

**Becoming Invisible: Resistance Strategies Among Black women Activists in Higher
Education**

Taylor A. Geyton, PhD, LCSW¹
Lalaine Sevillano, PhD²
Gerri K. Connaught, PhD, LMSW³
Fatima Mabrouk, MSW³



¹ School of Social Work, San Diego State University

² School of Social Work, Portland State University

³ Silver School of Social Work, New York University

Author Note

Taylor A. Geyton:  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0076-5540>

Lalaine Sevillano:  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5522-6715>

Gerri K. Connaught:  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2172-2697>

Fatima Mabrouk:  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1666-1992>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Taylor Geyton, Ph.D., 5500

Campanile Dr. San Diego, California, 92182.

Email: tgeyton@sdsu.edu

In 2020, *Essence* magazine published an article titled “New Study Shows Black Women are Among the Most Educated Group in the United States” (Davis, 2020). The magazine, known for recognizing, celebrating, and empowering Black women, was one of many media outlets that cited a study by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which showed that Black women were obtaining college degrees at high rates for a period of eight years and counting. Since then, a barrage of media proclaiming Black women as the “most educated demographic in the US” has been released (Dawson, 2022). Subsequently, scholars have scrutinized these claims, pinpointing inaccuracies in the statistical data upon which these assertions are based. Empirical evidence unequivocally reveals that within the realms of admission, enrollment, graduation, and employment across the entire spectrum of postsecondary education, Black women do not emerge as the predominant demographic (NCES, 2022). In actuality, the rates of participation among Black women are comparatively lower than those observed among White men and women, as well as Asian men and women. It is noteworthy, however, that Black women do surpass Black men in these domains, except when considering positions within the STEM fields, those employed as full-time tenure-track or tenured faculty, and individuals holding a Ph.D. (NCES, 2022). During the 2021-2022 academic year Black women were 8.3% of all students enrolled in postsecondary institutions and 7.5% of degrees and certificates awarded at postsecondary institutions were earned by Black women (NCES, 2022). Additionally, Black women accounted for merely 2.8% of full-time faculty across all degree granting institutions and Black women with the designation of full professor were 1.6% of all full professors (NCES, 2022). This distinction and the promotion of false narratives around Black women’s academic achievements have contributed to diminished attention to Black women’s experiences as students in the academy.

In 2024, a Black woman, student, and pro-Palestine demonstrator at the University of Mississippi became the target of a counter-protester who directed racist ‘monkey’ noises and gestures toward her. This incident was subsequently highlighted by far-right Congressman Mike Collins from Georgia, who posted a video of the event on social media, praising the racist actions with the comment, “Ole Miss taking care of business” (Wagster Pettus, 2024). This story, and countless others like it, is a representation of Black women’s experiences in institutions of higher education and the failure of a White-male dominated society to recognize and attend to these experiences.

Despite consistent and perpetual misrepresentations by the media and ongoing cultural alienation within the academic community, Black women continue to carve out space for themselves, as learners, educators, and resisters within the academy (Niemann et al., 2020). Black womanhood bears a legacy of resistance that has maneuvered systems that initially barred their entry into these very institutions (Garner, 2010) and continues to produce iterations of the same barring.

Theoretical Framework

This analysis employs Critical Theory through a Critical Race Feminist (CRF) lens to frame our exploration of the resistance strategies and experiences of self-identified Black women activists in institutions of higher education. Critical theories, emphasize the liberation of the oppressed from institutional structures through confrontation, questioning, and rejection of the status quo (Bronner, 2017; How, 2003). Critical Race Theory (CRT), intersectionality, and Critical Race Feminism all fall within the larger theoretical body of critical theories. Evans-Winters & Esposito (2010) established CRF’s value for examining the experiences of Black women in educational settings given the theory’s attention to the historical, political, and social

conditions that shape the context of Black women's engagement with institutions of higher education (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010).

CRF is an offshoot of critical legal studies and CRT. While CRT focuses on the societal and political marginalization people of color face because of their race, CRF examines the marginalization of women of color at the intersections of their race, gender, and socioeconomic status. In this way, CRF advances CRT by positing that the experiences of women of color are not the same as the experiences of men of color, simultaneously challenging traditional feminist approaches that tend to focus on the experiences of White middle- and upper-class women (Wing & Willis, 2009). Recognizing that women of color in the U.S., especially those of darker-skinned tones, are often placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy because of how their race, gender, and socioeconomic status intersect, CRF aims to demarginalize and center their voices and experiences (Wing, 2014).

CRF builds on CRT by highlighting how patriarchy adds a gendered layer to discrimination and oppression. For example, CRT's first tenet, the permanence of racism, argues that racism is deeply embedded in society (Delgado et al., 2012). CRF extends this, noting that other oppressive systems like sexism and ageism also shape Black women's experiences (Evans-Winters, 2019). In higher education, these systems are pervasive and self-sustaining. The second tenet, interest convergence, suggests that progress for racially minoritized groups only aligns with white interests (Delgado et al., 2012). CRF argues this also applies to Black women in predominantly white, male spaces, where policies reflect white, male, cis-heteronormative values (Abrams & Moio, 2009). This context frames Black women activists as subject to the priorities of dominant groups within academia.

CRT's third tenet, the social construction of race, posits that race is a social construct

(Delgado et al., 2012). Similarly, CRF emphasizes that gender, age, and class are socially constructed, influencing both Black women's identities and the expectations placed on them in higher education. The fourth tenet, counter-storytelling, validates the experiences of racially minoritized persons, positioning them as experts of their own narratives, even within oppressive systems (Delgado et al., 2012). CRF applies this to Black women's stories, supporting the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to understand how intersecting identities shape experiences (Wing & Willis, 2009). Finally, differential racialization holds that racialization varies by context (Delgado et al., 2012). CRF extends this to other social identities like gender, shedding light on stereotypes and negative characterizations of Black women, particularly in academia (Abrams & Moio, 2009).

Thus, the CRF framework that draws upon and expands CRT offers a nuanced lens through which we can comprehensively examine the intersecting oppressions faced by Black women, acknowledging the intricate web of racism and sexism that affects their lives and academic journeys. By embracing CRF, we not only shed light on the structural and institutional barriers they face but also celebrate their invaluable contributions to the academic landscape. Moreover, critical theories are based on the premise that people should be free of oppressive forces and requires the questioning of widely accepted truths as well as the agendas, consequences, assumptions of existing structures (Bronner, 2017). Critical theories, therefore, emphasize social transformation to eradicate oppression and prioritize liberty (How, 2003). Therefore, we frame our analysis of the resistance strategies of Black women activists in higher education, based on their experiences and interpretations, through CRF.

Black Women's Activism and Resistance

Black women's resistance to colonial oppression, and social exclusion has been evident

since the first African woman was bound and trafficked through what is now known as the middle passage (Stevenson, 2007; Wingfield, 2019). The acts of jumping overboard to escape and choosing to survive are both acts of resistance to captivity in which suffering was guaranteed and survival was unlikely. Over 200 years later, despite formidable opposition, Mary Jane Patterson would be the first Black woman to earn a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College in 1862 after completing both the women's courses and the men's courses (Garner, 2010). Patterson went on to become an educator herself, and a member of the Colored Women's League of Washington DC, which placed a focus on racial uplift (Brooks, 2018).

The precedent of Black women using education as means to advance the Black race is well established. In *A Voice from the South*, Anna Julia Cooper (1882) discussed the progress of race, women's rights, segregation, and Black women's education and asserted that the Black woman held responsibility for the prosperity of the Black family. Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett made significant contributions to national conversations on gender and race, and social movements during the 19th and 20th centuries (Carter-Robinson, 2019). Extant literature suggests that their push toward education and virtue was in an attempt to oppose the socially imposed stereotypes of Black women that sought to justify their exploitation (Geyton, 2021).

