The Soul Within: Understanding the Emotional Toll of Underrepresentation on African American Female Professors at Maryland Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

While community colleges are experiencing an increase in minority students, there has been a lack of substantial growth in the acquisition and retention of full-time minority faculty. For full-time African American female professors, this lack has resulted in the circumstance of underrepresentation. This qualitative study asked full-time African American female professors at predominantly White community colleges in Maryland, to explore the emotional toll of underrepresentation. In-depth interviews were conducted to develop a written illustration of how African American female professors at predominantly White institutions fulfill their professional duties in an environment that has been shown to lead to emotional burnout. This study will add to the body of research that increases the understanding of the lived experiences of minority faculty.

Keywords: African American female faculty, marginalization, minority faculty, underrepresentation

INTRODUCTION

Long before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, educated Black men and women were successfully forging a path to the professorship. In 1942 W. Allison Davis, a Black male scholar, became the first African American to be appointed as full-time faculty at the University of Chicago (Varel, 2018). Davis endured tremendous opposition to his appointment based solely on his race. By anyone's account, he was a brilliant anthropologist who was rendered "professionally invisible" (Varel, 2018, n.p.). Davis' wife, Elizabeth Stubbs Davis was also a scholar, and a talented anthropologist in her own right. Together they conducted groundbreaking research that shed light on race, poverty, class, and biased intelligence testing (Varel, 2018). As part of his professional invisibility, Davis' contributions were not properly credited, but as Varel (2018) also noted, "…the situation was far worse for Black women scholars …" (n.p.).

In 1945 Adelaide Cromwell, a Black female scholar, became the first African American faculty member at Smith College (Smith College Libraries, n.d.). In similar fashion, Mary Huff Diggs became the first African American full-time professor at Hunter College in

1946 (Perkins, 1995). It should be noted that during that time in history, 60% of all Black women who worked outside of the home were employed as domestic servants (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2016). To call them pioneers, or even trailblazers is an understatement considering the socio-political conditions in American society during that period. However, it was also a time ripe for change. In 1949, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher became the first African American woman to be admitted to the University of Oklahoma Law School. She was only admitted after a protracted legal battle intended to challenge segregation laws in the state (Synnott, 2008).

Fisher was the only woman and the only person of African descent among over 300 White male law students (Synnott, 2008). Upon entering the classroom for the first time, she was directed to sit alone in the upper level of the classroom, behind a sign that read COLORED (Synnott, 2008). In spite of this stark discrimination that set the tone for her matriculation, Fisher did go on to graduate and study law, returning to the University of Oklahoma in 1968 to earn a Master of Arts in History (Synnott, 2008). In 1992, she was appointed as a regent for the university and at that time asked the still relevant question, "Why doesn't the state's flagship university have more tenured black faculty and why isn't its retention rate for minority students higher (Synnott, 2008, p. 46)?

Statement of the Problem

The circumstance of underrepresentation that leads to marginality remains a contemporary issue that negatively impacts retention and career satisfaction in this population. Although research has established that success in academia comes at great social, psychological, and emotional costs, little is known about how underrepresentation impacts the emotional welfare of these women (Alston, 2006; Case & Hunter, 2012; Ford, 2011). When Davis was hired to teach at the University of Chicago, the school's leadership sent him a letter stating that they would not be responsible for safeguarding his well-being (Varel, 2018). In other words, he was on his own when it came to handling the racial animosity that ensued from White administrators, faculty, and students alike. Consider the same circumstance of underrepresentation for an African American female professor. Imagine entering a classroom, long considered a bastion of White male privilege, while positioned at the intersections of race and gender. What is the cost of underrepresentation on her psyche and her emotional health? This study was designed to explore that phenomenon.

Significance

This study is important to the current body of research in the area of minority women and their place in higher education. "We know little about how Black women in the professoriate survive and thrive in the academy" (Davis et al., 2012, p. 168). There is a myriad of studies that touch on the areas of race and gender equality, but there is minimal research focused on facilitating the well-being of African American women in predominantly White institutions. Those that do, often do not speak to the inner core of consciousness that defines her both professionally and intellectually. This study served to not only recognize the pressures of what underrepresentation means for African American female faculty left to misconceived diversity initiatives, but to also empower them toward self-determination, without bitterness, rancor or disillusionment. Likewise, institutions must make it a priority to advance her cause in a way that all stakeholders; students, colleagues, and policy makers benefit.

