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## Despite the Place, Can't Escape Gender and Race: Black Women's Faculty Experiences at PWIs and HBCUs

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# Despite the Place, Can't Escape Gender and Race

## Black Women's Faculty Experiences at PWIs and HBCUs

Tara B. Blackshear & Leah P. Hollis

### Abstract

Despite the profound academic and professional achievements among Black women, the intersection of race and gender in higher education remains inescapable. Black female tenure-track and tenured professors at predominantly white institutions (PWIs) commonly experience challenges; however, the challenges Black women confront at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are not publicly discussed. Using critical race and feminist theories, which is critical race feminism, the purpose of this study is to explore the intersections of race and gender among Black female tenure-track professors working at PWIs and HBCUs. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with Black female tenure-track and tenured professors at HBCUs and PWIs. The results highlight that Black women continue to experience exploitative and oppressive conditions regardless of their educational attainment, academic successes, or institutional locale.

### Introduction

The litany of literature regarding Black women's challenges in the academy at predominately white institutions (PWI) is overwhelming, especially for those on the tenure-track (Carroll, 2017; Dade et al, 2015; Flaherty, 2016; Kelly &

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McCann, 2014; Kelly & Winkle-Wagner, 2017; Matthew, 2016; Rockquomore, & Laszloffy, 2008). The University of Michigan, Dartmouth, and Michigan State University have reputations of tenure oppression among Black female faculty despite their respective mission statements of inclusivity (Justia, 1982; Matthew, 2016). Black men and women brace for the radicalized oppressions experienced at PWIs given white America's history of racial hatred towards Blacks.

In another context, a confounding dynamic emerges from one of the most poignant displays of oppression of Black women in education is at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). While the literature addressing Black women's experiences at HBCUs is not as robust as the body of literature exploring Black women's experiences as PWIs, the Black women's experiences are understudied just as HBCUs are understudied (Hague, 2018; Thompson, 1973).

Harvard College (now university), the first PWI, was established in 1636 for white men during the enslavement of Africans. Interestingly, white men established HBCUs 200 years later in 1837 with Cheyney University as the first. Shortly after the 1865 Emancipation Proclamation, several other whites established Black colleges, such as Fisk University founded in 1866, Howard University founded in 1867, Morehouse College founded in 1866, and Spelman College founded in 1881. (Cooper, 2018) The general mission of Black colleges was to educate former slaves and also educate the slave master's children of color who were often born from coercive sexual relationships with Black women slaves (Lovett, 2011). As such, white patriarchy is embedded in the foundation of many HBCUs.

In the face of this newly found freedom, HBCUs' professional and liberal arts curriculum was designed for Black men only, as the HBCU system was created and governed by white men (Lovett, 2011). The hegemonic underpinnings of higher education seldom included Black women, unless their course work prepared Black women for service fields such as nursing, teaching, and domestic science. Consequently, whether at a PWI or HBCU, the higher education sectors customarily ignored and diminished Black women's presence. Given Black women's history and recent academic accomplishments with the advent of Title IX (1972) giving access to women, and Title VII (1964), attempting to grant access to minorities, Black women have developed a complex sense of self. A corresponding complex conveyance of that self which reflects Black women's perceived intellectual and emotional safety, or lack thereof, in their academic spaces, as these spaces are centered around whiteness and maleness. As such, Black women consciously select ways of being and existing depending on the "power and agency" (Sulé, 2014, p. 436) in a specific environment. Though these ways of being such as privileging the racial self or dismissing the gendered self often subjugate part of the whole identity, these choices help Black women to navigate the professoriate, which seldom was embraced at the time of this writing in mid-2020. The entirety of Black women's identities, and the subsequent way they face some sort of oppression, regardless of the space and place, highlights the persistence historical dominion that still grips both PWIs and HBCUs.

### **The Legacy of White Patriarchy Is Here, Too**

Though discriminatory experiences are more commonly associated with PWIs, Black women faculty also experience discriminatory challenges at HBCUs, as many in the Black community have signed on to white patriarchy and remain on the plantation with Black men as the overseers who have been unable or unwilling to escape the plantation mentality (Marable, 1983, 2015; Green, 2007). As Green (2007) re-counts the sanitation strike by Black Americans during the 1960s civil rights movement, she acknowledges that many Black people wanted to break free from plantation-like conditions, and describes “plantation mentality” as not only “denouncing white individuals who behave like plantation bosses but also Black people who appear fearful of breaking free of their white supervisors” (p.252). Given the loyalty to uplifting the Black race, however, Black female professors often refrain from publicly discussing the ‘isms’ that affect them at HBCUs. Unfortunately for many Black women faculty who successfully earn a tenure-track position at an HBCU, the euphoria wanes dramatically when the knot of the double-bind still strangles self-determination in once presumably safe space of the Black college (Collins, 2000; Mithaug, 1996). Hine (1993) defined this double-bind as being both Black and woman; yet further, Hine (1993) assigns an increasingly complex identity in a fiveness of race, age, class, gender, and American. Regardless of the intensity of complex intersectionalities from which Black women emerge, they are inextricably tied to all of these identities which create a historically unresolved tension from which Black women strive to uplift the race, while the gender-based discriminations that they endure are relegated to a mere footnote.

