

# Voices in the Desert: Black Women Faculty in the American Southwest

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## ABSTRACT

The experiences of Black women educators are important, and yet their personal and professional experiences are rarely included as part of the faculty narrative at most North American higher education institutions. The continued normalization of White Supremacy and androcentricity, within North American higher education, maintain systems of oppression that perpetuate the systematic marginalization of Black women within the faculty ranks. The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Black women educators in New Mexico's higher education institutions. With a grounding in Black Womanist and Critical Race Theories, this qualitative research study employed snowball sampling as a means to engage ten Black women faculty members, via semi-structured interviews, in critical inquiry about their professional experiences with higher education. Study participants testified about experiences with microaggressions, discrimination, and racial battle fatigue as well as feeling intellectual, campus, and community isolation.

## KEYWORDS

Black Women Faculty, Invisible/Visible Paradox, Microaggressions, Racial Battle Fatigue

## INTRODUCTION

Racism, classism, and sexism are structural foundations within the North American educational system, from preschool through higher education (Lynn & Parker, 2006; Yosso, 2002). White supremacy, the inherent belief that Whites are superior to minorities, is at the heart of this institutional bias. Spring (2004) talks about this long-standing historical bias reaching back to European settlers who, when seeing Native Americans, "rationalized the enslavement of other humans by classifying them as an inferior racial and cultural other" (p. 57). The impact of this form of othering in educational settings is visible in everything from gaps in educational achievement (Howard, 2015), to exclusionary and oppressive curriculum (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Woodley, Mucundanyi, & Lockard, 2017) and even in exclusionary practices in hiring of faculty (Arnold, Crawford, & Khalifa, 2016).

Foundational research studies like those conducted by Benjamin (1997), Gregory (1999), Turner & Mayer (2000), and Thomas & Hollenshead (2001), and have addressed the concern that there remains a lack of Black women within the faculty ranks at most predominantly White institutions (PWIs) across the country. Since the 1980s, there has been an increase in research studies that examine the lived experiences of Black women faculty including Benjamin (1997), Gregory (1999), Moses (1989), and Thomas & Hollenshead (2001). However, there is still a gap in the research on the experiences of Black women faculty members especially at Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs), like most of New Mexico's higher education institutions. Black women account for less than 1% of faculty in

DOI: 10.4018/IJBIDE.2019070101

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New Mexico's Higher Education Institutions (Woodley, 2014). Those Black women faculty who do manage to make it into faculty positions in New Mexico experience various forms of gendered and racial hostility. It is these types of microaggressive situations that leave Black women faculty feeling attacked, isolated, and drained of their energy (Turner, 2002). This lack of representative voices is even more pronounced when we begin to look at the lack of research on the experiences of hidden populations of Black women faculty like those working at for-profit institutions, community colleges, and public higher education institutions in New Mexico.

This article provides findings from a qualitative research study that sought to understand the experiences of Black women educators in higher education institutions in the State of New Mexico. Ten (10) Black women educators, who worked at universities, community colleges, and for-profit higher education institutions at the time of the study, were interviewed to gain an understanding of their experiences. Participants shared about their ways of knowing, believing, and acting as they navigated systems of oppression within institutions of higher education in New Mexico.

## BACKGROUND

The presence of Blacks on the faculty at predominantly white higher education institutions (PWIs) is not commonplace, especially among Black women in the professoriate (James & Farmer, 1993; León & Thomas, 2016; Sulé, 2014; Turner & Myers, 2000). When Black women are hired to work at PWIs, they continue to fight to be fully included within the academy (Thompson & Louque, 2005). Black women faculty are stereotyped as tokens (Moses, 1989; Turner, 2002) or an “angry Black woman, whose value is in her ability to constantly fight racism and sexism with one stroke of her pen or one lash of her tongue” (Woodley, 2014, p. 47). Thompson & Louque (2005) spoke of an “interesting phenomenon” that happens when students attend class on the first day and see a Black professor: “Unless they have met the professor ahead of time, become familiar with the professor’s background via an Internet search or spoken to former students, many students are surprised to learn that they have a Black professor” (p. 1). This phenomenon speaks to the underrepresentation of Blacks in the professoriate at PWIs (Stanley, 2006; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Thompson & Louque, 2005; Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000; Zambrana, Ray, Espino, Castro, Douthirt Cohen, & Eliason, 2015). It also is a manifestation of the lip service higher education institutions give as they “make ambitious claims about the value of diversity” (Stanley, 2006, p. 2) while continuing to exclude Black women from the professoriate. PWIs continue to adopt initiatives around diversity and *inclusive excellence* as they “work toward parity and inclusion of People of Color within higher education” (Turner & Myers, 2000, p. 16) only to see these initiatives fail because of the insidiousness of racism and sexism that lines the fabric of American higher education.