Scope

This draws on the existing research that explains and explores African American female underrepresentation and marginalization, but for the most part, has not focused

exclusively on the socio-psychological costs of negotiating their success in academia. To accomplish this objective, a small representative sample was selected to share and emotionalize their unique experiences. This population shares a distinguishing intersectionality within the historical, social, and political movements of this country and thus, serve as ideal examples of counter-cultural anomalies in the hegemonic structures of the academy. Participants needed only to have significant experience as a full-time professor at a predominantly White community college in Maryland, self-identify as female, and of African American descent. Demographic data was self-reported and was not subject to verification or qualification. The study was designed to consider both micro racist/sexist social interactions, and macro oppressive institutional practices through the lens of a Critical Race-Black Feminist framework to promote an emancipatory agenda and to challenge oppressive institutional policies and practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study of the most recent literature revealed the following constructs of discriminatory influences that figure prominently in her professional experiences at predominantly White institutions:

- Underrepresentation
- Marginality
- Compromised professional identity
- Stress and workplace burnout

Underrepresentation

The problem of underrepresentation for African American female full-time faculty in higher education, and more specifically in Maryland community colleges, will be a challenge that lingers for an indeterminate amount of time. This conclusion is supported by national data trends, as well as state and regional reports. The percentage of African American full-time faculty teaching in Maryland community colleges who self-identified as Black or African American, without gender delineation, has consistently hovered between 13% and 15% of all full-time faculty over several years (Maryland Higher Education Commission, 2012, 2017). Moreover, the literature has shown that in general, African American females tend to populate the adjunct/instructor ranks (American Association of University Professors [AAUP], 2014; Duncan, 2014; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). Nationally, the trend is even more dismal. According to the NCES, in the fall of 2015 African American female professors comprised 3% of the national total (NCES, 2017). This is down from 4% reported in the fall of 2013 (NCES, 2015).

Within the literature, isolation, invisibility, and tokenism have been described as part of the lived experience of underrepresented minority faculty (Comer, Medina, Negroni, & Thomas, 2016; Ferguson, 2013; Generett & Cozart, 2012; Wilder, Bertrand, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013). Isolation is both physical and intellectual, and often manifests as the lack of opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, in addition to a lack of information sharing about tenure processes and professional development opportunities (Davis, Chaney, Edwards, Thompson-Rogers, & Gines, 2012; Moffitt, Harris, & Berthoud, 2012). Wilbert-Orelus (2013) discussed invisibility as a form of racism professors of color must fight against to become and remain significant professionally and personally. Alexander-Floyd (2015) compared the

experience of invisibility with the simultaneous hyper-visibility that African American female faculty confront as a result of underrepresentation. Invisibility renders them as generally incompetent additions to the profession, and that same tendency to view them as other, serves to intensify the scrutiny they withstand from colleagues and supervisors (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). Invisibility/hyper-visibility also breeds tokenism, as many institutions expect them to carry the banner of diversity by serving on multiple committees, participating in community outreach initiatives, and advising heavy caseloads of minority students (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). At the core of the issue is that African American female faculty have yet to reach critical mass, wherein their numbers allow them to influence institutional policy and culture (Dahlerup, 2014; Douglas, 2012; Kanter, 1977). Nair (2014) found that within the politics of predominantly White institutions, women of color are powerless to exert influence due to racism, sexism, and underrepresentation.

Marginality

When African American women enter a system that "has been defined by the absence of Black women and the stigmatization of Black female difference" (Sulé, 2013, p.2), they encounter organizational patterns that converge to block access to institutional resources that would enable equity. Baur, Butler, and Dalton (2015) found that women faculty of color are easily the most marginalized segment of campus populations. This is due in part to the residual influences of pervasive racial injustices that have been preserved in social and cultural aspects of this society, and continue to shape perceptions of her, despite evidence to the contrary (Ford, 2011). Ford (2011) referred to these perceptions as bodily (mis)recognitions. (Mis)recognitions cause injury because victims are viewed through a prism of disparaging, degrading, and demeaning caricatures that distort their true personage, and negatively influence her reception by students and colleagues. When these conditions exist, these women are vulnerable to the syndrome of stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is the idea that these faulty perceptions, whether evidenced or merely suspected, hang suspended over the heads of an individual and prompt him/her to adapt behavior to counter narratives that threaten their identities (Block, Koch, Liberman, Merriweather, & Roberson, 2011; Steele, 2011).