A more contemporary reminder of this unresolved tension within the HBCU occurred in 2016 when the HBCU community witnessed four Black women ripped from their respective HBCU presidencies in a two-month period (deGregory, 2016). One of the authors of this article was privy to one such coup; a colleague recounted how one of the women presidents, an outstanding scholar, and administrator, faced public shame as she had to call in the vote of her own demise. This trend is far from new with Wright (2008) arguing that Black women have been continuously locked out of the HBCU presidency—a legacy of white patriarchy. Hence, while shocked, but not startled with these rapid departures for Black women HBCU presidents, Black women continue to come to terms with the undeniable reality, that the shadow of sexism falls even here at the HBCU (The Culture, n.d).

Unfortunately, Black women have often been removed or removed themselves from gender equity struggles when it involves struggling within the race. “Regrettably, the hegemony of white patriarchy influenced the consciousness of Black women as well as men” (Manning, 1983, p.73). Gasman (2007) recounts that Black women have been subject to microaggressions or simply removed from historical accounts. Carter G. Woodson (1990), a Black man and scholar, recounts how white presidents of HBCUs refused to dignify Black women with titles or

respect, instead of relegating Black women to gal or auntie (Gasman, 2007). *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* by James Anderson is brought forward by Gasman (2007) as another example chronicling how Black women did not receive the same training as their male counterparts. Though the Hampton Institute model, “did not want to make white men of Indians and Negroes” (Chireau, 2006), it strove to produce Black men who were just palatable enough after slavery. The traditional domestic and service training that Black women were given at HBCUs fortified the traditional roles for women. When compared to the roles that Black women held in their homeland, the traditional patriarchal roles hoisted upon them at HBCUs were an extension of white male expectations; it was and remains a concerted “dewomanization” (Hudson-Weems, 2019).

As Black women did eventually move into the faculty ranks at Black colleges, the tradition to pay them less than their male counterparts continued (Carby, 1982; Hollis, 2019). Thompson (1973) attributed this trend to university Black women as a trailing spouse following husbands to new towns. In turn, Black women accepted lower pay given this constraint (Gasman, 2007). Further, Thompson (1973) quoted a department head reflecting on Black women faculty: “They are forever housewives or society matrons...Even in the most formal academic situations, they behave more like housewives than skilled professionals. Most of them shy away from any duty or involved that might interfere with family affairs” (Gasman, 2007, p. 771; Thompson, 1973, p. 124). The trajectory through which Black women emerge in higher education is analogous with colonialist appropriation (Bergner, 1995; Fanon, 2007). Black women did not choose these roles, yet these gendered racial identities remain indelible since the inception of HBCUs was white and male. Hence, the contemporary expectations still evolve from white patriarchal origins.

While the minimalist inclusions of Black women in education are ever-present, the absence of major accomplishments remains a side note. Gasman (2007) recounts how Woodson failed to recognize Mary Bethune-Cookman who established the Daytona Education and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls that later evolved into Bethune-Cookman College. Black women were kept marginalized on the sidelines at a school built exclusively for them, a trend that took over 100 years to break. Founded in 1881, Spelman College appointed its first Black woman president, the very dynamic Johnnetta Betch Cole, in 1987, a salient example of white and Black patriarchy coupled with a plantation mentality, as Spelman College is an institution for Black women only.

One of the few scholars to break from patriarchal expectations and instead give truth to power regarding race and gender at an HBCU, Florence Bonner (2001), documented how gender inequity is pervasive for Black women. While the HBCU has championed the advancement of the race, Bonner (2001) reported that 45% of Black women responding to her study claimed to experience gender discrimination. Bonner (2001) and Davis and Brown (2017) further commented that many Black women expressed fear about participating in the study and

often diminished the fight for gender equity in preference for the fight for racial equality. In the isolating faculty experience, many Black women faculty members often do not receive proper mentoring, career mobility, or pay equity (Bonner, 2001). Gasman (2014) confirmed further, that Black women continue to be locked out of the upper echelons of power at the HBCU. Despite this social, intellectual, and financial pressure cooker, Black women faculty still strive to avoid the 'angry Black woman' label even when she considers expressing legitimate concerns about the discrimination heaped on her persona and career (Davis & Brown, 2017). The culmination of these painful experiences leaves some Black women HBCU faculty members, "vowing never to work at another Black school" (Bonner, 2001, p. 178), which illustrates that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 2007).

The historical patterns of yesteryear remain consistent today with Black women still expected to operate in roles of servitude; thus, only four percent of all faculty are Black women; further, they are less likely to earn tenure and more leave the academy (Darity, 2008; NCES, 2015). The challenges Black women experience at PWIs are goliath in comparison to their gendered and non-gendered counterparts as they endure daily bouts of sexism and racism while working at PWIs. However, the ill-treatment of Black women at PWIs is replicated at HBCUs.

### **Theoretical Framework— Critical Race and Black Feminist Theories**

We draw on the theoretical constructs of critical race theory and Black feminism. While critical race theory (CRT) draws on several tenants, we employ three: 1) the permanence of racism or the understanding that racism exists in every macro- and micro-element in American culture and its institutional structures—especially in education; 2) interest conversion or confronting the notion that policies designed to benefit Black/Brown or women folk actually supports and sustains mostly white women (e.g., Affirmative Action), thus reinforcing white supremacy, and 3) the critique of liberalism challenges institutional statements of diversity and inclusion, and post-racial rhetoric (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Crenshaw, 1995; Hiraldo, 2010; Tate, 1997).