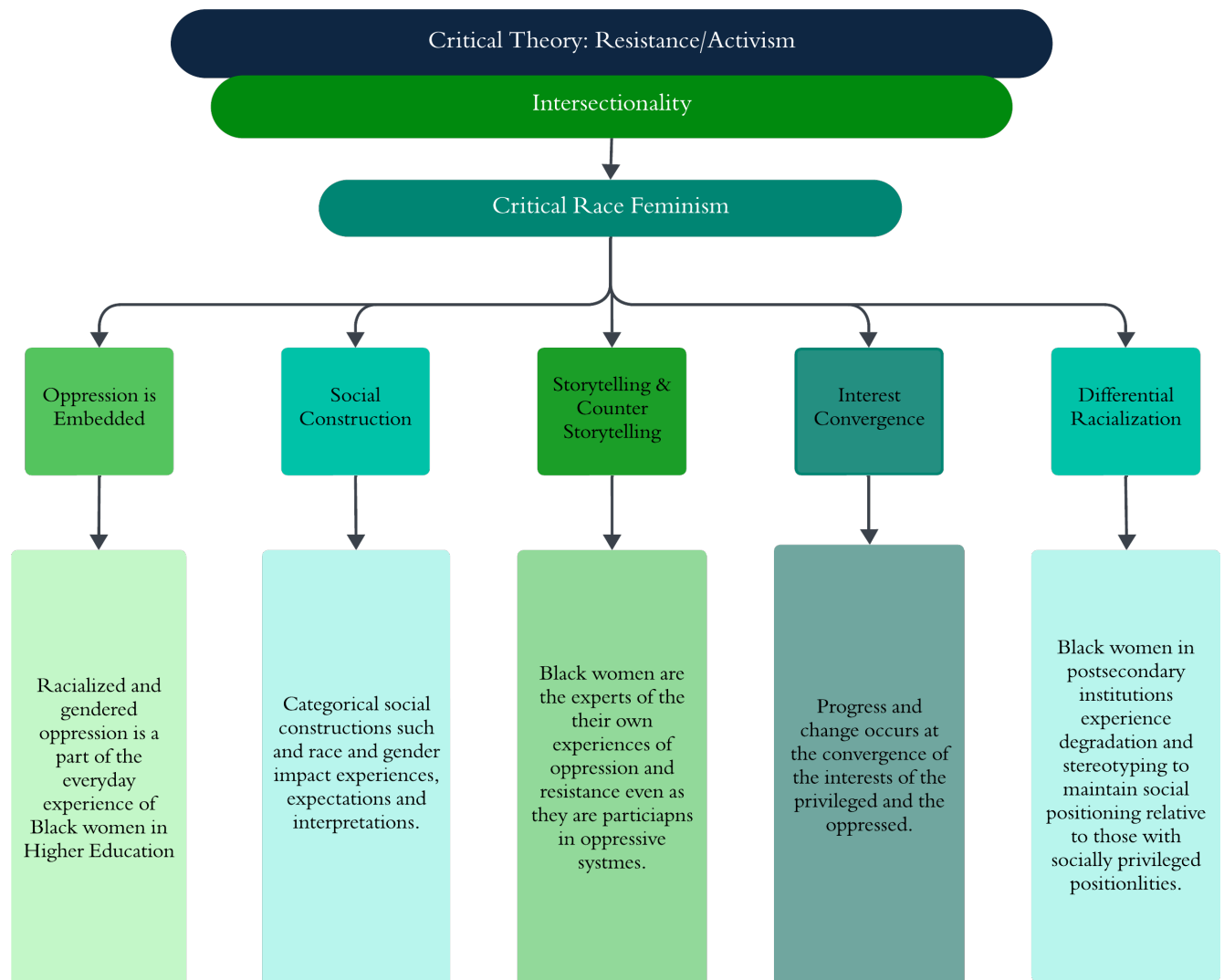
Black women's participation, and retention in institutions of higher education has been predicated on their resistance. As students they have established supportive communities, engaged in advocacy, and excelled academically (Carnevale et al., 2018; Cokley, 2000; Walkington, 2017). As faculty they have navigated microaggressions, limited representation in leadership positions, and the burden of being both educators and advocates for marginalized communities (Chambers, 2011; Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022; Gayles, 2022). Their contributions to

scholarship and their commitment to mentoring Black students are vital forms of resistance. In administrative roles, Black women confront institutional policies that perpetuate racial disparities in admissions, hiring, and campus climate (Njoku & Evans, 2022).

In *Black Feminist Epistemology*, Hill Collins (2000) identifies institutions of higher education as “increasingly important site[s] of Black feminist intellectual activity” (p. 252). The devaluation of Black women’s epistemological contributions within postsecondary institutions has warranted the dissemination and cultivation of ideas through alternate avenues such as music, literature, and conversation (Hill Collins, 2000, 2020). The development and dissemination of Black feminist thought and epistemology is evidence of Black women’s resistance throughout history and is especially relevant to our discussion of their resistance within the academy.

Present day resistance strategies among Black women who are also students and self-identified activists in institutions of higher education are understudied. Given the detrimental impacts of participation in environments that exclude, exploit, and alienate Black women, and the legacy of Black women’s resistance as a mechanism for survival, creation, and advancement, we must pay attention to Black women’s resistances in academic spaces. This study examines the resistance strategies of nine Black women activists studying, and teaching in postsecondary institutions within the United States.

Figure 1.
Theoretical Framework



Methods

Study Design: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Phenomenology is a qualitative research method focused on understanding the lived experiences of participants in the context of a specific phenomenon such as an occurrence, condition, or event (Smith et al., 2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a branch of phenomenology which, along with principles of traditional phenomenology, considers the researcher's interpretation of the

sense-making processes of the participants, rather than inductively synthesizing data (Smith et al., 2009). The IPA approach follows three tenets:

(a) reflexive analysis of participants' subjective experience; (b) a focus on the unique (ideographic) experiences of participants in a particular context; and (c) an understanding that interpretation (both on the part of the participant and the researcher) is an unavoidable aspect of analysis that cannot be disregarded.

We selected this approach because research on women's activism continues to be scarce (Fieck et al., 2020), and research with Black women remains particularly limited. As such, this study aims to amplify the voices of Black women activists and use a qualitative approach to gain deeper understanding of how they make meaning of their activism and activist identities in predominantly white institutions of higher education, while situated at the intersection of racist and sexist oppression.

Researcher Reflexivity

Similar to other qualitative methods, IPA emphasizes the challenge of separating researchers' interpretations, advocating for reflexive practices to enhance trustworthiness—a measure of rigor in qualitative research. One reflexive approach we adopted was to name our positionalities, situating our social identities in relation to study concepts like race, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment (Roberts et al., 2020). Given our closeness to the topic, we believe sharing these positionalities provides insight into historical and contemporary systems of oppression as experienced in our lives (Davis & Khonach, 2020). The first author is a Black, bisexual, cisgender woman from a lower-middle socioeconomic background, raised in a Protestant faith, now practicing Traditional African Religions, and a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). The second author is a Pilipinx immigrant and settler-colonialism beneficiary, an able-bodied, cisgender female from a low socioeconomic status, with advanced degrees in social work. The third author is a first-generation West

Indian American, cisgender Black woman from a lower-middle-class background, a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW), and a PhD candidate. The fourth author is a second-generation Middle Eastern and Black American, cisgender woman, and PhD student.

Additionally, the first author, who conducted the interviews and primary analysis, maintained a reflexive journal to document her evolving thoughts, feelings, and biases, promoting awareness of how her perspectives could influence the study (Malacrida, 2007). Throughout the writing process, we also engaged in reflexive discussions, critically examining our biases during data interpretation to enhance the credibility of our findings (Rettke et al., 2018; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). These discussions allowed us to challenge each other's interpretations, align perspectives, and collaboratively refine our understanding of the data, strengthening our research rigor.