Marginality produces stress and workplace burnout, leading to detachment, resignation, reduced personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Wilder, Bertrand, & Osbourne-Lampkin, 2013; Grant & Simmons, 2008). These factors often culminate in career dissatisfaction, lack of organizational commitment, and high turnover rates (Alexander, 2010; Baxley, 2012; Alleyne, 2005; Wilder et al., 2013). Griffin (2016) proposed that marginalized faculty experience systemic oppressions as routine, everyday occurrences. Within the body of research that focuses on marginality, there exists a substantial portion of literature that defines these everyday occurrences as micro-aggressions (Berk, 2017; Comer, Medina, Negroni, & Thomas, 2016; Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, Wallace, & Hayes, 2011; Shields, 2012; Wilbert-Orleus, 2013). Micro-aggressions are defined as small, inconspicuous words or behaviors that express racist beliefs that demean people of color (Stevenson, 2012; Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008; Sue et al., 2007). Micro-aggressions have a negative impact on the psychological, physical, and emotional well-being of minorities (Alleyne, 2005; Ingleton, 2016; Pittman, 2010, 2012).

Compromised Professional Identity

Identities are socially constructed phenomena, and in this case, are shaped by the historical and political contexts of race and gender within the U.S. (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Ford, 2011). Narrative accounts of African American female faculty in the academy describe

outsider-within experiences wherein their professional identities diverge from their cultural and social identities in a way that causes identity conflict (Collins, 2002; Henderson, Hunter, & Hildreth, 2010; Levin, Walker, Haberler, & Jackson-Boothby, 2013). "We shared a sense that our professional identity was at stake. Often, we referred to these feelings as losing our spirit" (Comer, Medina, Negroni, & Thomas, 2016, p. 152). Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that when one's identity is shaped by race and gender, there is oftentimes a negative impact on the ability to prosper due to biases and stereotypes pertaining to both.

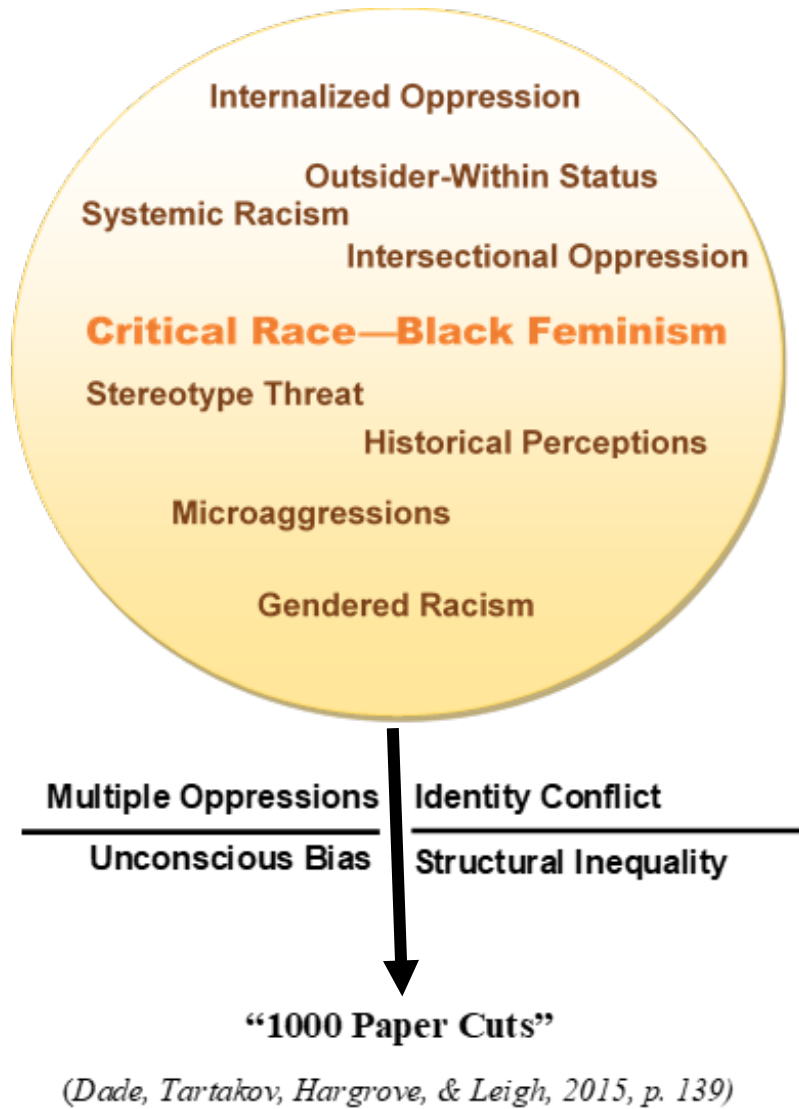**Stress and Workplace Burnout Leads to Emotional Fall-Out**