Eurocentricity, androcentricity and White supremacy at the heart of American higher education institutions create an intellectually, and sometimes physically, violent environment for Black women faculty. Denise Baszile (2006) found a perpetuation of “epistemic violence” due to “rules and codes of power in academia that determine which ideas are the fashionable ones to have, or which ones are scholarly or not, or how ideas should be presented” (p. 197). Black women faculty experience a constant and enduring battle against “epistemic violence” and other forms of oppression like “multiple marginalities, otherness, living in two worlds...silenced voices and visible and invisible barriers” (Stanley, 2006, p. 3) as they navigate their way into and through the ranks of the professoriate. For example, undistinguished racial bias on hiring committees results in the hiring of Black women, and other Faculty of Color, into junior faculty ranks rather than in tenure-track positions (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005; Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013; Turner & Myers, 2000). “Our [Black women faculty’s] tenuous presence in (White) universities and colleges speaks to the fact that individuals, but not the community, may attain some success in an educational process centered on the marginalization of all but the “European“ (socially constructed as White, propertied heterosexuals)” and at the heart of this marginalization is the continued “institutional bigotry which relegated ‘Blackness’

and ‘femaleness’ to savage superstition, invisibility or exotica and ‘Whiteness’ and ‘maleness’ to a paragon and the sublime” (James & Farmer, 1993, p.119). The Eurocentric and androcentric bias means Black women faculty “are perceived as less qualified than White applicants (Benjamin, 1997; Gregory, 1999; Moses, 1989) or they, like other Women of Color, are presumed to be incompetent (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, and Harris, 2012)” (Woodley, 2014, p. 51).

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of Black women educators in New Mexico’s institutions of higher education. The experiences of Black women are valuable and yet “black women’s experiences with work, family, motherhood, political activism, and sexual politics have been routinely distorted in, or excluded from, traditional academic discourse” (Collins, 1991 p. 47). Based on the exclusion of Black women from the research narrative, in many ways, Black women researchers have continued to emphasize the need for continued research that highlights and stresses the importance of Black women’s lives (Mitchell, 2009). At the time this study was conducted, there were no research studies that looked exclusively at the lived experiences of Black women educators in New Mexico higher education.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Black Womanist and Critical Race Theories were the theoretical frameworks for this study. Black Womanist Theory provides a comprehensive context for understanding Black women’s lives while bringing “confidence in evaluating our own experiences, dictating our own discourses, and defining our own terms” (Phillips & McCaskill, 1995, p. 1016). Critical race theory provides the structure for the research to find language to articulate the hegemony of White supremacy as well as the gendered and racial bias that plagues the North American educational system.

### **Black Womanist Theory**

Black Womanist Theory affords researchers a cornerstone for researching the lived experiences of Black women. Black women scholars developed Black Womanist Theory as a counter-narrative to the marginalization of Black women’s experiences in both Afrocentrism and Feminist theory (Walker, 1983; Heath 2006; Woodley, 2018). Although Alice Walker coined the term to reflect the co-existence with White Feminism, it has become “a theoretical framework developed by Black women for Black women and is specific in articulating personal insights from the Black female perspective” (Heath, 2006, p. 160). The emphasis on Black women’s experiences places Black women at the center of analysis. Black women “live at the nexus of race and gender hierarchies” (Baszile, 2006, p. 200), and research was done of, for, and by Black womanists are about understanding the essences of the axiological, ontological, and epistemological spaces in which Black women move and divine their being.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides researchers with theoretical groundings that allow for the interrogation of racial classifications, inherent bias, and the hegemony of White supremacy that plagues North America . Many scholars have recommended using CRT as the basis for evaluation and examination of inequities in teaching and learning within the American educational system (Woodley, 2018). CRT becomes the basis by which the experiences of People of Color (POC) are examined through a racial lens without negating other aspects of their identity such as gender and class (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2002).

