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### A Case Study of the Experiences of Black Female Faculty at Research-intensive Schools of Social Work

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*Washington University in St. Louis*

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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Brown School of Social Work

Dissertation Examination Committee:  
Renee M. Cunningham-Williams, Chair  
Tonya Edmond  
Carolyn Lessorogol  
Michelle Purdy  
Vetta Thompson

A Case Study of the Experiences of Black Female Faculty at Research-Intensive Schools of  
Social Work  
By  
LaShawnda N. Fields, MSW

A dissertation presented to  
The Graduate School  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2020 Saint Louis, Missouri

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LaShawnda N. Fields

Washington University in St. Louis

May 2020

Dedicated to my Grammy,  
Rosie Lee Howard

Honorable mention to my in-laws,  
Jerome and Josephine Fields



Abstract

A Case Study of the Experiences of Black Female Faculty at Research-intensive Schools of

Social Work

by

LaShawnda N. Fields, MSW

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work

Washington University in St. Louis, 2020

Professor Renee M. Cunningham-Williams, Chair

Representation has improved over the past 40 years among Black female faculty members in social work schools; however, low academic rank and distribution of this demographic across institutions is one way in which predominately White institutions (PWI) of higher education perpetuate racial inequalities. Higher education, in general, continues to result in negative experiences and poor outcomes for Black female faculty members such as time to tenure, low academic rank, and feelings of isolation. However, little is known about the experiences of this demographic in schools of social work, particularly those identified as research-intensive (R-1) Carnegie-designated institutions of higher education. This case study of Black female faculty at research-intensive schools of social work explores the experiences of these faculty members to determine if the challenging relationship between Black women and higher education in the United States in other disciplines holds true for social work. This present study is shaped by frameworks related to race and gender oppression, namely Black feminist thought, critical race

theory, and intersectionality to draw conclusions on the lived experiences of Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work. The goal of this study is a depth of understanding, not generalizability, with the specific aims of (a) exploring how Black women negotiate their roles as tenure-track faculty members in top-ranked schools of social work at PWIs and (b) understanding the nature of professional support for tenure-track faculty members at top-ranked, predominately White schools of social work from the perspective of Black female faculty. It is clear through in-depth interviews that these Black women are unfortunately having experiences similar to those of professors in other disciplines, which makes it difficult to be successful in the professoriate.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **Problem Statement**

More than one hundred years after the first Black woman completed her doctoral education in America, Black women continue to be underrepresented in a wide range of academic disciplines as shown below in Table 1 (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014).

Representation has improved over the past 40 years among Black female faculty members in social work schools. Being either the lone or one of a few faculty members with minoritized identities in a culture that is not inclusive often adds obstacles that impact retention, productivity and quality of experiences. In comparison to teaching institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), representation of Black females at research-intensive schools of social work remains low. Though representation has improved in general for this demographic in social work, low academic rank and distribution is one way in which PWIs (PWI) of higher education perpetuate racial inequalities (Allen, Epps, & Guillory, 2000; Pittman, 2012). A PWI is an institution of higher education with a student enrollment of Whites at or above 50% (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Higher education in general continues to result in negative experiences and poor outcomes for Black female faculty members such as time to tenure, low academic rank, and feelings of isolation. However, little is known about the experiences of this demographic in schools of social work, particularly those identified as research-intensive (R-1) Carnegie-designated institutions of higher education (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011). This study may advance knowledge about Black women faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work in an effort to improve retention and healthy experiences of this demographic.

Table 1  
*Black Women Doctoral Degrees Conferred by Field of Study*

Field of Study	2007–2008	2016–2017
Agriculture	21	28
Communication	39	39
Education	1054	1951
Engineering	52	63
Mathematics	12	4
Psychology	275	502
Social Sciences	68	111

National Center for Educational Statistics (2009)

### **Purpose of the Study**

This current case study of Black female faculty at research-intensive schools of social work explored the experiences of these faculty members to determine if the challenging relationship between Black females and higher education in the United States in other disciplines holds true for social work. Empirical research in various disciplines such as education, psychology, and law have shown the challenges Black female faculty members face, and this study explores whether the same is true in the discipline of social work. A case study methodology was chosen as it is the most appropriate way to study the complexity and intricate details of a single case (Stake, 1995), which in this study is Black female faculty members at schools of social work. The study targeted a purposive sample ( $N=30$ ) of Black female tenured and tenure-track faculty members at highly ranked, predominately White schools of social work in the U.S. as identified by *U.S. News and World Report* (“Best Schools,” 2019). In-depth interviews were used to allow the study participants the opportunity to share their experiences and outcomes as Black female faculty members at highly ranked, predominately White schools of social work. Ultimately, this study aimed to provide data to support improvements to the retention of this group and improvements to their job satisfaction.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 introduces the experiences of Black female faculty at research-intensive schools of social work. The problem statement discusses the culture and climate and how they impact this group. Chapter 2, the literature review, provides background and significance on the history of Black women in higher education and social work specifically. Chapter 3 details the study framework using the theories of Black feminist thought (BFT), critical race theory (CRT), and intersectionality. I used empirical studies in higher education to guide this study to determine if Black female faculty in social work have had experiences similar to such faculty in other disciplines. Chapter 4 explains the methodology the study utilizes to collect and analyze the data. Chapter 5 highlights and discusses the findings of this study. As is often the case with qualitative studies, the discussion is woven throughout the findings and summarized afterwards. Chapter 6 acknowledges limitations and offers practice and research implications of the study. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation, followed by references and appendices.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Though Black women do not solely face the challenge of assimilation into the academy or the absence of inclusion, they can face fundamental and unique issues rooted in gender and race inequalities as faculty members (Grant & Ghee, 2015). Pittman (2012) conducted a study of Black faculty members at a Midwestern Carnegie I research institution and found that 81% of the faculty interviewed believed race played a significant role in their campus experiences in general and 71% felt that their race-related experiences were negative and included feelings of exclusion and tokenism. As a result of their experiences with in/hypervisibility, women of color in the academy often experience a sense of heightened scrutiny and surveillance as they bear the burden of representation of the groups to which they belong due to not being seen as individuals (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). This heightened sense of scrutiny may lead to overfunctioning and stress, among other symptoms affecting their health and research productivity (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). Overfunctioning can look different for each individual, but it is essentially an attempt to surpass typical rates of productivity just to be seen as average at best.

Retention of Black women faculty members remains a challenge for research-intensive institutions of higher education primarily due to culture and climate issues (Allen et al., 2000; Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014; Marbley, 2007; Pittman, 2012). As defined by Stolp and Smith (1995), climate represents the shared perceptions of an organization, whereas culture is the historical values, beliefs, norms, and myths understood by members of a community or organization. Similar to the experiences of Black undergraduate and graduate students, faculty of color often endure isolation, underrepresentation, a lack of leadership opportunities, and salary inequity, creating what has been described as a hostile climate (Allen et al., 2000; McGee & Kazembe, 2015). Identifying with multiple marginalized identities may lead to what is labeled as

a hostile climate where one's credentials, expertise, professionalism, and contributions as a faculty member are regularly questioned (Allen et al., 2000; Marbley, 2007; McGee & Kazembe, 2015). Lee and Leonard (2001) labeled the behavior in a hostile academic environment as “violent,” citing individual behavior or systemic practices rooted in the misuse of influence and power against Blacks at PWI's of higher education. They use the term *violence* to identify ridiculing, threatening, intimidating, and gossiping behaviors. These experiences are in stark contrast to the six values espoused in the National Association of Social Worker's (NASW, 2017) Code of Ethics—social justice, dignity, and worth of the individual, importance, and centrality of human relationships, integrity, and competence. Black women faculty members at schools of social work may experience more significant negative impacts as a result of hostile environments, thus resulting in a cognitive disconnect if they enter these institutions expecting inclusion and equity and other values per the NASW Code of Ethics.

While being an underrepresented minority is not an identity held exclusively by Black women, inequities are more prevalent when evaluating gender and race together. For example, a study of 1189 college and university faculty members at six institutions—three private and three public—found that when evaluating their experiences of the culture and climate of the institution, Black women faculty members were the most dissatisfied of the four race/gender groups studied—White/male, Black/male, White/female, Black/female (Allen et al., 2000). Black women faculty members reported experiencing a reduced sense of community, limited satisfaction with the interactions they have with White faculty members, and less satisfaction with the organizational culture and climate in comparison to their White counterparts (Marbley, 2007).