Marginality produces stress and workplace burnout, leading to detachment, resignation, reduced personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Wilder, Bertrand & Osbourne-Lampkin, 2013). Griffin (2016) found that marginality is intellectually and emotionally taxing. Navarro, Williams, and Ahmad (2013) maintained that female faculty of color experience job induced mental and physical challenges that affect her overall happiness. Many suffer psychological, mental, and even physical symptoms of workplace burnout (Navarro, Williams, & Ahmad, 2013).

Conceptual Model

The conceptual framework guiding this research study was created using the umbrella of Critical Race-Black Feminist Theory because it is a theory that encapsulates essential concepts that guided the study. Chief among those concepts is the outsider-within status coined by Patricia Hill Collins (1986). This phrase describes the experiences of African American female faculty in the higher education sector. Collins (1986) argued that full membership in the White, male dominated academy is outside of her reach because of a value system that is constructed to perpetuate power and exclusivity at the expense of those deemed "other." Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term "intersectionality" in a critique of how the Feminist Movement and antidiscrimination policies attempted to address issues of marginality on a single-axis framework, either race or gender. She argued that because Black women are uniquely positioned at the intersection of race and gender, their experiences cannot be limited to either or, but are "greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (p. 140). African American/Black women have multiple identities that co-exist, co-mingle, and overlap, causing them to experience multiple levels of oppression. This is a distinguishing factor in their social navigation in the workplace.

Black Feminist Theory is particularly necessary to the examination of race and culture for African American women because traditional methods of studying race and feminism cannot fully, nor accurately capture the interwoven concepts of what it means to be an African American/Black woman in this society. Black Feminist theoretical features essential to this study were self-determination; self-efficacy; self-advocacy, and purposeful resistance to internalized oppression. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was relevant to this study because it provides an understanding of race in America. CRT holds that racism is an everyday component of daily life (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). It is also institutional, systemic and in many cases, the result of unconscious bias (Crenshaw, 1989, 1995). Of particular interest for this study are the following tenets of CRT; race as a social construct, intersectionality and the unique voice of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT theorists believe that race is not a matter of scientific delineation, but more of society's structural creation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). And finally, the unique voice of color acknowledges that people of color have a responsibility to add their own narratives to assist the dominant culture in the understanding of cultural/racial/ethnic dynamics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework model.

Critical Race—Black Feminism

Internalized Oppression

Outsider-Within Status

Systemic Racism

Intersectional Oppression

Stereotype Threat

Historical Perceptions

Microaggressions

Gendered Racism

Multiple Oppressions	Identity Conflict
Unconscious Bias	Structural Inequality

"1000 Paper Cuts"

(Dade, Tartakov, Hargrove, & Leigh, 2015, p. 139)

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. How do African American female, full-time faculty at predominantly White community colleges in Maryland describe their experiences as marginalized academics?

2. How do African American female, full-time faculty at predominantly White community colleges in Maryland describe the impact of underrepresentation on their emotional well being?

Limitations

Narrative inquiry is constructed to reflect the lived experiences of the participants, which is a desired outcome, but it is also dependent on the memory of the participants, and their ability to fully and accurately articulate details. However, this study was not designed to capture each detail of an experience. Instead, the study centered on what the participant lived through and experienced in her emotions. An additional limitation is the extent to which study results may be generalized to other women of color. The women chosen as participants are not completely representative of all women of color. For example, Latinas, Asians, and Native Americans may have commonalities with the study participants, but their cultural standpoints and their stereotype threats would limit the generalizability of the findings. Likewise, Black female professors who were not born in the U.S., such as Caribbean or African women, may endure strikingly similar marginalization, but again, the cultural, historical, and socio-political aspects of their identities would condition the relevancy of study findings for them.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was conducted using a qualitative, portraiture research design to illustrate the composition, depth, and patterns of the emotionalized experiences of underrepresented faculty. Moreover, this qualitative research study drew upon elements of portraiture research to capture and to portray the emotional context of the circumstance of underrepresentation. Pioneered by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983), portraiture research draws attention to those not often heard from, specifically minorities and women. Just as a painter attempts to immortalize the essence of an individual in creating a visual portrait, portraiture as a research design seeks to distill the phenomena under investigation through narrative storytelling and insightful analysis (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As a method of qualitative research, a social science portraiture research design merges empiricism with aesthetics to illustrate the complexities, contours, and organic composition of the phenomena under investigation. Portraitists highlight the perspectives and experiences of their subjects so that their voices might be represented in a profound and authentic manner (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The final product may be likened to experiential art exhibits. Art that is experiential in nature is not passively viewed.