With the intersectionality of two marginalized groups, CRT does not fully convey Black women's plight. Collins (1986) noted that Black women have been the 'other within.' During slavery, Black women served as nursemaids, cooks, and servants, the same positions they were trained for at HBCUs. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, white people reflect on their love for the Black mammy who nursed children, made homespun meals, and cared for sick family members, all while neglecting her own family. The 'other within' regarding the academic landscape shows that when a Black woman earns a tenure-track position in a predominantly white school, she is laden with service, acting as the nurturer to scores of Black students who also

feel ostracized in white environments; nonetheless, she typically preforms such service silently (Mawhinney, 2011). Black women in tenure-track positions at HBCUs are again the ‘outsiders within’ because they are in a man’s world. She is the trailing spouse. She is to accept lower pay and less status because she supports her man who was viewed as the true intellect of the family (Lovett, 2011).

No matter how intelligent, how savvy, and how educated, the Black woman in both PWIs and HBCUs are constrained by race and gender. The binds of race and gender typically lead to economic subjugation, though the field of higher education relies on resources, social capital, and economic stability to participate in a manner that earns tenure and promotion. In short, to borrow again from Collins (1990), Black women scholars regardless of race or place are ensnared in a ‘matrix of domination,’ oppressed due to their race, their gender or both.

The literature confirms that the space and place only shift the manifestation of oppression and subjugation. Armstrong (2007) and Blackshear (2020) highlight the problems that Black women face in sport and physical activity fields, while Parsons and Mensah (2010) confirm the obstacles facing Black women in the sciences. Whether in rural communities (Norris, 2012), in archeology (Battle-Baptiste, 2017), political science (Simien, 2004), the space, place, or discipline does not provide relief from oppression for Black women in the academy. Black women continuously are ensnared in one form of oppression or another.

*“All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are Brave”* is the title of a groundbreaking anthology on Black feminism by Hull, Scott, and Smith (1982) that remains a poignant summation of the inextricable confluence of identities Black women embody. Further still beyond race and gender, the intersections Black women embody are inclusive of class, sexual orientation, age, and other personas. Yet, over 35 years after this anthology appeared, the academy still adheres to the historical propensity to ignore, overlook, or just not care about the complex insight and personas Black women bring to enrich any academic environment. Consequently, an amalgam of critical race theory and Black feminism, and race feminism, guides this paper’s theoretical perspective (Sulé, 2014).

Crenshaw (1995) argues that the discourses, which resist racism and sexism typically, fail to be inclusive of a simultaneous consideration of both. “Mainstream civil rights rhetoric is based on the experience of Black men, while mainstream feminism has taken the life experiences of white women as the paradigm” (Crenshaw, et al., 1995, p. 354). Consequently, Black women are left engaging in an either/or discourse, which leads to an incomplete narrative. When Black men ignore the gendered experiences and when white women ignore the racial experience, Black women struggle against both erasures. In many cases, Black women then choose to support the race and leave the gendered self as a secondary issue. Then, the conundrum continues with political, economic, and cultural discourses continuously evolving from an incomplete context.

Sulé (2014) and Harris (2003) rightfully posit that the gendered and racial

personas for Black women cannot be and should not be dissected and analyzed independently of the other. This aligns with Symington (2004) who claims that women's identities should not be divided and analyzed, but instead, an analysis of the whole persona is required to elucidate the truth in Black women's experiences (Hollis, 2018). The complexity that Black women experience also is not just related to race and gender their experiences are also inclusive of but not limited to age, culture, class, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and language (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001). Consequently, a recent study confirmed a finding that the more complex a women's intersectionality, the more likely she is to face workplace bullying and organization abuse (Hollis, 2018).

### **Methods**

During the fall of 2018, both researchers developed an interview protocol for a comparative phenomenological approach to interview Black women faculty members at PWIs and HBCUs. Both researchers were also tenure-track faculty members and appreciated that as with any qualitative researcher, their respective social contexts can be a factor. To increase trustworthiness and reduce bias, the researchers collaborated on the interview protocol and interviewed women different from their respective institutions. The participants were recruited through a snowball sampling. Consistent with Hollis (2017), the researchers developed rapport with the participants and reassured them that their personal identities and institutions would not be revealed. The agreement was confirmed via the informed consent, which was approved by Towson University's Institutional Review Board. Participants' names, institutions, and other personally identifiable information were edited from all resulting transcripts before coding and data analysis. Nine participants were interviewed—four from HBCUs, four from PWIs, and one from an HBCU with tenure-track experiences at an HBCU and PWI. Interviews were conducted and audiotaped using a specific interview protocol for all participants. The interviews lasted from 25-45 minutes and were transcribed and coded for emergent themes by identifying recurring phrases. Participants were shown their respective transcripts and the final manuscript to ensure accuracy in reporting. The goal was to cultivate emergent themes from Black women's narratives and compare narratives between PWI faculty and HBCU faculty.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### ***HBCU Participants***

The HBCU faculty participants, from four different HBCUs, were all highfliers, which might be attributed to their time in higher education. All of them were over 50 years of age and had nationally recognized scholarship, which afforded them speaking opportunities while on the tenure-track. All of them comment-

ed that they kept their national profiles ‘under wraps’ on their respective HBCU campuses because the embodiment of ‘national expert’ and a ‘woman’ was not appreciated or celebrated. Two of the women have left the HBCU faculty ranks, with one in an executive position at a PWI. Two of the faculty members were teaching at an HBCU at the time of the interview. The following analysis presents the HBCU experience, then the PWI experience followed by the comparison of both groups. To ensure anonymity, African inspired pseudonyms are assigned to each participant (Asante, 1992).