Howard-Baptiste and Harris (2014) through a literature review and autoethnographic work found that Black female faculty members may feel stretched beyond capacity as a result of service on minority-focused committees, course and student advising loads, which often exceed those of their White, male counterparts, in addition to their scholarship, which is consistent with other researchers' findings (Allen et al., 2000). These expectations may be a source of contention as Black members of the faculty, in comparison to their White counterparts, have been found to place a higher value on teaching and service (Allen et al., 2000). Drawing from her personal experience, Carter-Black (2008) discussed the responsibility she felt as a Black, female faculty member to make herself available to as many students as reasonably possible who share her marginalized identities. She was in a sense reaching back to assist students in the way someone may or may not have supported her throughout her tenure in higher education.

Black women especially face additional obstacles in the classroom at PWIs as they are frequently questioned by non-Black students about their legitimacy and qualifications while having their authority challenged, which may result in less favorable course evaluations (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Constance-Huggins, 2018; Marbley, 2007). As teaching quality is a commonly accepted criterion for promotion and tenure, these negative course evaluations may present another barrier to tenure and promotion of Black female faculty at PWIs of higher education.

Black female researchers' scholarship across disciplines overwhelmingly centers on one or more of their identities, and historically research on matters of race and or ethnicity and gender issues has been perceived as less valuable in general and lacking in rigor as the methodologies often include qualitative components (Allen et al., 2000; Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2013). These scholars have faced harsh and often unfair criticism of both their topics and



methodology, resulting in both internal and external hurdles towards success and securing tenure and promotion. In spite of challenging circumstances, Black females have successfully navigated the ivory towers of higher education dating back to 1921 when Drs. Alexander, Simpson, and Dyke became the first Black women to obtain PhDs in their respective fields of English, Physics, and Economics (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014). Nearly a century later, changes in the culture and climate at most PWIs of higher education remain a work in progress with some Black female faculty members believing their presence is not valued but is merely tolerated (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014).

Despite continual efforts to improve diversity, which has been a priority of the CSWE (2017), Black women faculty members' representation in predominately White schools of social work continues to be stagnant (Edwards, Clark, & Bryant, 2012). Table 2 details the changes in Black faculty in schools of social work, both male and female, over an 11-year period. This demographic hovered around 14% until 2017, when the representation grew by 2.3%. Table 3 highlights the number and percentage of Black women professors in all disciplines throughout the US over a 26-year period from 1991–2017. The representation of this demographic increased by 1% during this time. A 2012 study of 108 self-identified African American female faculty members, of whom 42% had tenure and 73% were at public institutions, found that Black women faculty members reported moderate amounts of stress and relational–cultural connections with their White peers (Edwards et al., 2012).

Table 2  
*Social Work Black Faculty Representation Both Male and Female*

Year	Number of Black Faculty at SW Schools	Percentage of Black Faculty at SW Schools
2006	# Not Available	14%
2009	559	14.4%
2010	508	14%
2013	735	14.8%
2017	914	16.3%

Council on Social Work Education. (2018).

Table 3  
*Black Female Representation at All Ranks and All Disciplines in USA 1991 and 2017*

Year	Number of Black Female Professors	Percentage of Representation at All Rank and All Disciplines in USA
1991	11,460	2.2%
2017	26,004	3.2%

U. S. Census National Center for Educational Statistics (2018).

Navigating the professoriate is challenging for most, and yet, given the intersection of race and gender, it is essential to understand how the academy can ease these additional intersectionality-specific burdens shouldered by Black women in the academy. The relational-cultural theory posits that women specifically may associate their sense of self with their ability to maintain relationships while acknowledging how individuals are crippled by sociocultural challenges such as oppression and stratification that prevent participation in healthy relationships (Comstock et al., 2008). Intersections of race and gender may lead to Black women experiencing unique forms of oppression, including stereotypes that they are often working to distance themselves from in academia. Those stereotypes include the “mammy”—supportive, serving, and nurturing—and “Sapphire”—viewed as lacking intelligence and skills and not worthy of the attention of others (Mitchell & Herring, 1998; Smith, 1999). A 2011 study of 109 White undergraduate students from both rural and urban New England universities used a 78-item, 6-

point Likert-type questionnaire to identify which characteristics would be associated with White women in comparison to Black women. The study found that White undergraduate students ages 18–30 more often assigned characteristics historically associated with the Matriarch/Sapphire stereotype such as loud, quick-tempered, argumentative, dominating, tough, and strong to Black women in comparison to White women (Donovan, 2011). Again pointing to the unique experiences of Black female faculty members.

Bradley (2005) posited that institutions of higher education cannot ignore the likely impact these stereotypical images can have on the experiences of Black women considering how pervasive the images remain in popular culture. McGee and Kazembe (2015)—through a phenomenological study of 33 Black faculty members (14 female) in education departments at 13 institutions across the country—found a common theme among participants. When presenting their research, these faculty members believed they faced racialized stereotypes in expectations to behave as performers, and many believed humor needed to be as much a part of their presentations as the knowledge they were offering. The participants went on to say that in addition to entertainment expectations, they simultaneously received criticism for lacking scholarly integrity, leading to pressure to manage these stereotypes and biases. One Black woman participant in the study said she was told she needed to smile more when presenting because Black women were often viewed as too serious and she would not want to add to that stereotype.

Another way in which these stereotypes manifest themselves is in the classroom experiences of Black women faculty where they are questioned and their authority is challenged by students. White students at U.S. PWIs are not used to having their thinking challenged or experiencing power relations outside the status quo (Marbley, 2007). Diverse classrooms enrich

the academic experiences of students. However, it is not uncommon for Black women faculty members to receive more negative course evaluations as they are filtered through dominant culture norms where White males are the authorities and expected instructors on college campuses (Alexander-Floyd, 2015). Unwarranted negative evaluations are problematic in general, but specifically when consideration is given to the weight of student evaluations during the tenure and promotion process. Conversely, a small case study of seven Black professors reported no experiences with barriers to building trust with students with different racial identities nor did they report giving this issue much thought (Mitchell & Rosiek, 2006). As is often the case, these experiences are unique to the individual, although there may be patterns present among those with shared identities.

According to Gasser and Shaffer (2014), women often leave the academy as a result of feeling stuck in their current roles with little opportunity for quality promotions such as deanship, in addition to lack of satisfaction with salaries, recognition, and rewards. Edwards et al. (2012) explained a significant component of the challenges that Black women face in higher education through Kanter's theory of proportional representation. Kanter (1993) identified three types of diverse groups: skewed, tilted, and balanced. In a skewed group, minority group members are heavily outnumbered by majority group members, which is the least ideal make up of an institution. When there is nearly equal representation across race and ethnic groups, the representation is considered to be in balance. Controlling for power dynamics, these are ideal circumstance in which interactions throughout the groups will be fairly balanced. Between skewed and balanced groups there are tilted groups. These groups have just enough representation to allow individuals to provide support to one another through alliances, thereby buffering what would otherwise be skewed experiences.

Due to the low number of Black women in the academy, their experiences continue to include obstacles such as racism and sexism, distrust in their roles as instructors, underappreciation of their scholarship and lack of collegiality as they did nearly a century ago (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014). Institutions that are able to provide opportunities for tilted groups are more likely to create balanced groups eventually. In addition to achieving balanced or proportional representation, it is essential that opportunities for tenure, promotion, and other quality advancement opportunities are present (Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010).

Layered on top of the standard challenges and demands of being a junior, tenure-track faculty member, faculty members of color have the added burden of race, and Black women faculty members have the intersection of race and gender to navigate. Pittman (2012) conducted a study of Black faculty members at a Midwestern Carnegie research institution and found that 81% of the faculty interviewed believed race played a significant role in their campus experiences in general, and 71% felt that their race-related experiences were negative and included feelings of exclusion and being seen as tokens of their race. The intersection of race and gender repeatedly have proven to be quite challenging to navigate. One study identified women faculty members as having feelings they should say “no” more frequently to protect their time to focus on research but shared it was more challenging to do so the way they often witnessed the male faculty doing so (Griffin et al., 2013). These are disheartening experiences to cope with in general but coupled with a new professional role and the desire to secure tenure, these are extenuating circumstances at best.