Black Womanist and Critical Race Theories provided foundations that speak to the lived experiences of Black women thriving in the intersections of race and gender. The theories provided a context for understanding the gendered, racial, and cultural experiences of the Black women in this study. They also served as grounding for the research design, data collection, and analysis.

## **METHODS: QUALITATIVE**

Qualitative research provides holistic and naturalistic contexts for understanding the lived experiences of marginalized and hidden populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Vaz, 1997; Woodley & Lockard, 2016). The utilization of qualitative research methods values participants' unique voices in the telling of life stories and therefore provided the ontological spaces that allow for marginalized voices to be heard (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). Thus, qualitative methods provided study participants with a setting to talk about their experiences as Black Women academics in more naturalistic ways than they would have with quantitative methods (Woodley & Lockard, 2016).

### **Purposeful Selection, Snowball Sampling, & Research Participants**

Purposeful selection, through snowball sampling, was used to identify study participants. For womanist and feminist scholars, snowball sampling provides a way to "...partake in the dynamics of natural and organic social networks" as they identify participants for their studies (Noy, 2008, p. 329). Snowball sampling becomes a crucial way to gain access to hidden and marginalized population especially those that may be hard to access due to isolation or institutional bias (Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010; Woodley & Lockard, 2016). The snowball began with a conversation with one of the few Black hair stylists in New Mexico. After the researcher had shared about the criteria used to identify study participants, the hairstylist identified and referred three (3) potential participants to the researcher. This conversation was the beginning of referrals that resulted in the recruitment of the majority study participants. The remainder of the participants were identified through snowballing using personal and professional networks.

Ten (10) Black women faculty participated in a series of two semi-structured interviews. The following criteria were used for purposeful selection of research participants:

1. Participants self-identified as Black or African American women.
2. Participants were currently working as a full-time or part-time faculty members at a New Mexico institution of higher education.
3. Participants were at least 18 years of age and held a Master's, Ph.D., or terminal degree in their field.

Although it was not part of the selection criteria, all participants were born and raised in the United States. Pseudonyms protected the identity of the participants. Opportunity for participants to review the transcripts for accuracy was part of the protocol initiated before coding, theme identification, and data analysis.

### **Researcher Reflections: A Recognition of Self in the Research**

At the time of this research study, the researcher worked as a full-time community college administrator. As a Black woman educator, it was important for her to find a way to give voice to the experiences of the Black women faculty that worked in New Mexico. Qualitative methods provided the opportunity to understand the experiences of Black women educators throughout New Mexico while also providing the researcher an opportunity to reflect on her own experiences, as a Black woman educator, as she learned from the women in this study. Salmon, Brown, and Pederson (2010) state, "considerable attention has been paid by feminist academics to the need for self-reflexive praxis in an effort to

avoid perpetuating marginalization, disenfranchisement, and silencing of less powerful groups in research collaborations” (p.339). As the researcher listened to the stories and recollections of the Black women in this study, she could see and hear herself in their sharing. “Like the participants in the study, I had to learn to navigate and survive the many “human blindnesses” (Lorde, 1984, p. 45) of racism, sexism, and classism. As a Black woman educator, I felt a sense of familiarity with the stories of family, a love for education, and racism the participants spoke of in their interviews” (Woodley, 2014, p. 87). The participants’ experiences were familiar to the researcher because of similar experiences she endured as a Black woman academic.

## FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

Each participant in this study lives her life at the intersection of multiple identities including, but not limited to, race, gender identity, and sexual orientation. For theme identification, the typical role of the *educator* was used to analyze their stories. This focus on their roles as educators provided an opportunity to analyze a communal space (Taylor, 1998; Vaz, 1997), which strengthened the study’s data triangulation . Through a focused review and analysis of the interviews, themes were identified, presented and discussed in the sections that follow. Each theme speaks to the ways that racial and gendered profiling, stereotyping, and discrimination converges to create hostile spaces for the Black women faculty members in this study. From their stories, it becomes apparent that they experience many of the same systemic barriers at HSIs that other Black women faculty experience at PWIs.

