapable of leadership roles again demonstrates that their particular location in the matrix of privilege results in their continued harassment based on both race and gender.

Deconstructing these interactions demonstrates various aspects of dominance and privilege. It is evident that the white coworkers described here believed they had a right to impose their ideas, beliefs, and curiosities on black women at work. Participants were surprised by the freedom others felt to comment on their clothing, even when the others were not in a position of authority. Their comments also cause one to question who has the power to define their clothing as exotic or inappropriate as a result of its color. It is important to examine the privilege that accompanies the freedom to demand personal information about hygiene from others. Much like they felt free to make comments on black women's clothing, white coworkers were unrestrained in their curiosity regarding black women's hygiene. Participants described their astonishment with being physically touched by coworkers and felt that this reflected the privilege that whites, regardless of gender, have relative to African American women. Moreover, these women were subjected to both forms of dominance specific to their status as African American women. The questions and comments described here specifically isolated them as black women rather than as women in general or as blacks as a group. The freedom to touch and probe black women and the belief that satisfying one's curiosity trumps respect for the other's personal boundaries are but one manifestation of dominance over black women.

The second core theoretical proposition asserts that the legacy of slavery continues to affect how sexualized behavior and acts of dominance are experienced and perceived by both targets and perpetrators. Regardless of their position or rank within an organization, black women report treatment by white bosses, coworkers, and employees that reflect images born of this time period. Beyond the stereotypes of the Jezebel and Sapphire, which originated during slavery, the women also believed that former norms governing the work roles of black women relative to white women and men persisted in the present. More specifically, the women in this study noted that they were expected to fulfill the roles of servant and seductress, regardless of their organizational rank.

Perceptions of black women as seductive and hypersexed manifested in many ways. Often the nature of the sexual comments directed toward black women exploited the legacy of slavery and the sexualization of black female slaves. For example, one woman described an interaction with a white male coworker who, in attempting to flirt with her, commented, "I bet you're a slave to sex." Not only was this offensive because he believed that being sexual with her was an appropriate way of flirting, but he also conjured the painful legacy of slavery while doing so. As a white man, he may not have fully comprehended the gravity of such a statement. More importantly, because of his relative social status in relation to black
women, he did not need to fully consider the ramifications of such a comment.

In addition, the women in this sample believed that their treatment was different from that of Caucasian women, specifically because they continued to be seen as the Jezebel, a sexually insatiable black woman, which leads to negative presumptions regarding their sexuality. For example, participants reported that white coworkers and supervisors often felt free to be sexually explicit or to request information about their sex lives (e.g., seeking sexual advice, asking about sexual positions participants have tried, or telling participants of their own sexual exploits). These discussions occurred without sufficient opportunity to build the rapport or relationship that would normally precede such intimate conversation. Consequently, participants asserted that this behavior reflected an underlying assumption that African American women's sexual boundaries, both the behaviors they will engage in and their comfort in discussing sex, are looser than those of Caucasians. For example:

People will say things to a black woman. I don't care how much education she has, or what her position is, they'll say things to black women that they would never say to a white woman—no matter what position the white woman is in. They [white men] are more likely to not only say direct things, but to come out and do things to a black woman.

One woman said, "Not only are you supposed to accept it because you're black, but even like it, more than they would expect from white women." Several nodded and indicated agreement. One replied, "Yeah, you're there for their amusement."

It is important to note that negative stereotyping not only defined the manifestation of their harassment and the role of dominance for African American women, but also the way in which such events were perceived and responded to by targets. In addition to being targeted in ways that reflected sexualized stereotypes, participants believed that knowledge of these images and the sexually abusive relationships between white men and black female slaves affected their reactions to those behaviors. The following quotes illustrate these feelings.

It is more offensive from white men. I don't know if it's from *Roots* and slavery, but in the back of my mind I'm thinking, "Don't come at me that way."

As African American women coming out of traditional slavery work, we were owned body and soul by white men... We already have stereotypes working against us, we don't want to promote them. Sometimes you are an individual; sometimes you're the race.