Recruitment/Sampling and Participants

This study is part of a larger study which aimed to explore the identity formation of Black women activists.¹ Eligibility for inclusion in the original study was limited to self-identified Black women activists who were over the age of 18 years-old and resided in the contiguous United States. Blackness and womanhood were defined strictly according to self-identification as such, while activism was defined as involvement in any course of resistance with the intention of bringing about social transformation. As a result, some participants did not outright name themselves activists, however all participants had established involvement with social resistance. Participants residing outside of the contiguous states were excluded as were participants who could not commit to the full spectrum of the study activities. Recruitment for this study used purposive and snowball sampling approaches. Advertisements were placed on various social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, X, and Instagram) and shared across email networks of Black women in academia and graduate schools.

¹ The Institutional Review Board at Portland State University approved this secondary analysis as Human Research Protection Protocol (HRPP) #238266-18.

Participants in the original study received incentives of \$25 for their participation which was paid directly by the researcher.

The sampling frame for the larger study included 12 Black women activists who participated in two, one-hour interviews following a 17-item survey that collected demographic data. Interviews with participants who indicated affiliation with an institution of higher education in their surveys were selected for the current study. Thus, the sample includes the interviews of nine Black women activists all of whom identified themselves as students, one as faculty, and one as staff within institutions of higher education.

Of the nine Black women sampled for this study, eight were studying in the social sciences while one had an identified STEM concentration. Additionally, two participants were pursuing undergraduate degrees, four were pursuing master's degrees, and three were pursuing doctoral level degrees including two Ph.Ds. and one MD.

Data Collection

Participants received a thorough description of the study prior to consenting to participate and giving permission to audio-record interviews. Additionally, participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. All interviews were conducted by the first author who attempted to establish a friendly rapport with the interviewees, establishing mutual trust and promoting reciprocal understanding. This approach involved actively engaging with and adopting the interviewees' perspectives, meaning that the interviewer worked to genuinely see through each participant's eyes. By aligning with the participants' viewpoints in this way, the interviewer minimized personal biases, thereby creating a respectful space for interviewees to share their experiences authentically (Fieck et al., 2020). Interviews followed a semi-structured guide to ensure that all participants were asked the same questions, while also providing participants the space and opportunity to share experiences not captured by the interview

guide. The interviews were conducted between September 2020 and January 2021. Each participant engaged in two interviews interspersed by two months of weekly reflective journaling. Due to inconsistencies in the reflective journaling responses, these data have not been included in this analysis.

Interview questions and protocol were framed by social identity theory and intersectionality, and thus sought to examine the multitude of social identities and spaces that Black women activists occupied. Thus, the initial interviews included questions aimed at understanding how Black women relate to various social structures and the connections between these structures and their lives. Follow-up interviews then focused on the specific relationships and social domains that each activist engages in and feels a sense of belonging to. This approach provided a comprehensive view of both the broader social influences and the individual networks within which each activist operates.

Data Analysis

Drawing from IPA methodology (Smith et al., 2008), the first author analyzed 18 transcripts (two interview transcripts per participant). The first round of analysis consisted of open-coding data, strictly using In Vivo codes (i.e., short direct quotes) to capture the participants' experiences in higher education using their own words. The second round of analysis focused on generating initial themes based on patterns of In Vivo codes extracted from the previous round.

Table 1.
Primary and Secondary Coding Examples

Raw Data	Primary Coding	Secondary Coding
“With my school being so diverse in terms of like, you know, races, what we're lacking is the ability to be inclusive to you know, groups that people identify as queer or trans and that then translates into them putting out positions that maybe aren't as sensitive.” –Kia	Deficits Hiring Language Diversity	Policies Practices Communication Representation

“We always blame the oppressed people and not the oppressive system. So just trying to phrase things in a more welcoming tone, and people may accept them or be more likely to accept what I'm saying.”-Khloe	Blame Tone Policing Acceptance	Communication Avoiding Rejection Advocacy Code Switching
---	--------------------------------------	---

During the third round of analysis, the first author interpreted meanings underlying the raw data, aided by the primary and secondary codes. In this process the first author was careful not to distort the intended conveyance by participants. This round of coding also entailed a cross-analysis of primary and secondary codes and the deletion, grouping together, and revision of these codes into the tertiary codes.

The fourth and final round of analysis involved grouping tertiary codes into larger themes. Using notes, and memos throughout this process the first author developed themes that maintained the dynamic and complex meanings of participant responses.

Table 2.
Examples of Tertiary and Quaternary Coding

Primary Codes	Secondary Codes	Subthemes (Tertiary Codes)	Themes (Quaternary Codes)
Deficits Hiring Language Diversity	Policies Practices Communication Representation	Institutional Policies Devaluation Exclusion	External Messages Epistemic Violence
Blame Tone Policing Acceptance	Martyrdom Avoiding Rejection Advocacy Code Switching	Labeling Mitigating Rejection Voicing	Resistance Internal Processing

Throughout the analysis, the first author kept a reflexive journal that served as both an audit trail for analytical decisions and changes in interpretations. After themes were finalized, the first author shared preliminary findings with the nine participants included in the current study as a form of member checking. During member checking, participants were asked if the first author's synthesis and interpretations of data represent their lived experiences, and if all themes

have been identified. Six of the nine participants were able to provide feedback, and their suggestions have been incorporated into the findings. For example, one participant identified intentional silence and invisibility as a means of survival. This sentiment resonated with other participants during the checking process and lead to the conceptualization of silencing and voicing as mechanisms of resistance rather than products of oppression. Prior to preparing the manuscript, the first author shared findings with co-authors providing another check on validity.

Results & Discussion

Participants

The current study included 18 interviews across nine participants who range in age from 20 to 56 years old. The majority of the participants (n=5) were primarily residing in the Eastern Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. while others made their primary residence in the South (n=2), the Midwest (n=1) and the Pacific Northwest (n=1). Participant income and employment status ranged from unemployed (earning \$0 per year) to employed full-time (earning \$40,000 per year). All participants identified as students in postsecondary institutions (n=9); some participants were also employed through fellowships and assistantships as faculty (n=2); finally, one participant had been previously employed as staff at an institution (n=1). Below are profiles of study participants.

Kia, 29, is a first-year medical student at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) in the Mid-Atlantic, living alone. She identifies as straight and is in a relationship. With a mixed heritage (Indian mother, African American father), she has been an activist for seven years, advocating for inclusivity in medical education. Academia triggers her anxiety, but she finds comfort at her HBCU.

Imani, 30, moved from the West Coast to the Mid-Atlantic for a master's degree in

social work. Married with a young daughter, she worked as a student coordinator at a community college, supporting Black students beyond her duties. Discrimination led her to resign, leaving students feeling abandoned. She has been an activist for five years and aspires to work in policy advocacy.

Noelle, 37, is a self-employed Black woman in the Midwest, earning \$40,000 annually. A PhD student and educator in Critical Race Theory (CRT), she is originally from Pulaski, Tennessee, and feels unsafe in the current U.S. climate, planning to relocate to a majority Black country.

Gabrielle, 56, a lesbian in the Mid-Atlantic, is engaged, a single parent to an adult child with a disability, and cares for her elderly mother. With some college education, she's pursuing a bachelor's in human services and lives on \$13,000 annually that she receives in disability benefits. Due to perceived racial, age, and disability biases, she feels her knowledge isn't respected and speaks less in class, believing others value her opinions only on Black issues.

Zuri, 29, a master's student in social work in the Mid-Atlantic, has been an activist for eight years. Having experienced colorism in her adolescence in the Virgin Islands, she stays disengaged in class, preferring not to voice her views.

Asya, 20, is a full-time social work student at an HBCU in the Mid-Atlantic and has been an activist for five years. Single with no children or income, she actively advocates for herself and peers, believing her opinions matter at her HBCU.