Participants consisted of six African American/Black females who have reached the level of full-time professor at a predominantly White community college in Maryland. Criterion sampling was employed because it was critical that all participants have a story to share about the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher, an instrument within the study, shared some characteristics with the sample population, but rather than viewing this factor as a negative, it offered a basis of connection and relationship building. However, several measures were undertaken to ensure trustworthiness and validity. For example, bracketing and member checking, along with additional measures derived from portraiture research design conventions were employed. Participants were interviewed, in addition to participating in a focus group where they were asked to create self-portraits that exemplified the emotional costs of their underrepresentation. As is common for this type of study, pseudonyms were used for participants and their institutions were not identified. Data was transcribed, mined, compared, and contrasted to determine themes of analysis.

FINDINGS

The following themes emerged from the raw data: Constant Awareness of Underrepresentation, Mis/Perceptions (the term is presented in this way to communicate the disparate nature between their reality and how they are perceived), Other-ness (the term is hyphenated to represent the separateness of and the uniqueness of the outsider-within experience for minority faculty), and Coping/Strategies for Survival. Each of these themes were excavated and examined to determine how each participant lived within the confines of a marginalized professional identity. One of the most surprising commonalities that emerged from the data was the existence of a before and after category that the researcher referred to as a honeymoon phase and a defining moment. Just as the term honeymoon phase suggests, participants enjoyed a span of time wherein they were passionately in love with their jobs. Early in their careers they idealized their institutions in much the same way newlyweds romanticize their spouse's traits. Unfortunately, as reality crashed around them in the chaos of a defining moment triggered by gendered racism, they were confronted by the perils of being an underrepresented minority.

Constant Awareness

Participants revealed a heightened awareness of being the only or one of the only African American female professors at their institutions, in their departments, and/or at their career level. The degree of their awareness differed, but the data demonstrates that the lack of diversity they experience in their workplace is a phenomenon that is always a part of their consciousness. It is on their minds as they interact with students, engage with colleagues, serve on committees, and represent the college in the community. The weight of that awareness creates an embedded vulnerability that is rivaled by a heady responsibility to set a good example. Participants feel it necessary to be a voice for other faculty of color, to advocate for students of color, to represent the race, their families, and themselves in the best light possible, every single minute of every work day. Student push back also emerged as a common characteristic of their underrepresentation. As the literature supports, minority professors serving at predominantly White institutions are more likely to receive negative feedback from students. Student push back takes the form of students questioning credentials, showing disrespect, and creating student evaluation forms that are often weaponized to harm professors who are underrepresented, and members of minority groups.

Managing Mis/Perceptions

All six participants struggle to manage mis/perceptions about race and gender as African American women in the academy. These mis/perceptions include the cloud of the angry Black woman stereotype. This stereotype has so permeated the culture and shaped how society views and behaves toward African American women that it has reached near mythical proportions. The professional lives of these participants have been impacted significantly by this dubious persona. The leaning is to do all possible to present the counter image of this stereotype and to contradict the behavior patterns.

Anna: *"You have to comport yourself in a way that is not threatening to them."* (personal communication, July 6, 2017)

Naudia: *"... even as friendly as I am, and as fun, there was still this perception—I felt—of angry Black woman."* (personal communication, July 20, 2017)

Other-ness

Within the scope of underrepresentation, all participants experienced the phenomenon of being a part of, yet distinctly detached from the culture and social norms of their institutions. This is referred to as other-ness. Participants believe that race and gender have influenced their colleagues and supervisors to in some way discount their contributions. As a result, there is the additional pressure to be more, and to do more. Aisha stated that there is an expectation of incompetence that swirls around her. Lauren is cognizant that inherent in her other-ness is the idea that as one of few in the institution who can supply a significant diversity quotient, she is both overexposed and under-developed as a fully formed member of academia.