Thus, these women were continuously conscious of the stereotypes of black women as both hypersexual and aggressive, as well as the history of sexually abusive interactions between white men and black women. For some, this knowledge made the acts more offensive when the perpetrator was a Caucasian man, but these stereotypes also presented a conflict in responding. Namely, women felt torn between protecting themselves from harassment at the risk of reinforcing racial stereotypes of black women as Sapphires (i.e., aggressive, domineering, amoral) and protecting their ethnic community, perhaps at great personal sacrifice.

In addition to the stereotypes of the Jezebel and the Sapphire, the structure of black women's work during slavery and beyond impacted their current experience of racial and gendered domination. During slavery, African American women were relegated to roles as servants to white men and women, and these continue to define work roles and expectations for many black women today. As a result, white men and women are unaccustomed to being in a subordinate role to black women. This was most obvious in their examples of white women subordinates' hostility and outright refusal to engage in behaviors that may be construed as "serving" a black woman—despite performing the same duties without incident for their former white male supervisors. The following were reported by
an assistant dean and an accountant regarding their interactions with white female secretaries:

The first thing my secretary did was say that she wasn't going to make the coffee. She said, "Oh there’s no coffee today, you should make it." ME? I'm not making the coffee! Literally the dean had to stand there and say, "you make the coffee" to my secretary. Well, one day she was there and she had to get some stuff that I needed, some files. She was throwing them at me and they were hitting the floor. And she was looking at me like, "you black B——, how dare you."

Historically, black women were servants in the homes of whites and worked under the close supervision of white women. After slavery, the occupational opportunities of black women continued to be restricted to subservient roles as cooks, maids, and caretakers. To date, despite their economic and educational gains, women of color continue to be disproportionately represented in such occupations. As a result of these role expectations, white people are unfamiliar with images of powerful black women, let alone those whose commands are to be respected and obeyed. The historical demarcation of power, privilege, and dominance that defines the roles and status of black women in relation to white men and women led participants to perceive these experiences as a refusal by whites to engage in behaviors that may be constructed as "serving" a black woman.

In an attempt to remedy this reversal of dominant roles, white co-workers and subordinates made overt and covert attempts to return the structure of power to their favor. As a result of both racial and gender dominance that disfavors black women, their attempts were often successful in reminding black women of "their place" according to white America. As one woman concluded: "They think we shouldn’t be making that type of money, regardless of whether I have a master's degree or not. I could have a Ph.D. and they would still think I should be serving them."

DISCUSSION

Since the term sexual harassment was first coined, feminists have argued that a focus on the role of patriarchy and male domination is critical to understanding sexual harassment. The resulting research is almost exclusively dominated by white feminists using white women as participants. As a result, theories about the relationship between sexual harassment and male domination have not incorporated the role of race or the experiences of black women and other women of color. Without an examination of intersecting systems of domination, specifically gendered and racial dominance, the harassment experiences of African American women are unlikely to be fully understood.

To address these limitations, the current study is unique in that it examines black women’s racial and sexual harassment as intersecting experiences. In addition, it draws upon new methodology and underutilized bodies of thought to examine the phenomenon. First, the study is rooted in a black feminist epistemology, which focuses on systems of oppression and their dominance over women of color. Second, focus groups composed exclusively of African American women were used because they are both effective when exploring sensitive topics with women of color and empowering for participants. Third, the strategies of analysis were rooted in grounded theory as an inductive method of theory generation. This is in stark contrast to most research on sexual harassment, which utilizes feminist theory without a multicultural perspective, does not include representative numbers of women of color, and enlists deductive methods of analysis in order to confirm established theory rather than generate new theoretical propositions. Specifically, these results demonstrate that examinations of the nexus of race and gender yield results that are often overlooked in traditional research.