Kristen, 22, is a master's student in social work in the Pacific Northwest, earning about \$1,000 yearly. Adopted and raised by white parents, she has been an activist for two years. At her Predominantly White Institution (PWI), she mentors Black students and uses her voice to counter assumptions of incompetence, although this often discourages her from speaking out.

Khloe, 27, is a social work master's student in the Southern U.S. She recently entered a serious relationship, has been an activist for a year, and earns \$10,000 annually. Initially outspoken on classroom issues, she was labeled demanding, which led her to become less vocal.

Trinity, 30, a PhD student in sociology at a PWI in the Southern U.S., has been an activist for 15 years. Earning \$20,000 annually as a graduate assistant, she challenges peers and professors but feels unsafe and selectively engages due to frequent assumptions of incompetence and feeling discounted.

The Cycle of Strategic Silencing

Narratives of Black women activists in higher education indicate a cycle of strategic silencing—a deliberate use of silence and selective voicing as methods of survival and resistance within academic institutions. This tactic allows these women to navigate environments that may be unwelcoming or hostile, balancing the need to protect their well-being with the desire to challenge oppressive structures. The dominant themes that emerge in the narratives of the participants include the perpetration of epistemic violence by actors within the academy as well as from the academic setting itself, internal processing and meaning making of direct and indirect messaging, and acts of resistance based on the results of those processes. These themes point towards a process of strategic silencing that Black women adopt in academic setting in response to various forms of epistemic violence. By strategically choosing when to speak and when to remain silent, Black women navigate the unique challenges posed by higher education's entrenched systems of bias and discrimination. This strategy is recognized as an act of agency and necessity for Black women in an effort to secure their safety and prevent institutional dismissal. Yet, it also has the effect of keeping the voices of Black women activists in the academy muted.

Table 3.*Themes*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Tertiary Themes
Epistemic Violence (EV) & Social Invisibility	Discriminatory EV & Intersectional Invisibility	Labeling Traditions and Cultural Practices
	Testimonial EV & Interpersonal Invisibility	Presumed Incompetence Devaluation Knowledge Pillaging
	Distributive EV & Representational Invisibility	Institutional Policies Bearing Witness
Internal Processing	Expecting Objectification	
	Mitigating Rejection	Self-Policing Code Switching Perceived Threats to Safety
Resistance	Voicing	Martyrdom Disassociation from institution
	Silencing	Becoming Invisible

Theme: Epistemic Violence and Social Invisibility

There is a long history of Epistemic Violence (EV) against Black Women in the U.S. and they continue to experience it in various spaces including within institutions of higher education. EV describes the process of othering as a practice for maintaining social power dynamics by devaluing, denying, and suppressing the knowledge and ways of knowing of members of the out-group (Pérez, 2019), Bunch (2015), classified the mechanisms of EV in three ways; discriminatory EV, testimonial EV, and distributive EV.

Given the nearly homogenous composition of the people with political power in the US and the statistical majority of students, faculty, and staff in the academy—white, cisgendered, heterosexual, men—the silencing or dismissal of Black women's voices can be seen as an issue of multiple minoritized social identities (Wingfield, 2019). Moreover, the suppression of Black women's voices in institutions of higher education create insufferable environments, rife with microaggressions, overt racism, and biases in evaluation that lead to dismal retention rates among faculty, students, and staff (Carnevale et al., 2018; Jones, 2019). Gomez (2004) contends

that the dual minority status of Black women, coupled with the complexity of social impositions of identity expectations, create a "triple consciousness". The triple bind of racism, sexism, and the imposition of stereotypical identities rooted in slavery impacts Black women's social and self-perceptions (Gomez, 2004). Black women are thus susceptible to Social Invisibility, a type of social imperceptibility that derives from interpersonal, intersectional, and representational invisibility (Neel & Lassetter, 2019).

In participant stories multiple iterations of EV (Bunch, 2015), and Social Invisibility (Neel & Lassetter, 2019) were present. Discriminatory EV and Intersectional Invisibility are represented in the *traditions and cultural practices* of postsecondary institutions and the *labeling* of Black women by actors within the institutions. Testimonial EV and Interpersonal Invisibility emerged through participant reports of *devaluation, presumptions of incompetence, and knowledge pillaging*. Finally, Distributive EV and Representational Invisibility were evidenced in participant accounts of being impacted by *institutional policies* and *witnessing the treatment of others*.

Discriminatory EV and Intersectional Invisibility

Labeling. Discriminatory EV is the dehumanization of a group of persons by those with social and political power (Bunch, 2015). Dehumanization is evident in the archetypal characterization of Black women as "Mammies" or more contemporarily "Strong Black Women" (Geyton et al., 2020); "Jezebels" which manifests presently as a hypersexual, and morally deficient "Sassy Black Woman" (DeGruy Leary, 2005; Harris-Lacewell, 2001; Williams, 2022); and "Sapphires" who are rude, overbearing, and vitriolic "Angry Black Women" in modern media depictions (Doharty, 2020). The legacies of these characterizations,

including their dehumanizing effects are iterations of enduring discriminatory EV against Black women.

Intersectional invisibility is the lack of visibility of a group of people due to misalignment with socially constructed prototypes (Neel & Lassetter, 2019). Sesko and Biernat (2010) established Black women's "non-prototypicality" as women relative to white women, and as Black people relative to Black men. Blackness is stereotypically associated with toughness, while womanhood is associated with fragility. These stereotypes have led to enduring perceptions of Black women as morally bereft and strong, or capable of enduring great hardship, and simultaneously inferior (Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Thus, the non-prototypicality the authors suggest is the result of discriminatory EV in which the wholeness of Black womanhood is denied, leading to the marginalization and dehumanization of Black women.

The practice of imposing historical tropes and archetypes onto Black women is predated throughout American history as a way to discredit and diminish Black women's presence and power. Labels and characterizations that invoked the sapphire trope were most salient across participants. Mammy and jezebel tropes were also noted in several participant's experiences. Thus, this external message holds both historical and contemporary meaning to Black women navigating institutions of higher education.

Sapphire. Each participant discussed being labeled as angry, stoic, or unapproachable within their respective institutions. Actors within the institution who applied those labels were noted as white peers with whom they had direct or indirect contact, instructors of their academic courses, supervisors, and department heads. Advocacy for themselves and on behalf of others was noted as a primary catalyst for being labeled in this way. Khloe recounted one such instance in her interview.

It was biostatistics. Like, I wasn't really grasping the information. Neither were my classmates, because we would be in the 'Groupme' going in and talking about how we don't know what's going on here. So, I asked the professor, would he be willing to like upload the material before the class...and another professor, like kind of butted in, and it really wasn't none of her business, but she decided to respond anyway. And so, I responded, and my grad advisor, messaged me and let me know that they felt that I was being very demanding...it was like the 'angry Black woman' label.

The instructor in Khloe's example did not address her directly, and instead involved a third party in the discussion of her affect. Participants' experience of the application of the sapphire stereotype application across participants was complicated by the introduction of others in the affective discussions leading to sweeping assumptions and generalizations about their demeanor and presentation within the institutions.

Mammy. Participants spoke about being labeled or positioned in a caretaking role within their institutions with conflicting sentiments. Being welcomed into institutional spaces and to be able to care for others by virtue of fulfilling care needs felt good to participants, aligned with their existing identities, and provided feelings of belonging. For instance, Gabriel said "When we were on campus, they said I was like the grandma, and even on our... Zoom meetings for political science they act like I'm the mom, I'm the nurturer. I even have little nicknames for some of them." However other assertions of this label felt laborious, expectant, and tokenizing as expressed by Asya: "It's exhausting because a lot of people, white and Black, I feel like they see us as through the lens of a mammy trope, that we're supposed to sacrifice ourselves and our well-being to take care of them."