**Imani** is named such for her faith and spirituality, which has guided her through her career. She started her career at an HBCU on the tenure-track and successfully earned tenure. She was the only woman in her department. She has since obtained an executive position in higher education.

**Nailah** is named for her success and perseverance, which she replied upon remaking her career after she was terminated from her tenure-track position. She worked at two HBCUs and noted the struggle she found in fighting for students while withstanding an unsupportive environment. While she loved supporting Black students, she advanced her career to start her own business.

**Bisa** is named for how beloved she has been to students and faculty in her fight for equity. She is a seasoned faculty member and administrator with faculty experiences at both PWIs and HBCUs.

**Shaquana** is named for how she strives for truth in life. She is committed to her research agenda and paving the way for her students. Her research also put her on the national speaking circuit. Her experiences also include PWIs and HBCUs.

Ten themes (see Table 1) emerged regarding Black women faculty experiences at the HBCU. To be considered an emergent theme, at least three of the four women noted the problem.

### **1. Students**

All four Black women commented they were committed to Black students and the students’ development. They all appreciated that the HBCU is a great environment in which Black students can solidify their racial identities and bolster their confidence. Shaquana stated, “because of race I can be more open with my students...” Imani stated, “focus has to be on students, that’s why we do what we do, to try to give our students the professional role and their role in it.”

### **2. Salary**

All four women had salary issues at their respective HBCUs. Some specifically reported unequal pay issues; one was demoted and stripped of a project and the corresponding salary. A third commented on men with few qualifications had higher

**Table 1**  
**Emergent Themes at HBCUs and PWIs**

	<i>Themes at HBCUs</i>	<i>Themes at PWIs</i>
<i>Race</i>	Black women faculty are truly committed to serving Black students. Felt that education could be more inclusive of racial themes and factors at and HBCU.	Racism exists and is expected at PWIs. Black women felt and were aware that they were held to higher standards than white peers. Culturally raised to exceed expectations as a solution to succeed.
<i>Gender</i>	All experienced sexism, being diminished due to gender. A majority reported unequal pay. All commented that men's opinions and projects taken more seriously while they all were ignored. However, all reported being assigned additional work, or tougher work than men.	Three experienced sexism by white male colleagues and male (Black and white) students, however, dismissive and disrespectful behaviors were evident among white female students, too. All women reported better relationships with Black female students, but acknowledged there weren't many students of color.
<i>Race &amp; Gender</i>	Black women had to produce more than men. While silencing wasn't along racial lines, gender lines used to quiet women, their worth and diminish value of their expertise. Majority of women commented a man shared his social capital to move their careers forward.	Imposter syndrome, self-doubt, anxiety, and high stress levels, which support the pressures to exceed tenure expectations. Experiences shape research agendas which differ from initial research agendas. Black women experience student disrespect. Their knowledge and abilities are questioned. Students and staff refuse to use "Dr." for Black women faculty but always use "Dr." for white male faculty. Black women experience low course evaluations. Black women are excluded socially and collegially. Service burden: often asked to represent Black folks because there aren't many. Asked to serve on committees that don't help with tenure. Black women constantly monitor their behavior and consciously thinking about the angry Black Woman image. Black women are encouraged to be silent.
<i>Benefits/ Positives</i>	Helping Black students.	Increasing faculty and student diversity.
<i>Burdens</i>	Being silenced due to commitment to race, but exploited by own race because of gender. At times women who adopted misogynist's behaviors were worst culprits. Expected to make commitment to university service which university emotionally abused Black women faculty.	Service contributions are overlooked. The desire to do more for Black students but doing so negatively impacts scholarship and merit. The constant monitoring of the self to avoid falling into stereotypes.

salaries. Nailah commented, “I had a PhD and came in at \$50,000, and a male friend came with only a masters but he got \$80,000.” Bisa stated, “As women, we get paid a whole lot less than men in all departments here except one or two... the president ignored my internal study of women and pay. It took me a month...I didn’t even get a thank you.” Imani noted how she did not get paid bereavement time like the men, “I’ll take the cut in my salary. I have to go to my family’s funeral.”

### **3. Women Are Oppressed**

All four women definitely felt oppressed at their respective HBCUs. Men’s work was championed but even other women ignored women’s work. Bisa stated, “I have a great national reputation, but I have no reputation in this tiny little school.” Imani stated, “I engaged in a way that was very quiet. I was involved in professional organizations. I was very active and very big. When you’re doing so much professional work, when you are different, it makes you vulnerable.” Shaquana recalled, “Yes, my work has to be twice as good. One woman colleague gets an international award, and she is ignored in an open meeting. A male colleague gets an institutional windfall, that was literally given to him, it is like he won the Nobel Prize.” Nailah commented that at her second HBCU, one of the women from the president’s cabinet hit on her, making inappropriate comments. When Nailah rebuffed the same-sex approach, her standing with the administration was weakened.