### Theme 1: “What are YOU doing here?”

“Unless they have met the professor ahead of time, become familiar with the professor’s background via an Internet search or spoken to former students, many students are surprised to learn that they have a Black professor” (Thompson and Louque, 2005, p. 1). In New Mexico classrooms, Black women faculty deal with this phenomenon each semester at their institution. Here Michelle, participant 4 in this study, speaks about the different treatment she receives at New Mexico institutions, which is different from her treatment at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs):

*I would say that there are not as many faculties, students, staff who are willing to work with you as much or are not jumping out to work with me as an African American as much as when I was at a historically black college. I would say it’s almost like, “What are you doing here?” when I go to classrooms, stuff like that. So, that’s kind of the impression that I get. (Michelle, personal communication, May 7, 2012)*

For Michelle and other Black women faculty, the lack of support from colleagues and the “what are you doing here?” response from students can lead to classroom and career issues at the institution. Black faculty can find themselves contending with increased classroom management issues, higher student drop rates, and challenges to their authority as faculty members from hostile students (Thompson & Louque, 2005). Being the only Black woman in a department, or even one of only a few Black women on the faculty in the whole institution can lead to feelings of isolation. This isolation can take many forms for Black women faculty in New Mexico.

Black women faculty members remain a rarity in most predominantly white institutions (PWIs) (James & Farmer, 1993; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995; Turner & Myers, 2000). Those Black women that are hired in the faculty ranks continue to struggle, as Thompson & Louque (2005) assert, for “full inclusion” (p. 2) in the academy. In her research on the experiences of women of color faculty experiences, Turner (2002) found themes of “(1) feeling isolated and under respected; (2) salience of race over gender; (3) being underemployed and overused by departments and/or institutions; (4) being torn between family, community, and career; and (5) being challenged by students” (p. 80).

In the eyes of their White colleagues and students, many Black women educators are seen as either tokens or terrorists. Also, Black women faculty consistently challenge stereotypic characterizations like that of the “angry Black woman” (Moses, 1989; James & Farmer, 1993; Phillips & McCaskill, 1995; Gregory, 1999; Turner, 2002).

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data showed that Black women constituted only .66% of the faculty in New Mexico. An analysis of the interviews in this study showed similarities in the experiences of Black women faculty at New Mexico’s HSIIs when compared to Black women faculty at PWIs. Those Black women faculty who do manage to make it into faculty positions in New Mexico must also combat racism, isolation, and stereotypic characterizations.

## **Theme 2: The Invisible-Visible Paradox: Campus, Intellectual, and Community Isolation**

*It’s like being visible and being invisible at the same time, is the way I sometimes describe it. It’s like you’re visible when you’re needed, but otherwise, you’re invisible (Georgia, personal communication, June 20, 2012).*

The *invisible-visible* paradox is a phenomenon that many researchers have found in their studies about the experiences of Black educators. Stanley (2006) speaks of it as the implicit bias that burdens Black faculty members with the responsibility of shouldering the diversity agenda for their department(s). Black faculty members are asked to provide this service to their departments, colleges, and universities by being the diversity representative on hiring teams, at planning meetings, and on so-called diversity task forces. However, these requests are rarely made because of the faculty member’s scholarly or research expertise. Instead, the requests are racially motivated and come from a space of devaluation rather than valuing the unique, scholarly contributions the women can make (Stanley, 2006; Turner & Myers, 2000). Faculty of Color are often requested to spend a significant amount of time on these service commitments, which hold little to no value when compared to research and other scholarly activities in the tenure process (Turner & Myers, 2000).

### ***Campus Isolation***

Feelings of isolation can be commonplace for participants in this study due to a lack of Black faculty in New Mexico higher education. The lack of Blacks living and working communities may contribute to feelings of isolation (Benjamin, 1997; Gregory, 1999). This was the case for participants in this study. The small numbers lead to several challenges for Black women faculty both in the classroom as well as within their departments. Rachel divulged that she was the only Black faculty member in her department so there was no one she could talk with about how to deal with the racial microaggressions she experienced from her colleagues.