Jezebel. This stereotype emerged through the discussion of how participants' bodies were valued in comparison to their knowledge and perspective. Seven of the nine participants discussed being oversexualized and valued more for their appearance than their contributions to the institution, as expressed by Kristen in her narrative.

So, it wasn't ever like anyone was ever questioning how smart I was. They were just like, questioning me because they liked the way that I looked and me and all my other Black friends...like we were like all like sexualized and stuff and I am still being sexualized and shit. It's just like a weird cycle...I'm like, objectified pretty much because of my race and my gender and how I look.

This theme was also largely implied as an issue of sexism, where men were the perpetrators and perpetrators. Kia described this well when she said, "It's just the man thinking and it's men of all colors, thinking if you've got a shape and you're a woman that everything that they say to you is okay, or that they can put their hands on you and that its okay."

Traditions and Cultural Practices. Institutions of higher education in the United States are susceptible to the same foibles as the country itself regarding structural representations of racism. This theme was developed inductively from the lamentations of participants regarding the naming of buildings after known racists, the presence of monuments to confederate heroes, the celebration of national holidays rooted in racist and genocidal histories, and the selection of problematic guest speakers. Participants interpreted these institutional traditions and practices as sending the message that their presence was unwanted, not valued, and that the space of higher education was not and is not made or operated with them in mind. For instance, Noelle shared a memory, "When I was in grad school before, I remember they invited the guy who wrote The

Bell Curve. I can't remember—Charles something. I can't remember his last name, but it was like—why would you do that?”

Noelle is referring to Charles Murray who's work, *The Bell Curve* has been widely criticized as an endorsement of prejudice and racism in understandings of human intelligence and education; Noelle lamented that the invitation to Murray did not center or consider the experiences of Black students in her program. Such messaging also perpetuated through the continued existence of campus monuments dedicated to historical figures who enacted crimes against humanity such as enslavement, genocide, and the assertion of white supremacist ideologies. The pain of having to learn at a campus where such monuments exist was evident in Kristen's narrative.

It's not normal to sit here and like, applaud Christopher Columbus for killing everyone. Like, it's not normal like it's not normal to talk about, like, Robert E. Lee, you know, and having like, his name everywhere, and like, it's not normal...you're mad that you got rid of a whipping post in front of a downtown area, but like, how do you think Black people feel walking past every day?

Kristen was speaking about the continued celebration of Columbus Day, and the presence and removal of confederate names and statues on campuses across the nation. The prevalent messages of these traditions and practices are indicative of disregard for the humanity of minoritized and racialized students on campuses where the people who inflicted great harm to throughout history are held in esteem in higher education.

Testimonial EV and Interpersonal Invisibility

Testimonial EV is enacted through reducing the credibility of the source as well as silencing or testimonial suppression (Bunch, 2015). Prejudice, derived from enduring ideals

about Black women, lead white people in academia, to discredit the information relayed by Black women. The refusal to acknowledge Black women's contributions to what is known and accepted as knowledge impairs epistemic agency while silencing impairs Black women's ability to speak and be heard (Fricker, 2013)

Interpersonal invisibility refers to the inattention, indifference, or behavioral neglect of a person assumed to have little influence on the success or progression of the perceiver's objectives (Neel & Lassetter, 2019). Individuals will delve into the authenticity of narratives only when they believe there are personal gains to be derived from acquiring factual information (Glaeser, 2005). Thus, interpersonal invisibility is the product of testimonial EV.

Presumed Incompetent. Despite their expertise through lived experiences and education, participants reported that their peers, instructors, and supervisors would question the merit and validity of their work. Trinity pointed to one such instance during the interview, "So, like, I wrote in a paper, the term minoritized. And so, my faculty was like, is that a real word? And I'm like, yeah, it is a real word!" Additionally, participants reported that their instructors and faculty met displays of their intelligence and mastery of systems with shock and surprise as if to imply that they did not expect it. Gabrielle said, "You know, I got my GPA is a 4.0. . . they're shocked and amazed and I'm just like wow, yeah, our brains work too."

Knowledge Pillaging. Knowledge pillaging was identified when individuals exploited the knowledge, culture, or innovations of participants without fair compensation or recognition. Kristen reported, "I've been, like, burned in the past where like, White people have been like, oh, like, I want to help you. Like, I want to do all this. But like, they're only talking to me, like, get information from me." This was a common theme among participants who reported that they were keenly aware of the institution's use of their ideas, experiences, and presence as a resource

and commodity.

Devaluation. Participants also described the ways in which their knowledge was devalued by actors within the academy. Each participant named racism and sexism as the catalysts for this devaluation along with intersecting factors such as age and parental status. Gabrielle expressed that “Because I’m older, because I’m a woman and disabled, and because I’m Black, they don’t think I know as much. They don’t hear me or listen to me”

Black women in institutions of higher education encounter unequal pathways to graduation, challenging campus climates, harsher critique, underrepresentation, and microaggressions (Chambers, 2011; Daniel, 2019; Niemann et al., 2020). These challenges exact a psychological toll on Black women in higher education as the cumulative effect of their intersectional experiences, underrepresentation, and limited mentorship availability can lead to experiences of isolation (Walkington, 2017). As students, they often grapple with the effects of stereotype threat (Nadal et al., 2021; Owens & Massey, 2011) and unequal access to resources (Carnevale et al., 2018). These experiences have been well documented. For example, Black students in PWIs must cultivate separate social and cultural communities due to the exclusionary white centric environments of the institutions (Allen, 1992). Niemann et al. (2020) illustrated the physical and psychological toll of academia on faculty women of color. The rigidity of white supremacy in institutions of higher education create a space where authenticity for Black women is unsafe, effectively silencing Black women from sharing their own experiences, and preventing their full participation in the cultural aspects of the academic environment, thus enacting testimonial EV.

Distributive EV and Representational Invisibility

Institutional Policies. Distributive EV precludes minoritized populations from

participation in the creation of social meaning through excluding them and their experiences and perspectives from educational settings and curriculum (Bunch, 2015). In 2022, Florida State Legislature passed the Individual Freedom Act banning any courses in K-12 that included discussions on race and racism, which included the removal of AP (Advanced Placement Program) African American Studies courses (Individual Freedom Act, 2022). Although the application of this act to universities is currently halted (Quinn, 2023), the erasure of Black histories, experiences, and perspectives from curriculum is a contemporary example of distributive EV.

Representational invisibility describes the lack of representation of a group in cultural, historical, legal, and political domains, and how it impedes social perceptibility (Neel & Lassetter, 2019). The exclusion of Black women from academic culture, the removal of Black history and perspectives from curriculum, and the stark disparity in Black women's representation within the academy are examples of distributive EV that yield Black women representationally invisible.

Additionally, institutional policies that impinged on the development of solidarity among Black faculty, staff, and students, sent the message to Black women in these positions that without positional power their voices were unimportant, unheard, and irrelevant. Imani's narrative illustrates how such irrelevance is imposed on Black women in academia. If you're not a faculty you're not allowed to organize with students. So, because I was staff, it was considered a violation of my role to organize students. Faculty were allowed to do that, but not staff, which is really interesting because I have a much more consistent and like deep relationship with them.

Imani noted that as the only Black woman on staff, her presence mattered to Black students on campus. She also noted that when Black students felt they were being mistreated

they called her to act with them. The policy that prohibits staff from organizing with students sent the message to her that even though her presence was important for these students, and she was expected to mentor them, she was not expected or allowed to be a force for advocacy or protection. Moreover, her decision to organize with them resulted in a sanction that jeopardized her job. Institutional policies that restrict the ability of Black women and students to contribute to institutional discourse, and culture by virtue of social participation or resistance sent messages that the interests of Black students and staff are insignificant to the institution and created a sense of fragility around their place and security within the academy.