Instead of prestigious opportunities for leadership that could be beneficial to a tenure dossier, Black faculty members are often solicited for service to the campus community that may not be a good use of time and pose a distraction from their teaching and research. Black female

faculty members are often stretched beyond capacity to serve on committees addressing minority and Black specific issues in addition to the number of courses they teach, how many students they advise, and service to the campus more so than their White, male counterparts while being expected to excel in their own research projects (Allen et al., 2000; Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014). Often, these expectations are a source of contention as Black members of the faculty have been found to place a higher value on teaching and service than Whites due to their burdened experiences in the academy (Allen et al., 2000).

A 2012 study of 14 Black faculty members at a PWI found the participants believed they were chosen to serve on committees, give talks, and attend meetings related to race because they were expected to be the authorities on matters of race (Pittman, 2012). One participant expressed feeling these expectations were an additional burden to his work, though he tried to use the opportunities to create structural changes to improve the campus climate. Rarely are these tasks seen as leadership opportunities or valued as “scholarly” or academic work, which may negatively impact faculty time to tenure and promotion opportunities (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014). The lists of additional expectations are lengthy and may be placed upon these faculty members by administrators, students, colleagues, and at times community members (Allen et al., 2000). These are common and unfair burdens placed on a marginalized group, which may lead to their exit from the academy in search of a more appealing culture.

Tenure and promotion are the goals of assistant faculty members who accept tenure-track positions in higher education, which can be a tedious, confusing, and a political process for some. Modica and Mamiseishvili (2010) conducted a study using the longitudinal National Study of Post-Secondary Faculty (NSOPF) data. The 1993 NSOPF sample was made up of 4580 participants, of whom 160 were Black, whereas the 1999 sample included 3970 with 150 Black

participants, and the 2004 sample was composed of 5260 participants with 260 Black participants. The Modica and Mamiseishvili study brings attention to the lack of progress in tenure and career advancements of Black faculty at research universities over 9 years.

The inability to secure tenure was the most significant factor contributing to the slow increases, as well as the occasional decreases of Black faculty at PWIs of higher education. Unfortunately for faculty members from marginalized groups, tenure remains merit-based defined by measures that are often ambiguous and difficult to achieve without proper guidance and consideration of biases in the process (Griffin et al., 2013). While the process is not always transparent, this is not to imply there is no minority representation in these groups, but due to the low representation of minorities, there will inevitably be more dominant group members deciding who is and is not extended offers of tenure and promotion.

While there was no specific percentage presented, Smith and Crawford (2007), in a study of Black administrators of higher education institutions note a significant number of faculty of color at PWIs leave before their probationary period ends and choose not to endure the struggle to secure tenure in these hostile climates. As another example, Marbley (2007) shared her personal experiences with tenure and promotion at a PWI where she believed to be seen as equally productive as her White counterparts she needed to be twice as productive, and to get ahead she needed to be three times as productive. Doubling and tripling productivity is a complicated and unfair expectation for anyone to strive towards, but even more so for someone without support for and a clear understanding of the tenure and promotion processes while attempting to survive and thrive in a hostile environment. Faculty members of color do not always feel safe due to the constant questioning of their qualifications and doubts about their

ability to succeed as it is not uncommon for them to be the sole outsider in a department and struggle to secure support.

While the tenure and promotion expectations of scholarship, teaching, and service are somewhat apparent to women faculty, there is often a belief that their teaching evaluations are weighted more heavily during their tenure process than those of their male colleagues (Griffin et al., 2013). It is the responsibility of the institution to clarify these points of confusion as Black women specifically believe they are more closely scrutinized by students by having their competence and qualifications challenged unfairly, which may result in less favorable course evaluations (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Constance-Huggins, 2018; Marbley, 2007). This behavior can present barriers to tenure and promotion of Black female faculty at PWIs of higher education.

Nurturing-behavior expectations is another barrier to tenure and promotion that women in the professoriate face. A 2017 study of 47 female and 41 male professors at Carnegie classified universities were surveyed about student behavior, student expectations, and emotional labor. The results of this study showed that, in comparison to male professors, female professors reported marginally higher standard work demands. Standard demands were activities such as offering office hours and timely feedback to students. El-Alayli, Hansen-Brown, and Ceynar (2018) further discussed the impact of students' expectations and favors such as helping them manage stress, providing milder feedback, and accommodating requests above and beyond the standard expectations of an instructor, often resulting in female faculty members spending time as "academic moms," a role in which they are expected to exhibit both nurturing behaviors and competency (El-Alayli et al. 2018). *Cultural taxation* and *invisible labor* are terms used to describe the productivity hours sacrificed by many minority faculty members to support and



advise marginalized students that often go unnoticed and unappreciated though it aids in the retention of these students (June, 2015). The intersection of “academic mom” and cultural taxation may add to the challenges Black women faculty face in navigating the tenure and promotion process on time.

Often, minority faculty members believe it is due solely to their identities that they are expected to provide a higher level of service to the campus community. Extra service often includes race-related volunteerism, high volumes of student advising, and nonacademic appointments, which they do not believe has an impact on change at institutional levels, furthering feelings of tokenism and isolation while attempting to solidify their many identities (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada & Galindo, 2009; Pittman, 2012). If minority faculty members are expected to provide more than the average levels of service to the campus community, there should be efforts to ensure these commitments are valued during the tenure and promotion review process. Currently, most institutions do not place educational value on these efforts, and they absorb time that could be better spent focusing on teaching and research, which are valued towards tenure and promotion (Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014).

One component of the hostile climate Black women academics face is the ambiguity of the institutions’ and or departments’ tenure and promotion review process, which may result in navigation difficulties. Providing clarity of the process is where mentors can intervene and offer guidance (Lee & Leonard, 2001). The difference between the written and unwritten rules of tenure and promotion is interpretation and transparency, which are best navigated with the support of mentors who understand the lack of clarity is related to socialization, not incompetence (Wallace, Moore, Wilson, & Hart, 2012). Basically, these individuals are capable of achieving success with the proper scaffolds. It is not uncommon for faculty members to learn

more about tenure and promotion expectations from senior faculty members and not from a handbook or department heads. Barriers to tenure are often rooted in discrimination that is both historical and ongoing, thus supporting the hierarchy that maintains the status quo of inequality, as well as a lack of well-communicated expectations by the department and institution (Allen et al., 2000; Griffin et al., 2013). Like many professors, oftentimes Black females select research topics associated with their identities and their scholarship focused on matters of race and or ethnicity or gender issues, which may be perceived as less valuable due to a presumed lack of validity and rigor, resulting in varying standards of evaluation (Allen et al., 2000; Griffin et al., 2013).

As is clear from the literature, a substantial amount is known about the experiences of Black females in higher education; however, we know very little about the experiences and outcomes of Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work. The purpose of the present study is to help bridge this gap in the knowledge and determine if research-intensive schools of social work have more inclusive cultures as may be expected based on the tenets of the discipline and the NASW code of ethics. This is important to support efforts of recruitment, retention and diversity of thought resulting in potentially more culturally competent evidence-based practices.

### Chapter 3: Study Framework

This present study is shaped by frameworks related to race and gender oppression, namely Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory, and Intersectionality to draw conclusions on the lived experiences of Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work and in higher education at large.

#### **Black Feminist Thought**

Patricia Hill Collins (1991) defined Black feminism “as a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community” (p. 39). Collins added, “Portraying African-American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and hot mommas has been essential to the political economy of domination fostering Black women’s oppression” (p. 39). Collins said that the stereotypes Black women are often labeled with can be seen as fluid, meaning a woman can find herself being viewed in one way or another or several ways at any given moment. In higher education, the mammy and matriarch are more prevalent. Stereotypes are a reflection of the power denied to minority groups, as others have been able to define them and control the narratives of their experiences and worth (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). In recounting her experiences as a Black woman in higher education, Carter-Black (2008) stated that stereotype threat can occur when a member of a marginalized group realizes they may be identified by a negative stereotype in a given context, resulting in their being triggered. It is important to note that the possibility of being associated with a stereotype is impactful before any direct consequences. Additionally, these stereotypes are cause for concern as they devalue Black women and diminish perceptions about their intelligence, resulting in their feelings of inferiority in the academy (Jones, Wilder, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013).