*I think that it’s really difficult because there are so few African-American women in higher education and really no matter what institution you go to, and I’m really figuring this out—and no matter how educated these people are who are working at these institutions that they still have stuff. They still have their perceptions of who certain people are (Rachel, personal communication, June 1, 2012).*

Rachel was referring to her colleagues’ perceptions of Black women faculty and how the automatic assumption was that she was not qualified or competent to be on the faculty. There is the constant pressure she felt to prove that she was worthy to be at the institution as a faculty member. This pressure was evident in her interactions with students as well as with her colleagues.

*You are constantly proving yourself and not just to other faculty but to students. And I would tell my friends I'm okay with proving myself to students. (Rachel, personal communication, June 1, 2012)*

The need to prove oneself was also felt by Sally, participant 7. Sally shared about her experience with her department directors at two New Mexico institutions. In both instances, she was supervised by White women, who she says treated her differently because she was Black.

*Well, I definitely think that lady at (retiring institution) was a racist in a sense. And the one at that other institution, I think was too... But still, you know that there was something there. For some reason, she was intimidated by me. And probably, [the] reason could have been that I was African American, I don't know. (Sally, personal communication, May 17, 2012)*

She goes on to share about how it was a regular case of proving herself to the supervisors at both institutions.

*I don't know. I don't think we can get away from that. You have to prove yourself. Let people know that you know what you're talking about and just keep on going and being ready as far as I'm concerned. (Sally, personal communication, May 17, 2012)*

A stereotype with historical roots in the enslavement of Blacks in America is that Black people are “lazy, dumb and criminally prone” (Ross, 1990, p. 642). Sally’s comments point to the persistence of this type of thinking, and thus she feels the need to disprove it with her supervisor. This kind of stereotyping can impact the work performance of Black women educators by creating a dangerous environment for them. Steele (1997) referred to this as stereotype threat, “a situational threat – a threat in the air – that, in general form can affect the members of any group about whom a negative stereotype exists” (Steele, 1997, p. 614). According to Steele (1997), the burden of the threat falls on the shoulders of the stereotyped individual, and they change their behaviors to disaffirm the stereotype in the minds of their oppressors. In Sally’s case, her need to constantly prove herself is rooted in the fear that her actions might confirm existing stereotypes in the mind of her supervisor. Sally consistently overworks to disprove the stereotype that Black women are either lazy or incompetent. The consistent drive to prove competence becomes another yoke worn by Black women, and other women of color, in higher education (Wallace, Moore, Wilson, & Hart, 2012).

### *Intellectual Isolation*

For some participants, *intellectual isolation* was felt when advocating for the inclusion of diverse perspectives at institutions. Some study participants felt isolated as “intellectual activists” (Collins, 2013) even when there were other Black women, and other Faculty of Color, in the department. Xiomara shared about an incident that occurred during her first faculty meeting at the college. The department was planning a field trip where faculty and students would be going into a local neighborhood. As the department head described and planned the event, it struck Xiomara as a “gazing upon the natives’ approach” (Hollinshead, 1992) to understanding the experience of the mostly impoverished, working-class Community of Color. Xiomara voiced her concerns about the trip and the approach that would be taken to understand the perspective of the community residents. Although there were other Faculty of Color in the room, none spoke up to support her objections. Instead, she was left to defend herself and her objections alone. After the meeting had adjourned, one of the other Black women faculty members came to Xiomara, away from other department members, to discuss why she didn’t join in the conversation.

*Then she said, "Well, let's go out for lunch afterward." And so, we talked, and she was able, again, to talk about the stuff that she had seen when she and I were having lunch together. She was on tenure track too. That's, again, that's a game that they are going to play. 'I need to get tenure, and then I'll say more stuff,' but that doesn't help those of us who are kind of coming up, and you don't have that type of security because I wanted her to say something at that moment or anyone for that matter to say something. (Xiomara, personal communication, March 24, 2012)*

As Xiomara's story shows, not all Black women educators feel secure enough in their jobs, and their agency, to speak up in the same way. For many Black women, the culture of fear that frames the tenure and promotion process puts at risk those women that do speak up. A consequence of "speaking the truth both to power and to the people" may be punishment (Collins, 2013, p. 22) including retaliation, intensified isolation, and even a no-vote for tenure and promotion. So those Black faculty members, like Xiomara, who choose to demonstrate their intellectual agency by standing for social justice, may find themselves alienated from other Black women, who choose silence over sisterhood.