Witnessing the treatment of others. Finally, distributive EV emerged through participant observation and witnessing the interactions and experiences of others with shared identities. Six of the nine participants reported that observing the treatment of others within their institutions influenced their willingness to show up authentically in the space. Imani's reflection on her own observations is demonstrative of this experience.

I just noticed sometimes how like professors relate to other students that have children. And so, I know that might set me apart from other students...I need to be, I don't want to say careful, but I'm aware of how different people are perceiving my like, ability and capability to learn as a parent.

Internal Processing

In maintaining the CRF framework that positions Black women's epistemological stance as central to their experiences, the meanings and interpretations of their experiences of EV were *expecting objectification, mitigating rejection, and perceived threats to safety and success*. Each participant discussed expectations of being used and co-opted throughout the fulfilment of their roles in higher ed, lending to the expectation of objectification as the most recurrent theme in

internal processing.

Expecting Objectification

Participants held the expectation that they would be objectified, specifically by white peers and professors within the academy, as a result of EV within the institution. The expectation of rejection was derived as a result of experiences of testimonial EV and interpersonal invisibility, as expressed by Kristen in her interview.

I've been objectified my whole entire life in higher education. And it wasn't until I got into higher ed that I realized that most white people don't expect me to know anything. Like they just expect me to be like a little brown doll and, like, agree with everything, I guess. But yeah, I guess I'm not being objectified with my body. Now. It's just like my brain.

Expectations of being objectified were present in all but one participant's narratives and were often discussed as the price for participation in the system. Moreover, participants discussed this as a theme across life domains and with a sense of perceived inevitability.

Mitigating Rejection

Distributive EV and representational invisibility yielded assessments of the academy as unwelcoming and unaccommodating, participants reported being on the verge of rejection within the academy at all times. Participants unanimously reported fears of losing their employment, being failed or expelled from a course, or not being hired or accepted to their next step. This fear of rejection was marked by *perceived threats to safety* and managed through *self-policing* and *code-switching*. Interestingly, each iteration of this theme was accompanied by the expressed fear of running out of chances to push back, as expressed by Khloe in her response.

And you know, we had a conversation like, y'all need to speak up and say something too,

cuz I can't use all my capital, like, I need my get out of jail free card for me when I do some stuff, you know?

Self-Policing. Participants employed self-policing as a tactic for mitigating the threat of rejection. This theme was evident in sentiments that described standards to which they held themselves and other Black women for the sake of being taken seriously and negating any notions that they didn't belong. For instance, Asya said: "As a Black woman...like, you know, with whatever you want to talk about, make sure that your facts are correct, you don't want to come in with just your opinion, because you just gonna look ignorant."

This theme was also evident in participant perceptions of what was expected of them by others regarding how they are allowed to show up. As expressed in Zuri's assertion: "I think there's . . . in general, for Black women, regardless of whether you're an activist, there is no room for you to make mistakes, you have to get it right and get it right the first time."

Code-switching. Code-switching relates to identity, and the ways in which individuals put on or take off specific aspects of their identities, including language for the purpose of assimilation to the environment (Spencer et al., 2022). It is a noted phenomenon among Black women and has been associated with feelings of non-belonginess among students with intersectionally minoritized identities. In this study, participants discussed code-switching in their academic positions as a mechanism for mitigating rejection in the face of epistemic violence. Trinity shared a particularly relevant point when she said:

As I get older, it becomes less and less, but I still feel the need in academic spaces to code-switch. And not in a way that I feel like I'm unrecognizable to myself. But also, I find myself like okay, how do I phrase this a little bit differently so that it will be better received because I understand whatever I say it's going to you know be misconstrued or

there's a higher likelihood that it will be misconstrued.

Perceived threats to safety. Within institutions of higher education participants found themselves taking on roles that position them to resist colonial and patriarchal structures. While activism differed between students in predominantly white institutions and those at HBCUs, perceptions of threats to their safety and success were consistent across institutions. Noelle shared that she didn't feel safe in her doctoral program: "It's not a safe environment at all psychologically. You know, the mental health issues that a lot of Black PhD students have, PhD students' period, but when you're Black, it's like you're constantly being tone policed."

Noelle discussed the experience of being tone policed and questioning her safety within the institution. The threat to safety, though different, was a theme identified within PWI's as well as HBCU's among participants. Kia emphasized the ways that her safety felt compromised when she said:

HBCUs are supposed to be a safe space for Black people. And...this year, we had a Trump supporter who somehow infiltrated the first-year class, and I blame myself because I'm on admissions, but I did not know. And so, I was talking about how, like Black people shouldn't have to come to [redacted] and then feel like they are being challenged on their identity.

Resistances

Voicing

When participants decided to speak out in response to their internal processes it took the form of *martyrdom* where they risked their own interests for the sake of others or through *disassociation from the institution* of higher education altogether. These expectations were then affirmed through external messages and contributed to the cycle of systemic silencing.

Participants reported speaking out on contemporary issues rather than historical injustices. Their voicing was classroom and university based and directed toward persons with positional power.

Martyrdom. Participants detailed their activism within the academy as self-sacrificial. An example is the case of Imani who jeopardized and eventually sacrificed her job for the sake of advocating for her students against institutional policies. Whether they were employed or enrolled in institutions of higher education participants noted that there was an expectation that they martyr themselves toward progress or resolution. Zuri shared an experience of using her voice for the betterment of others and to her own detriment.

Black people continue to put themselves on the line for the betterment of the people going forward and we don't really know how much better we're getting...so there have been times where I have like, put myself on the line to correct like supervisors who were causing harm.

Importantly, the theme of martyrdom in voicing also emerged as an expectation that activists hold for themselves, that it is their responsibility to sacrifice themselves in the name of their activism. These expectations were often adaptations of what they felt were expected of them and had internalized as their future in activism, as Danielle articulated in her interview.

There is an expectation that we are to take charge, there's an expectation—we'll take charge is not probably the right word—But I think there's an expectation that we are supposed to be ready to die front and center.

Disassociation from the institution. Participants all used language in their narratives in order to distance themselves from the academy. Their disassociation from the academy was in response to the implication of classism and elitism that defines the ivory tower. Imani named her own perceptions of academia and her distancing when she expressed:

I often think of graduate school, that kind of can lend itself to like elitist or classist, ideals. And so, I guess I would like to, say student as opposed to graduate student, because I don't like to be attached to that.

Silencing

When participants internalized institutional and faculty messages as threats, their silence became a strategy of self-preservation, an effort to render themselves invisible to avoid further harm. These external messages—such as assumptions about their competence, dismissive attitudes toward their contributions, and implicit expectations to conform to institutional norms—communicated that their presence and perspectives were undervalued. Participants expressed that their silence in classrooms, boardrooms, and other institutional spaces was intended to uphold a professional image. However, despite being less confrontational, this choice to remain silent or invisible elicited new external messages that further reinforced their marginalization, underscoring the complexity and persistence of institutional pressures.

Becoming Invisible

In the larger study and within the current analysis each of the participants' narratives contained sentiments about the risks of hypervisibility due to their activism. The current analysis found that the risks of hypervisibility as a Black woman in higher education were mitigated through maintaining a passive presence with little engagement. This finding is evident in Zuri's sentiment:

So, sitting in classrooms is kind of just a formality. . .so, it has always been kind of difficult, just like having to go like go on the backend to get like things and stuff, clarification and stuff like that. But, yeah, for the most part, I actually am not very vocal in classrooms at all. Because it's not always safe for me to do that

... I'm just here for my education, I don't really engage too much.

