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Workplace Injustice: Catalyzing Organizational Change for African American women in Academia

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Abstract

Following George Floyd's death, few studies have examined the effectiveness of Diversity and Inclusion programs. This article will examine the impact of racial workplace injustice among African American women faculty.

Keywords: DEI, Higher Education, Racial Workplace Injustice, African American Women, Women in the Professoriate

Significant amounts of research studies indicate that the prevalence of institutional racism in higher education has adversely affected the experience of African American women faculty (Dade et al., 2015; Davis & Brown, 2017; Dicken et al., 2020). In the wake of George Floyd's death, however, few have examined the effectiveness of the Diversity and Inclusion program in addressing racial workplace injustice (discrimination, bullying, and harassment in the workplace; see Okechukwu et al. (2014) and promoting long-term changes within organizations. As a point of reference, the death of George Floyd will be used in this study. George Floyd's death has caused unprecedented support for Diversity and Inclusion initiatives in the workplace (Nguyen et al., 2021), and it is necessary to study the impact of workplace injustice amongst African American women faculty. This study explores how Diversity and Inclusion programs responded to workplace injustice for African Americans in higher education and the coping techniques utilized by African American women faculty.

This phenomenological study will fill a void in the literature by interviewing African American women faculty about their organizational experiences, notably racial workplace injustice, since George Floyd's death and positive strategies that helped them cope with racial workplace injustice. The conclusions of this study could potentially serve as direction for leadership, faculty, and staff on how to design a Diversity and Inclusion training program. Identifying the barriers to Diversity and Inclusion activities within the organizational context could aid in determining what types of interventions are required of organizational leadership and their stakeholders, what targets should be set, and how to implement those interventions.

Participation Criteria

Participants will need to meet the following criteria: (a) Must be 18 years or older, (b) self-identify as a woman or female, (c) self-identify as African American/Black (d) currently employed as a full professor at a four-year institution in the United States, (e) must have experienced or witnessed workplace injustice (discrimination, harassment, and/or bullying), and (f) must have participated in a Diversity and Inclusion program/initiative in their respective workplace in the last 12 months. The study will include a minimum of 10 participants but will seek to identify 15 participants to account for attrition. This study will utilize the snowball method, asking participants to recruit their colleagues to participate if the minimum of 10 is not

achieved through purposive sampling. The data will adopt Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), Critical Race Theory (CRT; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), and Black Feminist Thought (BFT; Collins, 1989) to analyze the findings. This research adds to previous work on workplace injustice, particularly racism, by focusing on the effectiveness and shortcomings of Diversity and Inclusion initiatives designed to address the challenges faced by African American faculty women in the workplace.

Research Questions

The research questions to guide this two-article dissertation are:

1. How have Diversity and Inclusion efforts addressed workplace injustice for African American women faculty since the death of George Floyd?
2. What strategies are African American women faculty members using to cope with workplace injustice in the higher education sector?

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