### **4. Sexism**

All four women commented they faced sexism in their respective tenure-track faculty positions. Imani remarked that she was the caregiver and counselor to her male department chair, who talked to her endlessly despite the open fact that she was newly married and had two small children at home. Bisa stated, “Sexism accounts for 98% of the toxic situation at our school. Women who are doing excellent things are mowed under.” She also reported, “I won a national award. They refused to acknowledge it. They would not allow anyone to publish that award at the University.” Shaquana reported, “Working at the HBCU is the single most sexist place I have worked. I have never seen other women work so very hard to destroy women faculty.”

### **5. Male Support System**

Interestingly, all four women commented that a male helped them climb in their careers. Bisa recalled, “I had a male here in the HBCU; he was actually very good and very supportive. I never got so much negative stuff from him. Then, I got a female supervisor and everything went downhill... negative. Very negative. Imani stated, “while I needed to stay late and listen to my boss, he did make good on his promise. He made me the department chair, which allowed me to hire two other women into the department.”

**6. Reporting Sexism**

Shaquana reported her disbelief, “My family and I thought HBCUs were about civil rights... right?! WRONG! The people close to me are crushed and disillusioned as they watch me face unreal discrimination/sexism. They are in such disbelief. How can an HBCU treat another Black person so very poorly?” Bisa stated, “Yes I reported it [sexism]. Nothing... nothing ever happens. I complained about how I was treated at promotion. The provost would not even look at the books I brought to her. It was a shame- so disappointing.” She also stated, “... those who do speak up, they get crushed and knocked over...” However, Imani recalled, “We just didn’t report those things. There was a man in my department who spoke poorly about women, very sexist and offensive... we all knew it. I just stayed away from him. We just didn’t report things like that.” Shaquana also stated, “... so often Black women don’t report what men are doing. For example, look at Bill Cosby. Several women of color knew what he was doing; but didn’t want to bring down the race... so the sexist behavior continues.”

**7. Service**

Three of four Black women faculty stated that their service wasn’t appreciated. Shaquana commented, “They had me working on a project, in which I did double presentations, coordinated other faculty, and even brought students. But when I asked about my pay, I became a target of intense harassment. They were stealing my labor.” Bisa remarked, “I feel like I have been slapped in the face. We’re trying to help and support and it’s frustrating and I just very disgusted.” Nailah commented, “When they told me in January I was terminated in May, sure I kept working with students, but I stopped working on the grants. And I was good at getting grants.”

**8. Health**

All four women reported health problems. Bisa commented on stress and migraine headaches. She said she had other stress related ailments, but didn’t offer more information. Imani and Shaquana recalled weight gain, perhaps from eating comfort food combined with the sedentary life of constant writing publications to go for tenure. Nailah who had worked at two HBCUs recalls weight swings due to stress. She also remarked, “Balding, I definitely remember balding from the stress. The spot was toward the front of my head.”

**9. University Culture**

While the four women interviewed continued their commitment to students, the women quietly withdrew from university culture. Bisa stated, “I kind of don’t care. It’s obvious they don’t respect me or what I do.” Shaquana remarked, “I have to protect myself in this environment. Sure. they will take my labor and not

pay like the men. I have to turn my energy to external service where colleagues at least say “congratulations” and mean it.”

### ***10. Women Don't Complain***

Bisa stated, “Women have a need for collective voice—but when other women speak out and shut down, the culture is CHILLED. Frankly, women can't afford to lose jobs.” Shaquana commented, “Who do you complain to when women are some of the biggest enablers of sexism? Sure, I know of other women who complained to the diversity office, absolutely nothing happened. In fact, some of the women were called to an intimidating meeting with the provost (also a woman).” Nailah recounted, “Everyone saw how the president kept approaching me at an alumni meeting. I wasn't interested. I didn't report it. He didn't touch me or grope me. I figured I could just handle it. But it did hurt my ability to be approved for different projects.”

The women participants from HBCUs were seemingly free of the constraint's white expectations place on faculty. Yet, none of the women commented that feminism was part of their pedagogy. The HBCU women often subscribed to self-silencing either from fear of retribution or the notion that they just are not heard, behaviors, and beliefs which are vestiges of patriarchal and imperialist doctrine (Fanon, 2007). Many of the themes signify the patriarchal objectification of Black women, even at HBCUs. Such experiences align with Fanon (2007) whose decolonization lens explained why Black women were considered sub-human, objects and commodities, not viable, and appreciated citizens. These participants' remarks further note the objectification a white patriarchal society has continually assigned to Black women in the western world for centuries.

### ***PWI Participants***

Four of five PWI participants, from four different PWIs, were on their way to high flying status, as they were younger than the HBCU participants and in the early stages of their careers. Two of four at the PWIs were also targets of ageism because of their youth, three were in their 30s and one in her 40s. The fifth participant was from an HBCU but had two PWI, two HBCU tenure-track experiences, and a few non-tenure-track experiences at PWIs. She, like the HBCU participants, was in her 50s and from a different generation than the other four PWI participants. Two women earned tenure and three were on the tenure-track. The older participant earned tenure at one PWI and two HBCUs. Two women attended different HBCUs for their undergraduate work, and three attended different PWIs. Two worked in programs among all white men and one is in a department with roughly 17% Black faculty of multiple ranks—Four were the first and only Black faculty hired to work in their programs. Reports by these women are consistent in

the literature on Black women's experiences in tenured and tenure-track positions at PWIs (Croom, 2017; Harlow, 2003; Matthew, 2016).