**Community Isolation.** *Community isolation* is another factor that many Black women faculty must endure in New Mexico. Feelings of isolation on campus are compounded by the fact that many Black women faculty find themselves working in cities and towns with small Black populations (Benjamin, 1997; Gregory, 1999). Joy, participant 1, shared how difficult it was for her to transition working in New Mexico after living in cities with much larger Black populations.

*What has been most memorable so far? I think part of what's been memorable is that I think I feel in some ways really fortunate to have been able to go to the Bay Area, to go to LA, to go to DC and then to be here in a State with not a whole lot of money, and on a campus with a whole lot of money. Knowing that I have other choices. And you know there's also not a large Black student population here. (Joy, personal communication, March 20, 2012)*

The limited number of Blacks in the community, as well as in the student population at her institutions, intensifies the isolation that Joy feels will result in New Mexico. As a young, professional Black woman, who desires to date Black men, living in a State with where Blacks constitute less than 3% of the population adds to isolation and limits her dating possibilities.

*And I don't have people to go out for a drink with. I don't have, you know, dating is non-existent [laugher]. (Joy, personal communication, March 20, 2012)*

Many studies have found that exposure to Blacks and other People of Color may lessen feelings of isolation for Black women faculty at PWIs (Gregory, 1999; Stanley, 2006; Turner & Myers, 2000). From Joy's perspective, this could also be the case for Black women faculty at HSIs.

### **Theme 3: Microaggressions, Discrimination, and Racial Battle Fatigue**

Study participants spoke about microaggressions, institutional racism, and discrimination they endured due to the implicit biases of students, staff, and other faculty members at their institutions. "The way that they treated you when you walked across campus, you knew that that was not your space" (Xiomara, personal communication, March 17, 2012). Xiomara's comments are like those made by Black college students at PWIs when they endure racist acts from Whites like eye rolls, racial slurs, and physical attacks (Woodley, 2014). Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) explain racial microaggressions as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically and unconsciously," (p. 60) which create a hostile environment. To maintain a sense of personal and academic wellness, Xiomara and other Black women faculty choose to create "counter spaces" on campus to help them maintain personal and professional wellness.

The lack of faculty diversity at most institutions means that the Black faculty experience implicit racism; one such example is the way Black faculty members are viewed as the torch bearers for the diversity agenda at institutions (Stanley, 2006). Georgia, participant 3, shared about the implicit racism she experienced when her colleagues look to her as the expert but only when diversity issues arise.

*I think in terms of the teaching experience, a lot of it is implicit and it's stuff like, when something happens with "diversity" then people will want to seek you out to help them with that issue, but it's only because they have to do something about the issue. Otherwise, they don't really care about it. I think there's quite a bit of that kind of racism and implicit bias in a certain way. (Georgia, personal communication, June 20, 2012)*

Georgia's comments speak to the additional burden placed on Black women to be the representative voices for all diversity issues even if they have no research expertise on the issue. "This *ghettoization* of Black women faculty means White faculty need not be responsible for racial issues. Instead, they relieve themselves of the responsibility by making it the Black woman's issue" (Woodley, 2014, p.135). This leads to a further devaluation of Black women's contributions (Gregory, 1999).

*Another example of that would be, raising a pretty valid point at a faculty meeting and then nobody responds to the point, they just keep moving on with whatever the discussion. So not only does the person facilitating the meeting not acknowledge the comment, but other people in the room don't support the comments by saying [something like] "That's a really good question, we should talk about that." I've had that happen several times. It gets to the point where, what's the point of contributing if no one is going to take me seriously (Georgia, personal communication, June 20, 2012).*

Dealing with microaggressive actions and institutional racism was commonplace for many participants in this study. Doc, participant 5 gave one example of a blatant act of discrimination by a supervisor. During her interview, she spoke about being demoted from a position. However, her supervisor still expected for her to fulfill the duties of the higher-level position even though she was demoted. When she refused to do the work, "... they put a memo in my files, saying that I was uncooperative and that I am not a team player and that kind of thing (Doc, personal communication, May 8, 2012)"