Doharty (2020) used the term “strategic emotionality” to denote the methodical ways that Black women theorize their own emotions in race specific research in order to avoid the threat of being rejected for publication, having the validity and rigor of the research questioned, and experiencing the negative perceptions of others at the expression or acknowledgement of their emotions. Strategic silencing has been interpreted as a mechanism for avoiding the violence and displacement associated with these institutions and is a representation of resistance as Black women assert agency over the visibility of their bodies and the impact of their voices.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Policies that perpetuate epistemic violence, covert messaging, and the enabling of personal and cultural messages that convey Black women's displacement in higher education need immediate revision. This displacement occurs when Black women's knowledge is co-opted without recognition, pushing them out of central knowledge spaces. Their contributions are thus utilized but undervalued, reinforcing a system that alienates them from spaces where they deserve acknowledgment as key intellectual contributors. This encompasses regulations regarding how buildings are named, which statues and monuments are erected or demolished, the recognition of holidays and traditions by the institution (including acknowledging the history of violence behind those holidays), the selection of guest speakers, and the initiatives and practices that often misconstrue, misunderstand, or deny the knowledge produced and shared in academic spaces by Black women.

Given the disparate numbers of Black women employed across academia, there is an urgent need for policies addressing pay equity, workload expectations, tenure and promotion

criteria, evaluation methods, and retention efforts. Education policymakers must prioritize these concerns. Recent policies that restrict educational content exploring the stories, experiences, and knowledge produced by Black people, specifically women, point to new modes of inflicting epistemic violence on Black women in higher education through erasure. Universities committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion must go beyond the DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) framework and engage in a fundamental transformation of the social and cultural environment of institutions, desensitizing and deprioritizing whiteness in favor of collectivity and cooperation.

People in positions of power within the academy, specifically educators have a responsibility to be mindful of the language they use when describing Black women and their behaviors and emotions. Reproducing stereotypes about anger, attitude, and aggression as the baseline for Black women is a dangerous practice that stigmatizes and delegitimizes their experiences and contributions across academia. Educators must also be conscious of how and when they center the voices of Black women. Selectively centering Black women's voices can quickly become tokenizing. Post-secondary educators should consider both the intent and impact of their interactions with Black women. Black women's successful contribution to creating knowledge across academia hinges on their ideas not being co-opted, dismissed, or devalued by others within academia who hold positions of greater privilege, visibility, and power.

Current standards for conducting research often preclude authenticity and emotionality in race-based research conducted by Black women. Researchers need to confront the hegemonic metrics used to assign value to research studies and endeavors. Additionally, there is limited information available on the coping mechanisms of Black women faculty who find themselves overloaded with service and mentoring students of color. Existing literature suggests that Black women in faculty positions need mentors who are also Black women, perpetuating the cycle of

overload without providing a resolution, and contributing to the exit of Black women from academia in significant numbers. Researchers should explore the resistance of Black women across academia, including the ways these mechanisms differ among students, faculty, and staff. Future research on Black women's resistance in academia can help institutions recognize and support their unique contributions, fostering more inclusive messaging. This work also shifts perspectives from deficit-based views to celebrating the resilience and agency Black women bring to academia.

Conclusion

Throughout history, institutions of higher education have been complicit in the systemic oppression of Black women, perpetuating epistemic violence, and silencing their voices. Within this context, strategic silencing emerges as a potent tool of resistance, challenging the status quo, and transforming the dynamics of power within academia. Strategic silencing is not an acquiescence to oppression but a calculated and deliberate response. It enables Black women to confront the systemic forces that have historically marginalized them and their scholarship. In doing so, strategic silencing fosters both individual agency and collective change, offering a pathway to reclaim the narrative of Black women's experiences within the academy.

This paper underscores the urgent need to address the ways in which institutions of higher education have oppressed Black women, denied them equitable opportunities, and perpetuated their silencing. It calls for a fundamental transformation in academia, including the acknowledgment, respect, and support of this nuanced form of resistance. Only through such actions can we hope to build a more inclusive, equitable, and just future within institutions of higher education, providing Black women with the recognition and agency they deserve as scholars and educators.

References

- Abrams, L. S., & Moio, J. A. (2009). Critical race theory and the cultural competence dilemma in social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 45(2), 245–261.
<https://doi.org/10.5175/JSWE.2009.200700109>
- Allen, W. (1992). The color of success: African-American college student outcomes at predominantly White and historically Black public colleges and universities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62(1), 26–45.
<https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.62.1.wv5627665007v701>
- Bronner, S. E. (2017). *Critical theory: A very short introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Brooks, R. (2018). Looking to foremothers for strength: A brief biography of the colored woman's league. *Women's Studies*, 47(6), 609–616.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2018.1492407>
- Bunch, A. J. (2015). Epistemic violence in the process of othering: Real-world applications and moving forward. *Scholarly Undergraduate Research Journal at Clark*.
<https://commons.clarku.edu/surj/vol1/iss1/2/>
- Carnevale, A. P., Van Der Werf, M., Quinn, M. C., Strohl, J., & Repnikov, D. (2018). Our separate & unequal public colleges: How public colleges reinforce white racial privilege and marginalize Black and Latino students. In *Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce*. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED594576>
- Carter-Robinson, J. (2019). *Many strides to freedom: African American women's unsung contributions and legacies*. NOVA Science Publishers.

- Chambers, C. R. (2011). Candid reflections on the departure of black women faculty from academe in the United States. *Negro Educational Review*, 62/63(1–4), 233-260,265.
- Cokley, K. (2000). An investigation of academic self-concept and its relationship to academic achievement in African American college students. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 26(2), 148–164. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798400026002002>
- Cooper, A. (1982). *A voice from the south*. The Aldine Printing House.
- Daniel, B.-J. (2019). Teaching while Black: racial dynamics, evaluations, and the role of White females in the Canadian academy in carrying the racism torch. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 22(1), 21–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1468745>
- Davis, G., & Khonach, T. (2020). The paradox of positionality: avoiding, embracing, or resisting feminist accountability. *Fat Studies*, 9(2), 101–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21604851.2019.1628604>
- Davis, R. (2020, October 27). New study shows black women are among the most educated in U.S. *Essence*. <http://www.essence.com/news/new-study-black-women-most-educated/>
- Dawson, S. (2022, May 18). Fact check: Are black women really the most educated? *NewsOne*. <https://newsone.com/4338015/educated-black-women-facts/>
- DeGruy Leary, J. (2005). *Post traumatic slave syndrome: America's legacy of enduring injury and healing*. Uptone Press.
- Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & Harris, A. (2012). *Critical race theory: An introduction* (2nd. ed). New York University Press.
- Doharty, N. (2020). The ‘angry Black woman’ as intellectual bondage: Being strategically emotional on the academic plantation. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(4), 548–562. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1679751>

Evans-Winters, V. E. (2019). *Black feminism in qualitative inquiry: A mosaic for writing our daughter's body*. Routledge.

Evans-Winters, V., & Esposito, J. (2010). Other people's daughters: Critical race feminism and Black girls' education. *The Journal of Educational Foundations*, 24(1), 11-24.

<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/other-peoples-daughters-critical-race-feminism/docview/205237804/se-2>

Fieck, M., Miron, A. M., Branscombe, N. R., & Mazurek, R. (2020). "We stand up for each other!" An interpretative phenomenological analysis of collective action among U.S. College women. *Sex Roles*, 83(11–12), 657–674.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01144-y>

Fox Tree, J. E., & Vaid, J. (2022). Why so few, still? Challenges to attracting, advancing, and keeping women faculty of color in academia. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 6.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fsoc.2021.792198>

Fricker, M. (2013). Epistemic justice as a condition of political freedom? *Synthese*, 190(7), 1317–1332. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-012-0227-3>

Garner, C. (2010, December 3). *Mary Jane Patterson (1840-1894)*.

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/patterson-mary-jane-1840-1894/>

Gayles, J. (2022, August 17). Does anyone see us? Disposability of Black women faculty in the academy. *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education*.