**Adebola** is named for her success as she met honor superseding tenure expectations in a field that grossly underrepresents women and people of color. She is the only Black person in her department among mostly old white men. These men represent a long history of privilege and oppression, which Adebola is more aware of as a voting member for tenure outcomes. She was dismayed with the low productivity of white male colleagues who earned tenure at much lower standards—a highlight of white patriarchy and the permanence of racism. Adebola is biding her time, however, and states “I’m outlasting them...I’m suffering with you now, but when you’re gone, I’m going to be one of the more senior people and I get to make it [the program] in the image I want.” Adebola did not have as difficult time as other women in tenure-track experiences, which she confirmed as she stated, “I’m the only one of five to earn tenure” in a national women’s research group where she was a participant.

**Dhakiya** is named for her smartness in playing the game of tenure effectively as she remains calm amidst the complexity of her intersections as she too is the first and only Black person and only woman working alongside old white men—another indication of white patriarchy and the permanence of racism given her “first” status. Given her experiences, she recognizes that “there’s a lot of work to still be done,” which has caused her to expand her research focus on “African American students at PWIs as well as faculty experiences and microaggressions.”

**Kumiwa** means brave, as she resisted social constructs at her institution and stood in solidarity with other Black colleagues. She reported that “we collectively decided that we would make a visible collective effort to affirm our Blackness and the value of it at the next faculty meeting. And so, we wore all black and wore a sort of Black pride shirt.” Unlike the other women at the PWIs, Kumiwa had the support and appreciated that she has “other Black women alongside me on the tenure-track at my institution...I mean, being able to walk in someone’s office, like literally being able to walk down the hall and step in and be able to say girl or ooh girl...has different intonations (laughter)... I can just be myself, I can show up as my cultural self.” At the time of publication, however, Kumiwa left this institution for another PWI, as she “was not supported,” which is a common phenomenon for Black women in the professoriate (Matthew, 2016).

**Njideka** is named for her *paramount survival* as she has encountered the most egregious infractions of gendered racism as the promotion and tenure track committee has voted to not re-appoint her every year—a first for any faculty member in the history of her institution. Fortunately, each year, the vote was overturned and Njideka has continued on her tenure track journey. Unlike the other participants, her oppressor, a white male senior colleague, explicitly tried to sabotage her success

by inviting her as a guest lecturer in his class, and unbeknownst to her, conducted a peer evaluation, which was negative. He added the evaluation to her file on two occasions—against policy, but allowed. Initially, Njideka was unsure if this interaction was because of race, gender and/or power afforded the senior colleague. White patriarchy and the permanence of racism appeared evident to others, as a white female mentor encouraged her to discuss race in her response after facing issues that differed from her white peers. She was affirmed to speak her truth and use her voice. Njideka recalls, “And so this time when I wrote my review, I completely talked about race and I hadn’t talked about it before and this time I talked about it. You know, I was like, this is a problem and clearly this is what the issues are [racism]. And so, I made sure that I included that where I hadn’t before.” Njideka refuses to concede and the experiences have made her stronger. Her message to the white male colleague and the committee who endorsed his behavior “I’m going to make you look at me. I’m going to be right here...I’m not going anywhere. I got one more year to tenure and we’ll go from there.”

**Migozo** is named for her earnest recall of events. Migozo had two positive tenure-track experiences at PWIs, yet she is now at an HBCU. Reflecting on her first PWI tenure-track experience, she stated, “my department was super supportive...I mean they [white colleagues] considered it super diverse...that standard is different depending on your perspective, but it was a good experience with faculty and the chair [were] supportive, the dean was supportive, you know, people helped protect my time there.” Migozo reported that she was happy but acknowledged she was underpaid. This dichotomy, again, positions Black women in an oppressive state and suggest that Migozo should just be happy to be there, despite the inequity in salary, which illustrates, in contradiction, the lack of support in economic mobility. Her chair, however, tried to make up for this disparity by giving her extras like summer salary, equipment, and resources needed for research. Migozo left this institution for her first HBCU prior to submitting tenure materials. Migozo earned tenure at her second PWI—another positive experience. She described this institution as, “one of my favorite places to be. So, they were decent.” She attributes her positive experience to the small size of the institution but did not elaborate on this experience and eventually moved on to her second HBCU, where she also earned tenure and is happy.

Eight themes (see Table 1) emerged regarding Black women faculty experiences at PWIs, and at their core, illustrate the permanence of racism. Given that the oldest participant was currently at an HBCU, had varied tenure and non-tenured experiences at multiple institutions plus the generation gap, to be considered an emergent theme, at least three of the four women currently at PWIs noted the problem.

**1. Students**

All five women reported that this was the first time most of their students (Black, white, and other) encountered a Black, female professor-scholar. All, however, expressed gratitude (and the stress associated) with the ability to help Black students who sought them out. Dhakiya states, "I'm here to mentor African American students but also kind of crossing over [to other racial/ethnic groups]."