One of the defining characteristics of a mammy is being an obedient servant (Collins, 1991; hooks & West, 2002). Regardless of occupation, Black women are often asked to take on caretaker roles such as nannies and counselors, fulfilling the stereotypical role of a nurturing mammy beyond a domestic worker (hooks & West, 1991). These caretaker expectations result in limitations of these women's value to only supporting others in their journeys toward success. Due to limited representation, Black women faculty are often in high demand to serve as a mentor and or academic advisor to students of color, which may lead to overcommitment and result in difficulty balancing the teaching, mentoring, service, and research expectations, thus leaving some with feelings of servitude (Allen et al., 2000; Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014; Weng & Grey, 2017). Additionally, faculty who identify as members of marginalized groups believe they may often be selected for campus service roles associated with their racial and ethnic identities as they are expected to be the experts on these matters regardless of their scholarship focus, while often teaching more classes and advising more students than their White male counterparts (Allen et al., 2000; Howard-Baptiste & Harris, 2014). Senior level administrators may expect Black women to perform these tasks in a stereotypical mammy way in that their professional and personal needs are not valued and they are forced to conform to these demands.

Collins (2002) noted that justification for race, gender, and class oppression is provided by the frequency of images of Black women as "Other." Marbley (2007) reported Black women faculty felt less connectivity and less satisfaction with organizational structures and climates and limited satisfaction with interactions they had with White colleagues, which again, can be a result of being labeled as "Other," which distinguishes Black women from everyone else (Collins, 2002).

Empowering Black women and ensuring their agency in the current power dynamics is a crucial element of BFT as reflected in its tenets of resistance, voice, and activism (Jones et al., 2013). Black feminist theory is built upon the historical collective struggle and resistance of Black women regardless of their individual experiences and priorities (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). In summary, Black feminist epistemology is an attempt for Black women through their research, language, and rhetoric to inform others of the value of educated Black women providing opportunities to understand the intersection of race and gender (Grant & Ghee, 2015).

### **Critical Race Theory**

CRT has several tenets upon which the framework is built: centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, challenging the dominant ideologies and deficit perspectives as well as providing counter-narratives centered on experiences of marginalized groups (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Sulé, 2014). Other tenets of CRT include centrality of experiential knowledge; interdisciplinary analyses; explicit commitment to social justice; race as fundamentally tied to different categories; examining institutional and cultural factors; and abstaining from neutrality with respect to law, institutions, and public policy (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Sulé, 2014). The counter-narrative is a primary tenet of CRT and seen as essential in that it (a) deconstructs the dominant narrative, which reifies, maintains, or mystifies the existing systems of oppression, (b) gives voice to those who are marginalized, (c) encourages unity among marginalized peoples, and (d) builds upon existing histories, narratives, and discourses (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Critical race scholars contend that racist discourses, or narratives, of dominant groups, rationalize systemic domination in ways that fit current historical, economic, and social trends (Abrams & Moio, 2009). For example, Leonardo (2004) suggested that the well-intended

academic discourse around racism and its overemphasis on the examination of White privilege encourages faculty, professionals, academics, and students to place little value on the empirical and unjust implications of racism. Leonardo argued that the dominant narrative surrounding White privilege silences marginalized voices while amplifying dominant White discourse. Counter-narratives function as effective ways of combating this oppressive, perhaps unintentional, phenomenon (Leonardo, 2004). This study provided an opportunity for Black female faculty members at top-rank schools of social work to offer a narrative of their lived experiences.

CRT is a preferred approach when attempting to understand the marginalized experiences of African Americans in higher education while balancing their experiences of tenacity and success (Felder, 2015). The educational environment has been shown to maintain the status quo with regard to oppression and racism based narratives throughout history such as the “inferiority paradigm” (Carter & Goodwin, 1994) and the “color-blind narrative” (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). The counter-narrative offers insight and balance to these dominant and oppressive narratives. CRT and its methodology of the counter-narrative bring marginalized voices to the forefront and help social workers and educators work toward the NASW (2017) mandate of cultural competency, which is to “understand the culture and its function in human behavior and society...understand the nature of social diversity and oppression concerning race, ethnicity, national origin, color” (p.15). In addition to the experiences of marginalized students, often White students are not interested in learning about race and deconstruction of systems of oppression so much, so Black female professors often receive evaluations questioning their competency and accusations of racism (Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011). Black female faculty add that neither their departments nor their institutions acknowledge the role sexism and racism may have played in these outcomes

reinforcing the cultural hegemony, and CRT and critical race feminism can provide transparency of these situations (Alexander-Floyd, 2015).

Many researchers of higher educational institutions have focused their efforts on exposing the experiences of non-Whites in the educational environment using CRT and its methodology of giving voice to those typically silenced (Anderson-Thompkins et al., 2004; Bowles et al., 2009; Ceja et al., 2001; Harper et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2002). Counter-narratives are an ideal fit for understanding ideas such as racism, White privilege, and the experiences of outsiders in a White institution (Daniel, 2011). Utilizing CRT for education requires a different execution than other CRT frameworks in that it foregrounds race and racism in the research while also challenging traditional paradigms, methods, and separate discourses on class, gender, and race by highlighting the intersection of these constructs and the ways in which communities of color are impacted (Solorzano et al., 2000; Sulé, 2014). Ethnic studies, women's studies, history, law, and sociology bring transdisciplinary knowledge and new methodological bases into CRT to offer a better understanding of different forms of discrimination (Croom & Patton, 2011/2012; Solorzano et al., 2000). This current study adds to the literature by exploring the experiences of Black female faculty members in social work using similar theories and approaches in a related but distinct discipline.

Specific to social work schools, there is a need to assess *cultural competence* in graduate-level social work programs as the value of cultural competence has been adopted by the NASW (2017). CRT supports a move from individual to institutional and systematic responsibility as it names racist injuries and identifies their origins (Croom & Patton, 2011/2012; Gildersleeve, et al., 2011; Solorzano et al., 2000). Cultural competency is of particular importance for social work because of the work with and on behalf of marginalized communities such as racial and

ethnic minorities, those living in poverty, and those of various immigrant statuses. CRT can be applied to analyze state and federal laws and policies related to social systems and support and the allocation of resources through a structural and systemic level lens.

Through CRT, racial microaggressions can be theorized more clearly for the structural and systemic forms of racism they are. Everyday racist acts towards people of color can be subtle, automatic, and unconscious layered assaults that cumulatively take an academic, physiological, and psychological toll on the victims (Huber & Solorzano, 2015). CRT offers counter-narratives to the dominant culture's proffered theories that neglect to provide space for the unique experiences related to the intersection of race and gender. Additionally, CRT is a framework often used to connect power-related experiences to structural oppression and the role of microaggressions in reinforcing this oppression daily, often leading to the slow wearing down of marginalized individuals. CRT is pertinent to the experiences and outcomes of Black women faculty as this theory is centered on highlighting the voices of those typically silenced by providing a platform allowing them to share their stories.

### **Intersectionality**

Built upon BFT and CRT, intersectionality is complex as it is a method and disposition as well as a heuristic and analytic tool. According to the theory of intersectionality, Black women's experiences are unique in that they are inextricably coupled with their race and gender, resulting in Black women having lived as "others" in society, differentiating their discriminatory experiences from both Black men and White women" (Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Roberts 2014). According to Crenshaw (1989), "Black women are caught between ideological and political currents that combine first to create and then to bury Black women's experiences." Intersectionality was initially introduced to address the lack of Black women inclusion in



antidiscrimination law as well as feminist and antiracist theory and politics (Carbado et al., 2013; Robinson et al., 2016).

Intersectionality is multidimensional in that it considers overlapping experiences related to marginalized identities and how these identities impact a person's agency, viewpoints, and aspirations, including women of color faculty members facing presumptions of incompetence as instructors, researchers, and leaders in higher education (Carbado et al., 2013; Comer et al., 2017; Jaysiiree et al., 2011). For example, Carbado et al. (2013) discussed how a member of their research group who identified as an Asian-East Indian woman felt as though her ideas and questions in group settings were often credited to others, and though excellent and informative suggestions they were not seen as her own, resulting in her feelings of invisibility. While these are not experiences unique to women of color, these accounts tend to be different from the typical claims of discrimination expressed by Black men and White women (Robinson et al., 2016).

Intersectionality goes beyond the simple categorization of identities and examines the power distribution associated with these identities. Identities are not distinct. Instead, they are always tied to one another, and due to circumstances, a person can be in a position of power and oppression simultaneously. These dynamics are fluid and ever changing; intersectionality is not fixed as it can and does move (Carbado et al., 2013; Jaysiiree et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2016).