<https://www.diverseeducation.com/opinion/article/15295726/does-anyone-see-us-disposability-of-black-women-faculty-in-the-academy>

Geyton, T. (2021). *Shattered Resilience: The identity formation of Black women activists*. (28410088) [Doctoral dissertation, Morgan State University]. ProQuest.

- Geyton, T., Johnson, N., & Ross, K. (2020). 'I'm good': Examining the internalization of the strong black woman archetype. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2020.1844838>
- Glaeser, E. L. (2005). The political economy of hatred. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 120(1), 45–86.
- Gomez, M. A. (2004). Of Du Bois and diaspora: the challenge of African American studies. *Journal of Black Studies*, 35(2), 175–194. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934704266716>
- Harris-Lacewell, M. (2001). No place to rest. *Women & Politics*, 23(3), 1–33.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J014v23n03_01
- Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* (Rev. 10th anniversary ed). Routledge.
- Hill Collins, P. (2020). Defining black feminist thought. In C. McCann, S.-K. Kim, & E. Ergun (Eds.), *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives* (5th ed.). Routledge.
- How, A. (2003). *Critical Theory*. Macmillan Education UK.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-80237-7>
- Individual Freedom Act, No. HB7 (2022). <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/7>
- Jones, L. (2019, July 25). Endless Exodus: Faculty of Color Leave the Academy in Search of Fulfillment. *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education*.
<https://www.diverseeducation.com/stem/article/15105136/endless-exodus-faculty-of-color-leave-the-academy-in-search-of-fulfillment>
- Malacrida, C. (2007). Reflexive journaling on emotional research topics: Ethical issues for team researchers. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(10), 1329–1339.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307308948>

- Nadal, K. L., King, R., Sissoko, D. R. G., Floyd, N., & Hines, D. (2021). The legacies of systemic and internalized oppression: Experiences of microaggressions, imposter phenomenon, and stereotype threat on historically marginalized groups. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 63, 100895. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2021.100895>
- NCES. (2022). *U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics*. [Dataset]. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cha>
- Neel, R., & Lassetter, B. (2019). The stigma of perceived irrelevance: An affordance-management theory of interpersonal invisibility. *Psychological Review*, 126(5), 634–659. <https://doi.org/10.1037/rev0000143>
- Niemann, Y. F., Muhs, G. G. y, & González, C. G. (2020). *Presumed incompetent II: Race, class, power, and resistance of women in academia*. University Press of Colorado.
- Njoku, A., & Evans, M. (2022). Black women faculty and administrators navigating covid-19, social unrest, and academia: Challenges and strategies. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2220-. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042220>
- Olmos-Vega, F. M., Stalmeijer, R. E., Varpio, L., & Kahlke, R. (2023). A practical guide to reflexivity in qualitative research: AMEE Guide No. 149. *Medical Teacher*, 45(3), 241–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2022.2057287>
- Owens, J., & Massey, D. S. (2011). Stereotype threat and college academic performance: A latent variables approach. *Social Science Research*, 40(1), 150–166. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2010.09.010>
- Pérez, M. (2019). Epistemic violence: Reflections between the invisible and the ignorable. *El Lugar Sin Límites*, 1(1). 81-98. <https://www.aacademica.org/moira.perez/84>

Quinn, R. (2023, March 16). Fla.'s stop WOKE act remains stymied. *Inside Higher Ed*.

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2023/03/17/floridas-stop-woke-act-continues-be-blocked-colleges>

Rettke, H., Pretto, M., Spichiger, E., Frei, I. A., & Spirig, R. (2018). Using reflexive thinking to establish rigor in qualitative research. *Nursing Research*, 67(6), 490–497.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/NNR.0000000000000307>

Roberts, S. O., Bareket-Shavit, C., Dollins, F. A., Goldie, P. D., & Mortenson, E. (2020). Racial inequality in psychological research: Trends of the past and recommendations for the future. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(6), 1295–1309.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620927709>

Sesko, A. K., & Biernat, M. (2010). Prototypes of race and gender: The invisibility of Black women. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(2), 356–360.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2009.10.016>

Smith, J. A., Larkin, M., & Flowers, P. (2008). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE.

Spencer, B. M., Artis, S., Shavers, M., LeSure, S., & Joshi, A. (2022). To code-switch or not to code-switch: The psychosocial ramifications of being resilient Black women engineering and computing doctoral students. *Sociological Focus*, 55(2), 130–150.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00380237.2022.2054482>

Stevenson, B. E. (2007). Introduction: Women, slavery, and historical research. *The Journal of African American History*, 92(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1086/JAAHv92n1p1>

Wagster Pettus, E. (2024, May 3). Congressman praises heckling of war protesters, including 1 who made monkey gestures at Black woman. *AP News*.

<https://apnews.com/article/campus-protest-university-of-mississippi-49c768142013680198809903e9e66a5b>

- Walkington, L. (2017). How far have we really come? Black women faculty and graduate students' experiences in higher education. *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations*, 1(39), 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.55671/0160-4341.1022>
- Williams, A. B. (2022). The implications of colorism on black women from the early 20th century to the present. *Honors Theses*. https://aquila.usm.edu/honors_theses/839
- Wing, A. K. (2014). Critical race feminism. In J. Solomos & K. Murji (Eds.), *Theories of race and ethnicity: Contemporary debates and perspectives* (pp. 162–179). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139015431.014>
- Wing, A. K. & Willis, Christine A. (2009). From theory to praxis: Black women, gangs, and critical race feminism. *Berkeley Journal of African-American Law & Policy*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.15779/Z38B03Q>
- Wingfield, A. H. (2019). “Reclaiming our time”: Black women, resistance, and rising inequality: SWS Presidential Lecture. *Gender & Society*, 33(3), 345–362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243219835456>

Dr. Taylor Geyton is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at San Diego State University. With a background in social work practice and research across individual, group, and community levels, Dr. Geyton's research focuses on health and mental health disparities among Black women, emphasizing culturally relevant practices and interventions. Her work is grounded in Critical Theoretical Approaches and examines the impacts of activism, systemic stressors, and intersectional identities on health outcomes. Dr. Geyton is also actively involved in developing culturally specific treatment models to address psychological and physical health risks for Black women through community-centered approaches.

Dr. Lalaine (Lainey) Sevillano is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Portland State University. She is a Pilipinx immigrant and a first-generation MotherScholar, educator, and relationship builder. Drawing from neocolonialism, critical race, and decoloniality theories, her scholarship advances the idea that adverse health outcomes and life trajectories may be linked to legacies of colonialism. Dr. Sevillano completed her doctoral studies from the University of Texas at Austin where she was awarded a 2021-22 University Continuing Graduate Student Fellowship. Her dissertation, "Resisting the New Yellow Peril: Internalized Racism and Critical Consciousness in Asian, Pacific Islander, Desi Americans" was awarded the 2022 API Social Work Educators Association's Doctoral scholarship. Most recently, Dr. Sevillano has been invited as a Fellow of the Indigenous Substance use and addictions Prevention Interdisciplinary Research Education (INSPIRE) program.

Dr. Gerri K. Connaught earned a PhD from NYU's Silver School of Social Work and is a licensed master social worker. With clinical experience supporting diverse student populations, including first-generation college students and veterans, her research focuses on equitable access to higher education. She examines racialized experiences among BIPOC students in social work programs, particularly how these impact feelings of impostor phenomenon and mental health. Dr. Connaught holds an MSW from the Silberman School of Social Work at CUNY Hunter College.

Fatima Mabrouk is a PhD candidate at New York University's Silver School of Social Work, focusing on the impact of microaggressions on Black women practitioners, particularly in the workplace. Her research investigates how these experiences influence mental health and

examines organizational policies and procedures surrounding restitution. Fatima's work employs qualitative analysis to explore themes of racial and gender-based discrimination within professional environments, contributing to broader understandings of mental health impacts in marginalized communities.