Doc continued to endure microaggressive behaviors from her supervisor when it came time for her to submit for promotion:

*So, I submitted my portfolio, and it was voted against promotion by 4 out of 6 of my own department. And that was primarily because the chair of the committee was a former department head, and I had complained about him for nepotism. His wife worked in the department, he also was in the department, and so I complained about the nepotism. And as a result, he stepped down as department head, but I guess he felt that he was going to get back at me. So, he was the chair of the [promotion] committee, and he proceeded to make sure that they voted no, which they did (Doc, personal communication, May 8, 2012).*

Her department head was then responsible for taking her portfolio forward for the college committee to consider the promotion. The college committee consisted of 5 people, but the vote was split. Here she shares that the vote was tied because her department head voted twice in the balloting.

*He presented it to the college committee and tried unsuccessfully to get everyone to vote no. And so, it was 50-50. They voted 3-3, 3 for and 3 against, but there was a tie there. But the reason there was a tie was because he voted twice... Yeah, he voted twice. So then once I see it was mathematically impossible*

*for there to be tie. How could there be a tie? Oh, he voted twice. (Doc, personal communication, May 8, 2012).*

Department and institutional norms establish the “ground rules for support (or lack of support) and rewards (or sanctions) that faculty members experience” (Chesler, Lewis and Crowfoot, 2005, p.136). Doc’s department head retaliated against her during her promotion process because she reported his nepotistic behaviors. The norms within her department, and within the larger structure of the institution, allowed this type of blatant discriminatory practice to take place. Racial bias and discrimination is an aspect of the cultural structure of America that every person of color becomes subject to at any given place and at all times (Ross, 1990). “Doc endured blatant discrimination at her New Mexico institution during her promotion process rather than receiving fair and equitable consideration for her years of service. In the end, Doc earned her promotion but only after seeking remedy via her institution’s grievance process” (Woodley, 2014, p.140).

Microaggressions, stereotyping, and defending against the violence of racism leads many Black women educators to experience *racial battle fatigue*. “Racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004) describes the exhausted condition some Blacks find themselves in after dealing consistently with the ubiquity of covert and overt prejudice, thoughtless stereotyping, and other forms of racists’ behaviors” (Woodley, 2014, p. 162). Smith’s use of the term describes an exhaustive condition that Blacks face as they must continually face the omnipresence of covert and overt prejudice, stereotyping and other forms of inherent bias. Joy shares about the draining impact she feels after dealing with systemic oppression on campus.

*In a way that I think—and then it’s just weird because, you know. Then I feel like I’ve become the one who keeps saying, “But what about this. And what about this. And you’re not looking for these students, and these people” and it’s just kind of tiring. (Joy, Interview 2, March 20, 2012)*

The Black women educators in this study found it necessary to develop coping strategies, like journaling and leaning on mentoring relationships, in order to relieve themselves of the exhaustive condition that inevitably comes from resisting such attacks.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study shows that Black women faculty members, who work at HSIs, experience many of the same types of discrimination and racial bias that other Black women faculty members do at PWIs. Black women educators continue to experience institutional bias, systemic violence, and discrimination within American higher education institutions. Out of necessity, Black women have developed strategies for navigating these difficult institutional waters to survive oppressive forces within academia. Black women educators in New Mexico became experts at navigating incidents of racism and discrimination as they worked to maintain their faculty positions. “Surviving requires an expansive repertoire of scholarly and political skills that not only protects but also nurtures Black women’s intellectual activism” (Collins, 2013, p. 24). The survival strategies utilized by the study participants included openly resisting White supremacy, building strategic partnerships with other Faculty of Color within institutions, and learning selective silence as a means of resistance. In some cases, the participants chose to leave the institution rather than continuing to fight institutional *dis-ease*.

Simply listening to the experiences and voices of Black women educators is not enough. Hearing them tell their stories and thinking that is sufficient to appease them is not enough. What is wanted and needed is change within higher education institutions in New Mexico. Not change that is temporary and subject only to one leader. What is wanted and needed is the kind of systematic change that comes in like a rushing wind and takes our breath away. The kind of systematic change that forces us to take a look at who we are as human beings as well as who we are as academicians.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author declares there was no funding received for this research study.

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