When seeking an understanding of the experiences and outcomes of Black women faculty in schools of social work at R1 institutions, the three theories that offer the strongest framework are BFT, CRT, and intersectionality. Each of these theories considers the unique experiences of Black women negotiating multiple marginalized identities in what remains a White space. While individually providing insight and understanding, collectively these three theories capture the

historical, cultural, personal and social elements of this phenomenon while offering a platform centered on Black women's experiences in higher education (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Jones et al., 2013).

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### **Introduction**

In this chapter the methodology used to conduct this case study is reviewed. The research questions and aims, recruitment of participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis are outlined. A case study methodology was chosen as it is an appropriate method for studying the complex and intricate details of a single case (Stake, 1995), which in this study is Black female faculty members at schools of social work. Yin (2012) stated that case studies are frequently used to conduct evaluations, and one element of this study is the evaluation of the culture and climate in schools of social work. This qualitative study sought understanding of the social phenomenon of Black female faculty members' lived experiences of the culture and climate at research-intensive institutions' schools of social work. Critiques of qualitative study designs are that it is difficult to check for researcher bias as they often lack rigid structure and provide a great deal of flexibility in exchange of control (Kumar, 2014). According to Padgett (2008), qualitative study sample sizes should be specific to the study design and the phenomenon in question. Qualitative work is less generalizable than quantitative study designs; however, it often reveals patterns of behavior, perception, or experience that may be applicable to other similar situations. The goal of this study and qualitative work is depth of understanding, not generalizability.

### **Specific Aims**

Aim 1: To explore how Black women negotiate their roles as tenure-track faculty members in top-ranked schools of social work at PWIs.

Aim 2: To understand the nature of professional support for tenure-track faculty members at top-ranked, predominately White schools of social work from the perspective of Black female faculty.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: How do Black women prepare for serving as faculty members at research-intensive predominately White schools of social work?

RQ2: What is the meaning of inclusion and equity from the perspective of Black female faculty members, and how do these meanings align (or not) with their lived experiences at research-intensive predominately White schools of social work?

RQ3: From the perspective of Black female faculty, what forms of support and institutional cultures facilitate success in their roles as faculty members?

This case study explores the experiences of Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work at predominately white U.S. institutions to understand the uniqueness of their experiences and the ways in which Black women navigate professional roles in higher education. In-depth interviews were used to generate data that reflect the subjective nature of these experiences and elicit nuanced meanings and strategies that Black women use as they pursue careers in social work academia. The in-depth interviews took place both in person and via computer using Microsoft Teams, which allows video and audio recordings. The in-person interviews resulted in audio-only recordings. The researcher prioritized the privacy and comfort level of the participants by supporting their agency to determine what would be best, such as location and other logistics, to ensure anonymity.

## Recruitment and Sample

To recruit study participants, the researcher conducted a content analysis of the faculty profile pages on the websites of the top 20 schools of social work according to *U.S. News and World Report* (“Best Schools,” 2019), all of which were identified as research-intensive (R-1) Carnegie-designated institutions of higher education (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011). While Washington University (researcher’s home institution) is included among the list, it was purposely excluded as a target site for recruitment. The researcher used faculty photos to identify faculty members who appeared to be Black women and recorded their email addresses. The top 20 schools of social work are listed in Appendix A.

Following IRB approval from Washington University, in September 2019, the researcher sent an email to the identified faculty members inviting them to participate in the study. The email recruitment script is in Appendix B. The desired number of participants was 30 in an effort to have a breadth of experiences to include in the study and in an effort to increase the likelihood of diversity of institutions, geographic locations, academic rank and years in the academy. At the conclusion of data collection, twenty-one of those solicited did not respond to the request despite a single follow-up request that was not systematically tracked (Table 4 summarizes the professional characteristics of the non-respondents; n=21). Yet, nearly one-third of the target purposeful sample (n=9) from nine different institutions completed in-depth interviews. Study participants were from different academic ranks with some being relatively new while others were more senior professors. The diverse representation of the sample provided an opportunity for women with more recent experiences to be included along with those with longer –term experiences in the academy. It was valuable to speak with those who had secured tenure and compare their responses to those currently on the tenure track. The more mature respondents’

careers began in different eras when the social and political climates of the nation were in several ways different from what the newer faculty members will mature within academically. Due to some of the advancements of Blacks in general, the younger faculty members may arrive to the academy with very different expectations of inclusion.

Once a participant emailed an expressed interest in participating in the study, they were sent a link to Doodle.com to select a day and time of their convenience to conduct the interview. Interviews were then scheduled for an hour via Microsoft Teams, which provides audio and video recording options. Two participants opted to meet in person during the CSWE conference in October 2019, which produced audio-only recordings. The questions used to guide the discussion are outlined in Appendix C. As a former equity, diversity and inclusion practitioner within higher education, the researcher relied upon several years of prior experience in developing climate surveys to craft the interview questions.

**Table 4**  
*Professional Characteristics of Non-Responders: Black Female Faculty Members (n=21)*

<b>Academic Rank</b>	<b># of Years in the Academy</b>	<b>Work Experience Outside of Higher Ed</b>	<b>Ever Attended an HBCU</b>
<b>Full</b>	35	No	No
<b>Assistant</b>	2	Yes	Yes
<b>Assistant</b>	5	Unknown	No
<b>Assistant</b>	9	Unknown	No
<b>Associate</b>	12	Yes	No
<b>Associate</b>	11	No	No
<b>Associate</b>	8	No	No
<b>Associate</b>	6	Unknown	No
<b>Assistant</b>	5	Yes	No
<b>Assistant</b>	4	Yes	No
<b>Associate</b>	17	No	No
<b>Full</b>	26	Unknown	Yes
<b>Associate</b>	12	Yes	Yes
<b>Associate</b>	11	Yes	Yes
<b>Assistant</b>	3	Yes	No
<b>Assistant</b>	2	No	No
<b>Assistant</b>	2	Yes	No
<b>Assistant</b>	5	No	No
<b>Associate</b>	38	Yes	Yes
<b>Associate</b>	16	Yes	Yes
<b>Associate</b>	24	Yes	No

## **Data Collection**

Nine Black female faculty members at nine different research-intensive schools of social work at assistant, associate and full professor rank were interviewed. While not generalizable, it is informative to compare the experiences of those who have had tenure for some time, those who have recently earned tenure, and those currently pursuing tenure at research-intensive schools of social work. By exploring these various academic ranks and percentages of representation in differing cultures, this study seeks to gain an understanding of a range of Black female faculty members' lived experiences to provide institutions greater insight into this demographic.

## **Analysis**

Following completion of the interviews, transcribing the recordings presented an opportunity to experience the data in a more intimate manner and to begin coding rather than outsourcing this activity. As interviews spanned four months, it was beneficial to revisit not only the data but the feelings that would arise while collecting the data in preparation of analysis. As is the case in deductive coding, a majority of the main themes were decided on as a result of the literature and prior empirical studies in various disciplines. The goal of this study was to test if similar experiences would hold true for Black female faculty members in social work. The theme of lack of social and political preparation along with the subthemes emerged through inductive coding, allowing the data collected to determine the codes rather than any preconceived codes based on theory or prior empirical data. The researcher made a few judgment calls with regard to coding as there were data points that could have been assigned to multiple themes and or subthemes. Many of the themes are connected and tie together to tell the narrative of the experiences of this demographic as faculty members.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the nine profiles used to provide insight into the lived experiences of Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work are presented. Pseudonyms are being used to protect the identity of the research participants and prevent any potential backlash they may experience by sharing their stories. During our in-depth interviews, we spoke about experiences and outcomes in general, but specifically about diversity, equity, and inclusion in their respective institutions. Data analysis is presented and discussed in this chapter.

### **Participant Profiles**

Nine Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work housed in predominately White universities shared their experiences and outcomes as it relates to diversity, equity and inclusion. While there are no hard and fast rules about sample sizes, researchers often believe theoretical saturation typically occurs between 10–12 interviews, and different approaches to qualitative research have various considerations which could result in a case study analysis being as small as a single case while many phenomenological studies having between six and 10 participants (Breen, 2006; Padgett, 2008). Though a larger sample providing a greater range of experiences was desired, the final number of 9 is ideal for this study design and adheres to methodology norms. Table 5 outlines some of the demographics of these women. It is worth noting most of the participants have worked outside of higher education and none have attended HBCU's. Years as a faculty member range from 2-20 with the average being 8.1 years. The sample is comprised of 1 full, 3 associate and 5 assistant professors. Seven participants have doctoral degrees in social work with one being in education and another in sociology. All participants are employed at different institutions.