**2. Service**

Complimentary to the "invisible labor" literature among Black faculty who carry out disproportionate, unrecognized amounts of service (Matthew, 2016), all reported that service interfered with scholarship, was undervalued, and not impactful for earning tenure. Kumiwa states, "you don't have a metric for the type of service that I'm engaging in, like all these students showing up to my office because I'm the only woman of color professor they've ever had at this entire university." Dhakiya expresses similar sentiments, "Also, when it comes to working with minority students in our program, if there's an issue with them, they automatically funnel them to me. So, like if an African American girl or African American male they immediately say, oh, will you help her with this, so there's not a discussion of why or how they could also support them... so putting that other burden of service that kind of support all the students of color. Another burden is that it is not credited in terms of the tenure process is not something they are going to look at such an asset..."

**3. Mental Health**

All women reported increased levels of anxiety, especially during the 3<sup>rd</sup>-year review process for Adebola and Kumiwa, which subsided after a positive outcome. Nijideka suffered from insomnia after poor course evaluations, which is common among Black women faculty (Merrit, 2008; Reid, 2010; Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2008), and further highlight the permanence of racism where white thought and bodies are valued, and Black thought and bodies are not—even with a Ph.D. She stated that "there was a level of stress because then I felt like, okay, well I need to do more preparation. I haven't had any other like serious, no serious issues, but I think about the chronic sleep deprivation and what that potentially could lead to." Adebola stated, "I've had anxiety and fear, but my desire to achieve has always been great and [I] just keep going,"

**4. Doubt**

Adebola and Dhakiya reported feelings of self-doubt specifically stating "imposter syndrome" despite their exterior display of strength, confidence, and knowledge of their competencies. Dhakiya felt more at ease about her self-doubt

after attending a campus-wide diversity meeting where she was shocked to hear white women and men express feelings of imposter syndrome, too. She believes, however, “it’s a lot more intense in people of color and in women” which is supported in the literature (Edwards, 2019).

### **5. Self-Determined**

All the women entered these spaces with the knowledge that they had to work harder than their white peers—a legacy of white patriarchy. Kumiwa attended an HBCU for undergraduate school and is often reminded of a comment made by her professor who told her and her peers, “you have to be three times as good just to get to equal recognition.” She now has a better understanding of this mantra that gets her through the tenure-track process. Again, the permanence of racism and white patriarchy is evident as a Black woman’s knowledge is devalued, despite evidence that mediocre white men are able to move through the ranks (e.g. Donald Trump) without question or consequences of what is not known.

### **6. Black Women Are Dismissed and Devalued**

All experienced direct and indirect disrespect from students, colleagues, and staff, and all commonly used “microaggressions.” Calling these racist behaviors “microaggressions” appeared to mitigate reality or perhaps a coping strategy to help reduce the effects of ill-treatment because of race and gender, as these microaggressions are racist acts that have macro outcomes. The use of this term, however, circles back to the permanence of racism, as microaggressions give white people an excuse to be naïve about racism, despite the macro impact that these underhanded comments have on Black people.

Participants’ intellect and authority were challenged often. A white female student-worker told Dhakiya “I was not going to tell him no” to a white male colleague after Dhakiya confronted the student-worker who lied and told her “no” for protocols she had privy to as a faculty member. A white female student questioned Kumiwa’s role as a professor and said, “Are you kidding?!” even after Kumiwa assured her she was the professor of the course. Kumiwa also had an Asian female graduate student yell at her. Kumiwa stated, “. . .that really just like took me by surprise. . . . ‘ I’m like [you] would not yell at a white male professor, like, I just know this would not happen to a white male professor. . . I felt like you’re yelling at me because I’m a Black woman’ . . .[The student felt] It is okay to talk to me this way.” Dhakiya adds, “sometimes I don’t feel like my opinions are as valued. Sometimes it’s more of my program director comes to me to inform me of things rather than asking my input on things.” Again, these are illustrations of the oppressive legacy of white patriarchy, and Black women are at the bottom of this hierarchy.

Low quantitative scores and negative comments in student course evaluations plagued three women, which has led one to inflate grades despite an abundance

of literature on lower course evaluations for Black women compared to other gendered ethnic groups (Anderson & Smith, 2005). Adebola reports, "I should not give as high a grade as I should...but the pressure to make sure that the scores are good is real (laughter)." Dhakiya reported students referred to her as "aggressive" in course evaluations and are (mis) using the angry Black woman stereotype to negatively portray her. Njideka had poor course evaluations too, however, after her institution transitioned to a qualitative, equitable course evaluation system, her course evaluations improved. Despite meeting tenure expectations, her committee did not support her, which illustrates the permanence of racism and white patriarchy inherent systemic structures in the academy by the selection committee's racist act. It is fortunate that Njideka received the full support of the provost and president, who overturned the racist committee's recommendation.

### **7. Exclusion**

Adebola and Dhakiya felt excluded and acknowledged the solidarity among the white male colleagues. Dhakiya reports, "I am the only female, so there is some camaraderie amongst the male faculty, you know, they talk about golf and they talk about different clothing options that I feel like I'm just kind of an outsider. They are also all white I'm [also] the only minority in my direct program, which affects not only my interaction...I do still feel like an outsider."

### **8. Committed to Diversity**

Before Dhakiya arrived, there were no students of color in her graduate program. Now that she is on the selection committee, however, the most recent cohort is more diverse. In fact, Dhakiya states, "the first class that I was involved in the application [process]...five people in their letters of application stated that I specifically wanted to come because of Dr. Dhakiya." Dhakiya also reports success connecting with non-Black students, "I have white as well as students of color in my lab so in terms of mentoring...kind of crosses gender and race, so that's a positive experience...having students or minority students come to me and...say they like my research studies on minorities so they are interested in studying it."