Coping/Strategies for Survival

Participants feel the need to engage in coping and/or survival strategies that help them to do their jobs despite the impact of underrepresentation and marginalization. The margins offer little protection for this population, prompting participants to adopt tactics for self-preservation. Survival strategies were adopted in direct response to the presence of threat that exists in the margins. These women are vulnerable to unwarranted student backlash, unsupportive colleagues, insensitive superiors, and a system that was not created to ensure nor promote their retention and advancement. Coping methods include self-care, bonding with other minority academics, enjoying time away from the job, journaling, therapy, advocacy, and activism. These methods tend to alleviate the most severe effects of workplace stress.

The second research question asked African American female, full-time faculty at predominantly White community colleges in Maryland to emotionalize their experiences as marginalized academics. The emotional toll that participants connected to their professional experiences can be attributed to trauma induced in equal parts by an event or occurrence, and trauma caused by the daily exposure to workplace stress in response to cultural insensitivity/aggression. Participants reported a bevy of emotional repercussions that they have experienced as a result of underrepresentation. Chief among them are loneliness/isolation, anger, mistrust/betrayal, pain/hurt, and fear.

Loneliness/Isolation/Lack of Connection

Each of the participants described feelings of loneliness due to underrepresentation.

Aisha: *"Um, I feel it mostly in um, not being inside. There's a kind of dismissal. I feel it sometimes in the bigness of the room and feeling smaller in the room. We're isolated. And that creates that stress, you know, because when you're in these rooms and you're the only one in the room, um, it just . . . all of that compounds. All of that compounds on you."* (personal communication, July 19, 2017)

Lauren: *"I'm still the only one at the table. That hasn't changed. I am the unique one."* (personal communication, July 19, 2017)

Anger

In response to workplace events that were linked to racial/gender animosity, participants described feeling anger or upset about the situation or toward the perpetrator.

Tommie Lee: *"I felt angry—anger definitely. I was pissed. I felt betrayed. There was this great sense of injustice."* (personal communication, July 21, 2017)

    Lauren: *"It was very upsetting. So, I wouldn't say I was actually angry . . . I was hurt . . . because I tried so hard to keep that perception and that um, reputation clean."* (personal communication, August 10, 2017)

Mistrust/Betrayal

Participants described feelings of mistrust and betrayal related to students and colleagues alike. Participants feel unsupported by colleagues and are often subjected to a climate of distrust that disrupts professional relationships.

    Anna: *"I feel that I'm guarded in a lot of ways at an institution like this."* (personal communication, July 6, 2017)

    Naudia: *"I came to this place, where I would go to work, and I didn't trust . . . anything . . . anybody. I was like, I can't trust my colleagues. I can't trust these students. You know what I'm saying? I felt like even with my students —they would go sometimes and tell my boss the dumbest things."* (personal communication, July 20, 2017)

Pain/Hurt

When asked to express the overall emotional toll of their experiences, the participants spoke of substantial emotional hurt/pain. From subtle slights to open hostility, participants have been subjected to emotional injury that surpasses typical workplace strife.

    Naudia: *"I was very devastated. I felt like I'd been emotionally abused."* (personal communication, July 20, 2017)

    Tommie Lee: *"Oh my God—I cried every day."* (personal communication, July 21, 2017)

    Tristan: *"So, yeah, the emotional price is significant, and that in and of itself is a story and I think particularly, Black faculty on White campuses, not just community college campuses, go through a lot."* (personal communication, August 3, 2017)

Fear

Identifying the emotion of fear was an interesting part of the study. Initially, the participants shied away from the idea that they were fearful in any way. However, as dialogue continued, the root of some of the emotional fall-out was traced to fear. The fear of losing their jobs unjustly, the fear of being judged based on mis/perceptions, the fear of vindictive student reprisals, and fear connected to a sense of being powerless to defend themselves against institutional racism/sexism, overshadows their professional lives.

    Aisha: *So, I think that probably undergirds a lot of us. There is this fear that we don't have power in our institutions. So that person that we're going up against— that Goliath—can, you know, step on us. They can, you know, make us disappear . . . the fear is, is like the soft-something underbelly."* (personal communication, July 19, 2017)

Participants often feel that they have no recourse to address or correct the hurtful situations that expose a cultural insensitivity toward African American female professors. They also identified feelings of humiliation, shame, and embarrassment. Disillusionment, disappointment, and confusion are included in the daily experiences of this population.