Table 5  
*Participant Professional Demographics*

Participant name*	Academic rank	# of years as a faculty member	Ever Attended an HBCU	Experience outside of Higher Ed	PhD in social work
Elise	Asst. prof	3	No	Yes	No/education
Robin	Assoc. prof	15	No	Yes	Yes
Doris	Assoc. prof	20	No	Yes	Yes
Dana	Full prof	15	No	Yes	Yes
Keisha	Assoc. prof	7	No	Yes	Yes
Sheila	Asst. prof	4	No	Yes	No/sociology
Nicole	Asst. prof	3	No	Yes	Yes
Tracy	Asst. prof	2	No	No	Yes
Laura	Asst. prof	3	No	Yes	Yes

\*Pseudonyms to protect participant’s identity

### Qualitative Themes and Subthemes

In-depth interviews with Black women faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work highlighted many experiences that resulted in several themes and subthemes as outlined below in Table 6 with discussion and analysis to follow.

Table 6  
*Data Themes and Subthemes*

Primary	Ambiguity of tenure and promotion	Imposter syndrome	Lack of social/political preparation	Professional mentoring
Subthemes	Expectations and Protocol	Lack of inclusion	Isolation	Formal
	Invisible labor	Authenticity	Representation	Informal
	Quality of service	Student interactions	Postdoctoral positions	

### Ambiguity of Tenure and Promotion

The first theme that emerged was ambiguity in the tenure and promotion process which the participants defined as a lack of clear understanding of expectations around productivity as well as the formal process. Ambiguity of these processes often make successful navigation a

challenge, which is not unique to Black women. In response to questions about tenure and promotion, three subthemes emerged: lack of clarity of the expectations and protocol, invisible labor, and quality of service commitments.

### **Tenure and Promotion Expectations and Protocol**

A majority of the study respondents spoke to tenure and promotion expectations, as well as requirements and processes not being clearly written out and easily accessible. Several of the study participants believed that institutions intentionally keep these details vague and open to interpretation. Robin believed the act of preparing a dossier for tenure and promotion is “a complete waste of time, intentionally difficult, and it’s embarrassing that the process has not yet been improved.” Dana’s journey also lacked clarity, but additionally she shared she “felt blindsided at my third-year review by instructions that caused me to over compensate for tenure a few years later. I worked myself crazy and afterwards realized I did not need to spread myself so thinly to be successful.” Dana’s experience is not unique in that she felt she needed to engage with every opportunity she was presented with regard to campus service to meet expectations of tenure because they were unclear. She should have felt empowered to decline offers to engage in service throughout her career and not just after earning tenure. She questioned how much healthier her experience could have been as well as how much more productive she could have been without this pressure. It is important to consider ways in which others can avoid this same pitfall.

None of these respondents thought the ambiguity surrounding tenure and promotion was accidental, which speaks to the lack of trust some individuals have in the system in which they are active participants. Sheila’s understanding of the rules around tenure and promotion at her institution were simple, “I clearly understand they aren’t named and I’m meant to be excellent.”

She went on to say that “excellent” is subjective and could look very different based on who was being evaluated and by whom. In that same vein, Laura believed tenure and promotion can sometimes be less about productivity and impact and more of a popularity contest.

Keisha relied upon informal mentors to gain a clear understanding of what was required to secure tenure at her institution. She was told to produce 10–12 manuscripts and as many conference presentations as possible as well as to excel at teaching, though she could not find this information stated plainly in a handbook or other resource. The same could be said of most of the respondents in that they felt their understanding of the expectations of tenure and promotion relied upon the guidance of others who were currently going through or had previously successfully gone through the process. Collectively they felt their institutions have not done a great job of directly communicating around this topic. Only one participant stated that she had a clear understanding of and no concerns with the tenure and promotion process at her institution.

Most institutions of higher education have some amount of ambiguity around these processes, but this demographic in particular may not have the support networks to bridge these knowledge gaps. This information is valuable because for years higher education has struggled with recruitment and retention of those with minoritized identities. One way to begin to combat these barriers to success for these individuals is to ensure equitable access to information and support to improve the likelihood of securing tenure and promotion. Representation has been shown to be valuable in other empirical studies and the retention of Black female faculty members will further increase representation.

## **Invisible Labor**

The second subtheme around ambiguity in tenure and promotion was invisible labor. The Social Sciences Feminist Network Research Interest Group (2017) recognized the frequency with which women and faculty of color engage in work to make their institutions better places, yet this work is not valued or calculated into the equations of tenure and or promotion. Invisible labor can be framed by both BFT and CRT. With stereotypes such as Sapphire there are assumptions that Black women lack intelligence and are not worthy of the attention of others reinforcing the idea that their contributions to the discipline nor their institutions are noteworthy. Additionally, Black female faculty members can feel as though they are being treated as mummies and matriarchs of the academy in they are expected to sacrifice themselves for the greater good. CRT is rooted in social justice, which is absent in the ways that invisible labor manifested in the lived experiences of the study participants. Eight of the nine participants shared ways in which invisible labor has impacted their experiences as faculty members. For example, Nicole stated, “Relationships we develop with our students do not always end when they complete a course.” She went on to discuss long-term mentoring, which includes meeting with students, writing letters of recommendation, and aiding in development of a professional network. Currently, there is no official process for these women to capture these time commitments as part of tenure and or promotion packets. In addition to students that have completed courses with these faculty members or are in their areas of instruction, other students who become aware of their presence on campus may see them as valuable resources. Elise, who was in her third year, said, “Black students from all across the campus seek us out because there are so few of us.” This comment speaks to a lack of representation in addition to an inability to properly report these assumed responsibilities.

In many ways these minority faculty–student relationships serve as retention tools for the university, which is an invaluable service to the institution yet provides no professional benefit to the individual. It is not uncommon for students who have had negative experiences in a campus community due to their identities and who had planned to transfer to reconsider leaving upon identifying a faculty member they believe to be an ally who can create a safe space. These safe spaces can be used for venting and strategizing such as seeking out leadership roles and networking across campus to identify potentially inclusive opportunities.

Unexpectedly, a couple of participants decided to take a stand against invisible labor prior to securing tenure. Tracy, who is a second-year faculty member, was clear in that she “does not have a problem with saying no” when asked to join committees without prestige, though she is willing to go above and beyond for students. Sheila offered a solution that she believed worked well for her. She responds to requests in writing, making sure to include her dean in the following manner, “Thank you for the opportunity to provide this valuable (stated service) to the university.” Sheila believed if the service is not valuable her dean would clarify this immediately rather than during reviews. She will know soon if this tactic has worked as her third-year review is on the horizon.

While invisible labor is often thought about in negative terms, the participants have been able to derive positive outcomes from these practices. One of the positive outcomes of invisible labor was the opportunity it provided for “us to replace ourselves” according to Doris, who was in her 20<sup>th</sup> year and has mentored numerous students. She highlighted the responsibility she felt to be a resource to up and coming scholars and practitioners and to serve as a compass as they navigated their professional futures. It was important to her that representation of marginalized identities continued to improve throughout academia. Similarly, Laura noted, “I have worked

myself to the bone with committee assignments, but it has allowed me to develop some great relationships across the university.” Finally, Dana expressed that in many ways the invisible labor brought her joy through building meaningful relationships with students, but she believed it should be captured in annual performance reviews. Doing so would formalize these activities and the time taken away from other service and or research productivity.

### **Quality of Service**

Another shared experience of the participants with regard to ambiguity of tenure and promotion was assignment to undervalued or ignored campus service. Often, this undervalued service took the shape of committee membership, particularly those charged with diversity initiatives. Intersectionality is present in this theme in that the marginalized identities of the study participants as Black females, can lead to a loss in autonomy and power distribution resulting in undesirable service assignments. Robin, who is in her 15<sup>th</sup> year and currently applying for promotion to full professor, spoke candidly about the lack of agency in selecting service projects at the start of her tenure in comparison to the agency she now has, “When I first arrived, it was clear to me I was being tokenized and asked to be a part of all things minority related.” After earning tenure, Robin felt more empowered to decline invitations, which allows her to allocate her time towards activities that are viewed as valuable service to the campus and local community.