When given the opportunity to discuss their experiences, the black women in this study claimed they commonly experienced racialized sexual harassment, that is, harassment with racial and sexual overtones. Not all their experiences were the same. The types of racialized sexual harassment described ranged from racial sexualization and denigration of clothing worn by black women to assumptions regarding their competence and personal hygiene. Their stories demonstrate how the history of slavery shapes contemporary experi-
ences of harassment, particularly regarding the persistence of stereotypes and assumptions regarding their sexuality.

Their experiences also illustrate how multiple systems of dominance impact everyday life. Within the interlocking hierarchies of gender and race, privilege is relational. For example, the women in this study experienced class privilege relative to poor women of color, but if compared to white men, even poor white men, the balance of privilege and dominance shifts against them. Their stories show with great specificity how racialized sexual harassment is used by white women, as well as black and white men, to protect and steal power (Johnson 2001).

The women in this study defined as harassment experiences that did not clearly fit commonly accepted definitions of either sexual or racial harassment. This may reflect the racial differences in perceptions of an environment, which develop as a result of their differing history of oppression. For example, in one study of professional black and white women, it was found that black women were much more likely to perceive gender and racial inequality in the workplace (Higginbotham & Weber 1999). This implies that, at least in the workplace, black and white women are experiencing different worlds, and racialized sexual harassment is one experience that divides them.

The finding that black women feel sexually harassed by white women was surprising. Because of their common experience of gender oppression, it would be natural for African American and Caucasian women to unite around workplace harassment. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Instead, white women often perpetuated and/or responded to myths and stereotypes of black women as incompetent, dirty, and sexually immoral. Moreover, because of their racial privilege, white women appeared additionally offended by having to “serve” black women (e.g., by making coffee, getting files).

Although white women also experience gender oppression, they have a stake in maintaining aspects of the matrix of domination because they experience white privilege (Collins 1998, 2000, Hurtado 1996, 2003, Johnson 2001) and identification with the aggressor, white men. This can manifest in acts of actual harassment perpetrated by white women, or in their silence when they witness the harassment of another. Women in this study voiced frustration with those who observed harassment and said nothing, or later apologized for a witnessed event. The reluctance of others to publicly state their discomfort with inappropriate comments or behaviors acts as collusion with perpetrators, whether they agreed with the events or not. As Allan G. Johnson states, “oppression and dominance name social realities that we can participate in without being oppressive or dominating people” (2001:13). By virtue of their silence, white women hid behind their own matrix of privilege and benefited from that privilege as a result.

These findings also suggest that African American women are particularly vulnerable to contrapower harassment, defined as harassment directed toward an employer or supervisor by subordinates (Rospenda et al. 1998). As members of two socially marginalized demographic groups (women and ethnic minorities), black women experience multiple forms of dominance and limited social privilege. As a result, both male and Caucasian employees may feel that their lower social status as women of color overrides their formal organizational power, thereby increasing their vulnerability to contrapower harassment.

Interestingly, some of these experiences also required a re-creation of the race and gender hierarchy to reach resolution. Specifically, in the earlier example in which the secretary refused to make coffee, the situation was not resolved until the dean of the college, a white male, issued a direct order to the secretary to make coffee. To legitimize her own status, she had to appeal to someone of greater social and organization power, the college dean (a white man). This “power by proxy” keeps black women, even professional women, in a precarious position. Because others do not afford them the benefits of their status, they may be forced to align themselves with white
men, who may also exert varying levels of racial and gendered dominance over them. As a result, African American women are continually vulnerable at work, even when acquiring positions of organizational power.

Expectations of racialized sexual harassment and vulnerability to contrapower harassment may explain the reluctance of African American women to establish mentoring relationships and/or friendships with Caucasian coworkers and employers. Specifically, the black women who participated in these focus groups were fearful of interactions with white men being interpreted as an invitation for a sexual relationship, which may lead to harassment (Richie et al. 1997). The choices these women made to protect themselves from possible harassment not only had personal costs, but likely limited their access to the benefits such relationships can provide, such as promotional opportunities and career enhancement.