DISCUSSION

Historically, African American female faculty have entered a profession that does not attract, retain, or promote them on a level that significantly increases their representation. The push to understand what it means to teach, serve, and pursue scholarly endeavors under the chafe of gendered racism, which is ingrained within institutional systems, is still abstract in terms of how much is truly understood. In order to bring change to an inequitable system, it is critical that researchers bring attention to the circumstance of underrepresentation and all of its complexities. The conceptual model used for this study was Critical Race-Black Feminist Theory. This model was chosen because it best characterizes the framework of lived experiences of those within this population. Examples include the outsider-within descriptor that explains the state of her professional existence as an underrepresented academician, the intersectionality that is uniquely inclusive of race and gender, and the concept of intellectual activism that encompasses her advocacy. As a concept, Critical Race Theory (CRT) informed the study because theorists contend that race is a social delineator that is implicit, inherent, and commonplace (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). And finally, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) argued that the unique voice of color, those narratives deriving from minority people, are a necessary addition to the body of knowledge that delves into culture, race, and ethnic identity in society.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicate that the conceptual framework that served as the foundation for this study not only accurately guided the research, but also served to inform the research through the application of constructs that explain and synthesize participant experiences. Participant narratives are living testaments to the concepts of identity conflict, unconscious bias, intersectionality, and structural inequality that typify underrepresentation and marginalization. The findings also revealed that underrepresentation leading to marginalization, whether acknowledged or not, is colored by historical mis/perceptions, maintained through micro-aggressions, weighted by stereotype threat, clothed in other-ness, framed by gendered racism, and quantified by intersectional oppression. These essential concepts encompass the constructs that are inherent in Critical Race-Black Feminist Theory.

The idea that these conceptual truths would result in some emotional toll was expected in light of the literature and experiences witnessed first-hand by the researcher. However, the discovery that the sum of these truths result in devastatingly injurious emotional trauma was surprising. The depth of the emotional wounding that these women experienced as an outcome of their underrepresentation due to race and gender other-ness, far exceeded that which had been described in the existing literature. For example, participant Tommie Lee experienced severe emotional trauma that was exacerbated by the assault of micro-aggressions she had endured for years. After her traumatic defining moment, her hair fell out, and she lost her appetite, resulting in unhealthy weight lost. She contemplated taking her own life. Tristan thought she was good at dealing with the stress of underrepresentation until the day she drove onto campus after a long absence, and suffered a panic attack. In the midst of Lauren's defining moment, she endured debilitating migraines that her neurologist attributed to workplace stress.

Moreover, study data firmly established that African American women pursuing careers at predominantly White institutions are typically exposed to racialized/gendered behavior that is emotionally damaging to such an extent that it can be likened to chronic abuse. In Danzer's (2012) discussion of culturally specific trauma grounded in historical perspectives, he argued that trauma related to racial prejudice deregulates emotional health. Danzer (2012)

went so far as to compare the resulting psychological and emotional suffering to chronic physical abuse experienced by women and children. In such a case, the victims become primed to anticipate danger at all times, meaning that their sense of trust and security is destabilized (Danzer, 2012). In support of this conclusion, the data clearly documents the severe emotional pain that African American female professors are likely to experience as a result of underrepresentation and marginalization. Findings also revealed that underrepresentation is a circumstance that limits the fullest expression of African American females in the professoriate. It silences their voices, restricts their power, inhabits their consciousness, and presents a barrier to their well being. "…we did not realize the degree of racial discrimination and the extensive racial and gender micro-aggressions that we each had faced throughout our employment at the university, nor did we realize the silent pain and suffering that each of us were enduring" (Dade, Tartako, Hargrove, & Leigh, 2015, p. 137).