Participants distinguished between service that was valued by the tenure and promotion review committees and service that was not. Often the less valuable service was focused on issues surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion and was often a series of meetings without actions or measurable outcomes behind them. While the participants may be excited about the opportunity to work on matters associated with their identities, such work may not have long-

term benefits. Some of the more valuable committee work was related to hiring searches, curriculum design, and other work that results in tangible items and or measurable impact. There were also discussions around volunteering versus appointments to service work and how that may impact the value of the work being executed. For many of the participants, a sign of leadership's confidence came by way of appointment to a service role that was not exclusively related to their race or gender versus the roles that came by way of volunteerism. Ambiguity of tenure and promotion address both specific aims and research questions 2 and 3.

### **Imposter Syndrome**

The second theme identified throughout the in-depth interviews was experiences with imposter syndrome. In the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Leonard (2014) wrote,

It is crucial to note that Impostor Syndrome stems not just from the mismatch between the representation of an academic and one's identity, but also from the daily experiences in which faculty, students, and administrators convey that you don't belong, or that you don't have what it takes.

Intersectionality is applicable to imposter syndrome in that the experiences in this theme are often directly shaped by the race and gender of the respondents impacting their viewpoints and aspirations. When asked if they had ever experienced imposter syndrome, several of the study participants stated they had and offered examples as to how it manifests for them. Nicole's response was "I overprepare for meetings. I try to make sure I have three points I want to make, I arrive early and I watch what I say." She noted that this routine leads to a lot of anxiety and wasted time. Elise feels pressured to be the best, resulting in exhaustion as she constantly chases an unattainable goal of perfection.

Dana, who is in her 20<sup>th</sup> year, stated, “Even after all these years I still get nervous submitting manuscripts, presenting my research and applying for grants. I have come a long way, but I continue to have moments where I feel I do not belong, I am not good enough and I will be unfairly critiqued.”

Tracy said,

You know the way we normalize a workload that I think is really unmanageable and so when everyone around you is acting like it’s normal to be responsible for what you’re responsible for and you are drowning that makes for that misalignment, that feeling of I can’t do this. I can’t pull this off. You know this isn’t for me? I would say that’s really probably the only domain in which I feel a disconnect in belonging to the institution.

Her comment offers another perspective as to how imposter syndrome can affect this group.

Several of these statements are reminiscent of the age-old adage that Blacks have to work twice as hard just to be seen as mediocre. Blacks often receive these messages early and often throughout their lifetime. Erin shared in this sentiment and responded with “there’s nothing I can do other than kill myself trying to meet a certain mark which means I’m going to kill myself doing it right?”

Laura, who is in her second year as a faculty member, attributed her decision not to use the title *doctor* to her feelings of imposter syndrome. She believed it would cause people to have expectations of her she was not sure she could live up to, “I have students call me professor, not doctor. I often wonder if maybe I heard God wrong and I’m not cut out for this career.” Keisha, who has tenure, believed she has always experienced some element of imposter syndrome, though she does not recall the term being used until recently. From a very early age, she recalls being the only Black girl/woman (or one of very few) in spaces she often felt she did not belong.



It was not until college that she was exposed to other smart Black females. While she feels she has come a long way with her self-confidence, she knows the work will be ongoing. Doris, the participant who has been in the academy the longest, believed imposter syndrome is rooted in the reality that merit does not warrant outcomes. These women spoke of instances where those who had not performed well were held in high regard whereas some who had been excellent were overlooked. These experiences were not exclusively along gender or race lines, but minoritized groups were more often in the exceptional yet overlooked group.

### **Lack of Collaboration**

In addition to internalized imposter syndrome, there are ways in which cultures and climates in schools of social work perpetuate these negative feelings. A lack of invitations to collaborate on projects is one way Black female faculty members' imposter syndrome is reinforced. A majority of the respondents felt as though they are not asked to collaborate at the same rate as their White counterparts. For example, Robin has been told, "I didn't think you would be interested as this does not fit into your research agenda." She believed others were offered opportunities that would be a stretch based on their research, whereas her agency was stripped when she was not allowed to decide for herself if she wanted to engage in various projects. Even though she has a doctorate in education, Elise noted "I am not invited at the same rate and I'm often told my work belongs at another table, so I build other tables." Examples she provided were collaborating with those she knew from graduate school as well as others across campus. Dana reported that she is invited to collaborate consistently with campus partners who are usually people of color, but she rarely receives invitations in her school of social work. Laura spoke about a Black women's writing group that has formed at her institution to provide several opportunities for collaboration across disciplines. It was common that Blacks and other people of

color sought out one another across interests and disciplines to create transdisciplinary projects that often bridge the gap of intraschool collaborations. Relationships that developed during their doctoral studies were also an avenue through which many of these faculty members participated in collaborative research though they all still felt what they described as rejection by their immediate peers.

For Black women faculty members who are not invited to collaborate on projects in their schools of social work, experiences with imposter syndrome were intensified. Some of the women spoke about their self-doubt being reinforced as well as feeling isolated. They often wondered if their work lacked quality and if that was the reason they were left out. Somehow those who had been quite successful with publications and grants found themselves questioning their abilities. Others associated the lack of invitations to collaborate with their race more often than their gender, but this did not prevent them from questioning their skills. These experiences were labeled as isolating. This was another way in which these women felt forced to build community outside of their schools resulting in feelings of being “othered,” meaning they were not included in the culture of their school. Alternatively, a couple of the study participants have had positive experiences with interdepartmental collaborations. Keisha believed, “Because my research is so rigorous and my productivity is consistently high, I am often sought out.” Sheila felt that her outgoing personality and the way she has “put herself out there” has resulted in the volume of invitations for collaborations she receives.

### **Authenticity**

Another manifestation of imposter syndrome is the hesitancy of some Black female faculty members to present what they consider to be their authentic selves at work. Most of the respondents have had and continue to have concerns about how they show up in their

professional spaces. They face questions and concerns about their speech, attire, and behavior in general. Nicole spoke about not feeling comfortable wearing hoop earrings out of a concern she would not be taken seriously. She also began wearing muted colors after receiving comments about the brightness of her wardrobe in her course evaluations.

When asking about authenticity, “code-switching”, a practice of changing one’s vernacular when interacting with those of different ethnic and or racial backgrounds was pretty consistent among the interviewees. Dunn (2019) found that 48% of Black college graduates felt the need to code-switch, and in my sample that number was much closer to 100%. Although code-switching was a common practice, as these women secured tenure many found themselves engaging in this practice less frequently. Several of these women felt more comfortable being their authentic selves with their students than their colleagues. When asked to elaborate, Tracy said, “When I’m at the front of classroom lecturing, my students get a pretty raw version of me. I am not concerned about tone, or vernacular in the same way I am during faculty meetings.” Similarly, Elise added that she does not present her authentic self because she does not trust that others do either. She believes people bring representatives of themselves to work and know what is acceptable or not; therefore, her White and or male colleagues may not share their thoughts of racism and or discrimination though it may be clear in their behavior. Three of the respondents were sure to present their authentic selves at work and Sheila noted that “people are bothered by it and I love it.” It was interesting to hear how despite having completed doctorate degrees, these females believe their competency is scrutinized because of their slang, tone, or fashion choices. Many of the participants attended top-ranked schools for their doctoral studies and have a proven track record of academic success and at times this seems to have been forgotten or ignored if they show up in spaces in a way that someone has arbitrarily decided is unprofessional. It is these

unwritten rules and additional layers of scrutiny that result in these females feeling they have to dress, speak and behave in a way that is acceptable to their superiors, colleagues and students. This self-censorship results in exhaustion while reinforcing their challenges with imposter syndrome.

### **Student Interactions**

Finally, student interactions can have a negative impact on the ways in which Black female faculty members see themselves professionally. As previously stated, several study participants tended to present their authentic selves in the classroom. Research-intensive schools of social work overwhelmingly have student bodies that are predominately white women (CSWE, 2017). Study participants reported mostly positive interactions with this demographic; however, they recalled having their authority and expertise challenged by their White male students. A few of the women spoke of these students going to a dean or department chair to file complaints as a result of being challenged more often than not on the privilege they hold with their dominant identities of being White and male. Black women especially face additional obstacles in the classroom at PWIs as they are frequently questioned by non-Black students about their legitimacy and qualifications while having their authority challenged, which may result in less than favorable course evaluations (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Constance-Huggins, 2018; Marbley, 2007). This was the experience of a majority of this group.

Robin had a strong reaction to being asked about course evaluations.