Kumiwa articulates the benefits of investing in Black women in the professoriate at PWIs by paraphrasing a message she heard somewhere, "...when you invest in Black women, you're not just investing in that individual. You're investing in a family. You're investing in a network. You're investing in a community. Because when Black women come up, we almost never do for ourselves. We come out, we bring, you know, [a] whole wrath of people with us, like it's a collective effort." She continues, "Like there are students that I've had like that [see that] Black woman professor again that decided when they saw me, I can do research now. Like, I didn't ever think that now I see someone that looks like me doing it, I can do it. I'm going to apply to some PhD programs," which changes the negative narrative about Black women.

### Limitations

Customary to Black women's allegiance to the race to the detriment of her gendered position, many Black women shy away from speaking out against men. These behaviors are common in a society where over 400 years of racist and sexist expectations have mangled the psyche of Black women and Black men. Silence often leads to safety in a world where one's tongue could be cut from their throat for speaking their truths.

White men have the power to destroy Black women; simultaneously Black women are often taught to support Black men while abandoning her own aspirations as a woman. Typically, Black women want to avoid the unfair stigma of 'angry Black woman,' therefore, this population often avoids complaining about men, sexism, or unfair treatment. Further, in aligning with Harris-Perry (2011) Black women often adopt the 'strong Black woman' persona, attempting to withstand injustices and inequities seldom heaped on those of another race or opposite gender. Regardless of the stereotypes that Black women embrace or repel, none of these ill-fitted personifications allow Black women to truly be or even believe in herself in a space accepting of that Black and female self. The position Black women hold in *any* space presents limitations.

### Conclusion

Black women have been subjected to degrading stereotypes throughout American history (Harris-Perry, 2011), deemed worthless (Jones, 1985), and simply ignored (Collins, 2000). Further, the sudden departure of Black women presidents in the 2016 school year confirms—even HBCUs appear to advance Black MEN, while Black women still feel invisible and poorly compensated. Migozo contends that "Black men sometimes...get credit for not being drug dealers and not having a bunch of undisclosed babies," as she discussed three of four Black men at her HBCU exist yet do nothing, yet their female counterparts do everything and earn substantially lower salaries. Such pay disparities illustrate how some Black men exist on pedestals at the expense of Black women. Furthermore, the fact that other women perpetrate such sexism also shows that some women have been indoctrinated by [white] male culture, internalized sexist ideals, and then function as sexist overseers, striking down fellow women (Fitzgerald, 2014; Freire, 1970; Harris-Perry, 2011; Gaëtane & Tickles, 2017).

Black women academics face those destructive 'isms' in different places and spaces. At the HBCU, the women interviewed knew they were high fliers, and confident despite the sexism. One HBCU participant alluded to the notion that reporting sexism at the HBCU is like telling the family matriarch about a brother or uncle's bad behavior. Black women just do not go against the race, even at their own peril. Further, they are punished if they make the attempt to "right the

crooked room,” (Harris-Perry, 2011) and create a work environment that supports BOTH men and women.

At the PWI's, the women interviewed knew they deserved to be there, but the constant policing and monitoring of the cultural self-created unnecessary stress to the point where they often contemplated leaving their institutions. In the book, *New Plantation* (2010), Billy Hawkins discussed the colonial influence on Black student-athletes at PWIs that include athletic exploitation and little regard for academic success, which parallels the experiences reported by Black women faculty at PWIs. The plantation-like system of “free” labor and “be seen but not heard” at PWIs exclude Black women's presence, dismisses their voices, exploits their service, and ignores the additional tenure-track challenges Black women confront—these affronts highlight the CRT tenet of interest conversion as Black women participate in service (free labor) that continues to benefit white faculty and students at the expense of Black women. Diversity efforts at PWIs appear to only tolerate and subjugate Black women rather than embrace and proliferate, which suggests that the presence of Black women at PWI is transactional, and statements of diversity and inclusion are simply buzz words that are popular in mainstream America, which critiques the liberalism purported. Missing from the diversity equation is the development of authentic measures to understand Black women's plight in the academy and the struggle for respect, acceptance, and the acknowledgment that institutions of higher learning reproduce plantation-like environments.

Given that race and gender have shown to have a negative impact on tenure outcomes and contributes to higher rates of attrition among Black women in the professoriate (Darity, 2008), considerations for PWIs when crafting mission statements and hiring Black women faculty should not only tick the two diversity boxes but also recognize that the magnitude of racial and gender stressors in the academy supersede the already known inherent stressors associated with obtaining tenure. Black women at PWIs delicately balance their existence to avoid and dismantle negative stereotypes to include the angry Black woman (Ashley, 2014), non-intellectual (Johnson-Bailey, 2015), and less scholarly output (Croom, 2017), which puts insurmountable pressures to succeed. Cultural suppression and the multitude of racist acts these women encountered appear to contribute to psychological and/or social distress, which Arnold, Crawford, and Khalifa (2016) identify as Racial Battle Fatigue symptoms, and suggest Black women are exhausted by their exclusion on the academic plantation. This paper also points to a sexist battle fatigue, in which gender is a confounding factor in the tenure-track experience. Although similarities and differences were evident among the women at the HBCUs and PWIs, one thing is clear—despite the place, Black women continue to be negatively impacted due to gender and/or race.

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