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Respectability, Resistance, and Code-Switching: The Hidden Psychological Labor of African American Women Educators in Professional Spaces

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Abstract

African American women educators frequently navigate professional educational environments shaped by racialized expectations, institutional power structures, and gendered stereotypes. Within predominately white educational spaces, many Black women educators engage in continuous code-switching and emotional self-monitoring in order to maintain professional legitimacy while simultaneously avoiding negative racialized stereotypes. This article examines the psychological and emotional labor associated with professional respectability politics among African American women educators.

Grounded in Critical Race Theory, Black feminist thought, and sociolinguistic perspectives surrounding code-switching, this work explores how African American women educators navigate the tension between authenticity and professional survival within contemporary educational systems. Particular attention is given to the emotional taxation associated with tone-policing, behavioral regulation, professional image management, and racialized expectations surrounding communication styles.

This article also examines the long-term implications of professional code-switching on educator wellness, identity negotiation, leadership advancement, and workplace belonging. Drawing from practitioner experience, educational scholarship, and sociocultural analysis, the authors argue that code-switching should not be understood solely as communication adaptation, but as a survival mechanism rooted in systemic inequity and institutionalized whiteness.

By centering the lived realities of Black women educators, this work contributes to broader conversations surrounding workplace equity, educational leadership, emotional labor, race, gender, and

professional identity within contemporary society.

Keywords: African American Women Educators, Code-Switching, Emotional Labor, Respectability Politics, Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, Professional Identity, Educational Leadership