Figure 2. Findings/conclusion/conceptual framework.
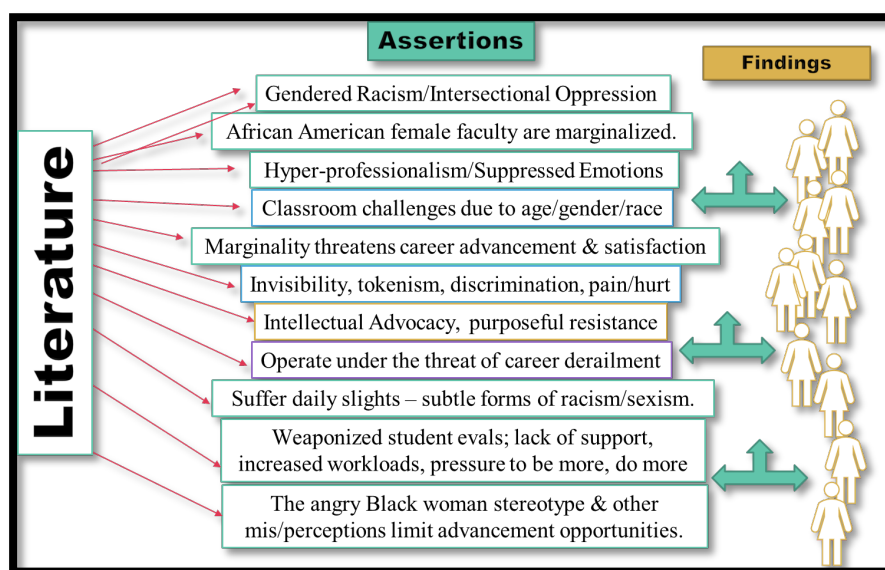
IMPLICATIONS

Individuals

At the individual level, the findings should prompt African American female professors to purposefully practice self-care. Study participants were aware of the need to participate in activities that allow them to renew and refresh their psyche in order to continue to do the work of educating and mentoring students. Learning effective coping methods is related to self-care. Participants discussed activities such as journaling, practicing their faith, bonding with others like themselves, spending time away from their institutions, and engaging in professional therapy.

In addition, future faculty preparation is also important to sustaining and growing the professoriate. Considering that the dynamic of underrepresentation will be a long-term fixture in higher education, it would be valuable to add a preparation course/seminar/workshop to graduate school curriculum. Included within that course would be suggestions for managing the

cost of underrepresentation. And finally, at the individual level, African American women who are veterans of this circumstance may be inspired to use their influence to mentor and facilitate the rise of other African American women within the faculty and/or administrative tracks.

Institutional Practice & Policy

At the institutional level, the findings suggest implications for changes in practice and policy. All participants expressed disappointment in the traditional practice and execution of selection committees. Institutional hiring practices should be reimagined to circumvent implicit bias that obstructs the hiring of diverse candidates. Many organizations now require committee members to participate in seminars that educate and thereby attempt to defuse the bias that is inherent in the academic tradition of selecting candidates that "fit in" with the majority.

Additionally, none of the participants felt that their institutions offered professional development opportunities that speak to their positionality as African American women. Institutions could meet this need by offering a speaker series, conference workshops, and even developing a campus organization for women of color to connect with one another. Cross-cultural mentoring has also been shown to increase retention and advancement opportunities for minorities. Institutions could ask senior faculty/administrators to extend time to mentor minority professionals who show interest in advancing within the institution. It is equally important for institutions to develop a vehicle to hear the voices of minority faculty.

Because these women often feel under-valued and unheard, institutional administrators should discover ways to ensure that they are appreciated and that their contributions are celebrated. And finally, the gatekeepers of predominantly White institutions should reconsider how they evaluate the veracity of student evaluations and complaints lodged against minority faculty. Culturally responsive training should be a mandatory requirement of continued employment, especially for those who have the power to dismiss or levy disciplinary action against employees.

Society

With the understanding that African American women are underrepresented in several arenas within society at large, the results of this study may positively inform how they are perceived and supported professionally and socially. Kanter's (1977) work on critical mass is of particular importance in this case. Underrepresentation restricts the influence that is gained through representation (Dahlerup, 2014; Douglas, 2012; Kanter, 1977; Kaur, 2010). There is no magic number that will cure underrepresentation. However, representation that tips the scale in the favor of impacting policy and governance is the goal. Until that time, emerging narratives about their experiences may expand their influence enough to promote social change that allows them to be heard from the margins.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are various research studies that may develop from the findings, and as such would be beneficial to delve into with future research.

- Emotional Research is a growing field of study within higher education. It is becoming clear that exploring the emotional landscape of academics with the intent to facilitate career satisfaction in the new age of academia would be beneficial.

- Emotional Intelligence training may be used as a method of coping with the effects of underrepresentation. Studies have found that individuals with high emotional intelligence levels generally handle stress better than those with a lower index.

- To extend the reach of this study may mean increasing geographical concentration.

- Researchers should conduct similar research focused on African American males and other minorities.

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