Future examinations of interlocking dominance must consider how social class influences the experience of racialized sexual harassment. Although none of our participants identified as lower or working class, it is important to consider how class privilege may have impacted their experiences as well as those of other African American working women (Hurtado 1996). Classism has been used as justification for differential pay for women, and because of its interaction with other forms of subordination and dominance, it has a differential impact on African American women (Johnson 2001). Historically, black women have been among the lowest paid in the workforce, falling far below men of all races and white women in salaries, even for similar positions (Corcoran 1999, England, Christopher, & Reid 1999). Although not addressed in this study, it is also possible that these women experienced more severe harassment because their education and organizational status were a greater challenge to the social hierarchy than black women in more traditional occupations. Nevertheless, their elevated class status is likely to provide privileges not afforded to working-class African American women, particularly those in blue-collar jobs. For example, Gruber and Bjorn (1982) found that black women in blue-collar employment experienced more severe forms of sexual harassment. Therefore, it is likely that women in this study were spared the more overt and/or severe forms of racialized sexual harassment that may be directed toward blue-collar black women. So, although their position within the matrix of domination placed them lower than both men and white women, the women in this study still enjoyed some privilege based on class.

Current mainstream research on coping with sexual harassment does not adequately incorporate black women’s responses to racialized sexual harassment (Buchanan, Langhout, and Fitzgerald 2000). Black women’s coping strategies vary depending upon the gender and race of the perpetrator. For example, the strategies chosen take into account the belief that official action against a black male perpetrator may result in harsher consequences than similar accusations against a white man. Participants in the current study recognized that black men can exert gender dominance over them, but their power was different from that of white men because of their location in the racial hierarchy.

In another study of black women’s ways of coping, Jenkins (2002) found that participants experiencing community violence utilized strategies rarely addressed in the coping literature (e.g., prayer and political activism). Moreover, demographic factors, such as education and income, influenced participants’ coping styles, such that more highly educated women with higher incomes responded to violence by isolating themselves from potential harm and becoming politically active in their communities. Based on these research findings and the intersections of racial, gendered, and sometimes also economic oppression, it is likely that they will utilize or reject certain coping strategies based on their utility in addressing their intersecting oppressions.

CONCLUSION
Although the goal of this project was to examine the experiences of African American women’s workplace harassment, the applicability
of this data to the general population, indeed, to the population of African American women, is limited. Participants who elected to participate may have been more likely to have negative work experiences, more likely to conceptualize these experiences as hostile, or more willing to discuss such events than people who did not participate. Also, because advertisements for participation in the study specifically requested African American women, those who responded may have a stronger racial, gender, or combined identification than those who did not. This may have made them more likely than other African American women to label experiences along dimensions of race and gender or their intersection.

The findings point to the need for interventions and training that integrate issues of both racial and gendered dominance. As the women in this study asserted, race and gender are inextricable in their lives because participants embody the nexus of the two. Therefore, workplace training must address these intersections and understand the nuances of racialized gender oppression. In addition, when these interconnections are understood, it becomes clear that perpetrators, as was the case here, can be of many forms, including Caucasian women and African American men. To be truly effective, trainings will need to broaden their conceptualization of harassment. However, change requires more than new trainings or simply giving people of color and women positions of power while the current gender and racial hierarchies still exist (Guinier & Torres 2002). Instead, change requires that we deconstruct the matrices of domination and privilege that create conditions where racialized sexual harassment flourishes. Such efforts require all stakeholders to recognize and take action against the harm resulting from workplace harassment and the subordination of women and people of color.

Overall, this study makes a strong argument for the importance of not overlooking either racial or gendered components when examining the harassment experiences of ethnic minority women. Participants described events they considered both racist and sexist, and unique to them because they were both black and female. Indeed, many examples were specific to them as black women, and few of these experiences would happen to either white women or black men. This places African American women at a crossroads, where their particular location in the matrix of domination and privilege puts them at risk for multiple, intersecting forms of oppression. As a result, they are continually sexualized for their race and for their gender.

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