Oh man, I hate those things. You know I, I get you know out of 5 my average is probably a 4.5. I didn't realize that there are people who are getting 4.9. I took a look at one of my colleagues merit review forms and she had down her average scores from her students and I didn't know you could get scores as high as that because I never received those

scores. Mine are good but they are not that good. So I start off by telling my students that you can fill out these student evaluations if you want to because now it's all online. But you have to know you're engaging in a process that really benefits White men and White women and faculty of color get poorer scores and I tell them if you believe this is not socially just you should kind of rebel against capturing one's evaluation of one's faculty members when it's racist and inequitable.

Most of the women reported getting decent evaluations, but some of the qualitative responses were more related to their race and gender than their performance as an instructor. As stated before, Keisha received a comment on an evaluation that her clothes were colorful and bright, which led to her revamping her wardrobe to be taken more seriously. Others reported receiving feedback using words like *aggressive*, *intimidating* and *too familiar*. These negative remarks, disruptive moments in the classroom and unwarranted reports of misconduct can feed into the feelings of imposter syndrome these women have experienced. It is important to note that three respondents reported receiving teaching awards, and they attributed these accolades to the authenticity they carry into the classroom with them. By engaging in honest dialogue with their students and being transparent and vulnerable, these women often developed long-term relationships with some of their students. Based on class participation and other interactions, they often believed they knew who was responsible for which evaluations both the negative and positive ones. Imposter syndrome addresses specific aim 1 and research questions 1 and 2.

### **Lack of Social and Political Preparation**

The next theme that emerged through inductive coding of the data is lack of social and political preparation. This theme comprises three subthemes of isolation, representation, and postdoctoral positions. Though the participants felt their doctoral programs gave them the

necessary skills to conduct research, teach a variety of courses, and perform an array of service, they often reported feeling less and under-prepared for the social and political aspects of faculty positions. The theme of preparation intersects with imposter syndrome.

It makes for a richer discussion to address the three subthemes of isolation, representation and postdoctoral positions collectively. Sadly, isolation is not foreign to this group, and several respondents attributed it to not only the current state of their schools but also their doctoral programs. Keisha said, “Real conversations about what to expect did not take place in my program. I had already had some of these struggles with networking and engaging with others but I did assume it would be different as a faculty member.” She went on to say, “A lack of other Black females in my school greatly contribute to my struggles with isolation because I don’t have a lot of people with whom I can close my office door and have genuine conversations.” Elise had a similar thought, “Black women can only be free at home and I cannot forget that.” It was disheartening to hear from so many of the respondents that felt they had to often choose between employment and masking key elements of their identities. In a job that is often tied to one’s identities, it was surprising in some ways the level of disconnect these respondents expressed. It was as if they were in some ways living two lives in an effort to survive and that was difficult to digest. One of the women was blunt in stating, “I have kids to feed, I enjoy my job enough so I play the game.” These are not exchanges of empowerment and peace of mind one should have to engage in to retain employment.

Seven of the nine interviewees were one of two or three Black female faculty members in their schools of social work, which is not enough to force changes in the climate and culture, often resulting in isolation and lack of inclusion. The low representation was a major contributing factor to the discomfort in being authentic, lack of collaboration, questions related

to the rigor of research being conducted, and overall feelings of exclusion. Doris mentioned the inability to teach people to care about people. Her belief was one has this trait or they do not, and the behavior of most of her colleagues leads her to believe they do not care about others. The participant who worked in a faculty that has five Black members has had the most positive experiences to date because the culture, while not perfect, was more inclusive. She had several offices of refuge within the department and her office also served as a safe space for her Black female colleagues.

Only two of the interviewees had completed postdoctoral positions prior to becoming faculty members. They believed doing so had served them well with regard to being politically savvy. Sheila said, “During my time as a postdoc I had a bird’s eye view of how faculty operates. I was also able to establish an independent research agenda, so I felt very prepared for the social aspects of joining a faculty.” Sheila has a doctorate in sociology but had no expectations that social work would be a more inclusive culture. She believes “all of higher ed engages in the same shenanigans.” Laura also completed a postdoctoral program prior to her current faculty position, and she believes it is what has allowed her to have a better experience than she had in her first assistant faculty position the year prior to her current role. A majority of the respondents who did not complete a postdoc regretted not doing so. There was a belief that some of the social and political knowledge gaps they felt following their transition into faculty members could have been reduced and or eliminated during their time as a postdoctoral researcher. Robin said she now advises all of her mentees to complete a postdoctoral position before applying for assistant professorships.

When asked if they have had experiences with hyper- and or invisibility, each expressed that they had. The invisibility was a factor in their feelings of isolation. Doris, one of the senior

interviewees, said, “On my journey to tenure I definitely felt invisible and as soon as I achieved tenure a switch was hit and I was suddenly hyper visible and I’m certain it’s because no one expected me to make it.” Dana believes her institution is currently focused on other minoritized identities such as the LGBT community, and people of color are being seen as one monolithic group of people, which feels like erasure of Black-specific needs. Experiences with invisibility also surfaced during committee work for some of the respondents. They were left with feelings of tokenism rather than feeling like respected contributing members of the group. Navigating these dynamics or attempting to suppress these feelings were other ways these women faced isolation. Representation was an underlying thread throughout the theme of lack of social and political preparation. The participants believed that if more Black women were present in the schools, feelings of isolation would be less prevalent. Finally, two of the women believed it would serve doctoral program administrators well to have conversations targeting social and political preparedness in general, but especially for those students with minoritized identities as they begin to transition into their careers. Lack of social and political preparation addresses specific aim 1 and research questions 1 and 2.

### **Professional Mentoring**

Professional mentoring was a main theme with formal and informal subthemes and internal and external components. Each of these interviewees spoke about the value of mentors and the ways they enriched their experiences on campus and beyond.

### **Formal Mentoring**

When asked about university-coordinated mentoring, three of the nine respondents said they had participated in formal mentoring at the start of their positions. None of these women had senior Black female faculty members as their mentors; instead, two had White women and



one had an Asian male. Of these three women, only the one with the Asian male mentor reported a positive and long-term relationship. Guidance in navigating the academy and managing dynamics in their respective schools of social work were the key benefits of having a mentor. Opportunities to collaborate on projects resulting in publications and presentations were another benefit of a healthy mentoring relationship, which has long-term benefits in better positioning the mentee in applying for tenure and promotion. Sadly, mentoring, which is designed to be an asset, can become another source of stress for mentees. The two mentees who did not have great experiences felt their mentors were looking to groom researchers who would adopt a similar research agenda to their own versus supporting the women in the direction they were looking to take. Tracy discussed a lack of trust with her assigned mentor: “I went to her strictly for administrative tasks. We did not discuss anything personal because I did not feel like my success was a priority of hers.”

There are often assumptions that successful mentoring requires shared identities between the mentor and mentee. The participants did not believe this to be the case and several of the interviewees believed the best mentors were the ones who were committed to the success of their mentees. For example, Keisha stated, “I think it’s about showing up, um for people on the margins. And if we continue to do that, the margins won’t be the margins, it’ll just be like sort of a distribution of ideas.” This point speaks to the ways in which everyone and anyone can show up in solidarity for those who have not experienced inclusion in hopes difference eventually becomes the norm.

### **Informal Mentoring**

Each of the participants spoke about the various ways they are supported through informal professional mentoring that at times is also quite personal. These informal mentoring

relationships take many shapes. What was unanimous was that all of the interviewees had Black women as their mentors, though they were not always faculty members. Several of these women had more than one mentor, who served different purposes in their lives and offered various types of support. It was common among these women to maintain long distance mentoring relationships with those who had supported them throughout their doctoral studies. For some, it was an advisor and or a dissertation committee member, for others it was a senior faculty member they had worked for or an administrator with whom they had developed a relationship.

In addition to support from those who have successfully navigated the professorship, informal mentoring took place between those who had matriculated through their doctoral programs together and were beginning their careers at the same time. Professional conferences provided a chance for these women to come together and catch-up in person. These moments of engagement were seen as opportunities to recharge throughout the academic year. These relationships also often resulted in conference presentation collaborations, so they were dual purpose in support and tangible products that strengthen their tenure packets.

Often these supportive informal mentoring relationships between Black women were referred to as a “sisterhood” or a “sister circle.” Discussing these relationships were the few times the interviewees radiated joy. It was clear how much they valued these relationships and the ways in which these women often were a lifeline. Sheila spoke of the writing circle she was a part of. It was created by one of her fellow Black women assistant faculty members, and they meet once a month at various locations to write for 4 hours. She was honest in that it was not always productive in the traditional sense of writing groups, but they left feeling encouraged and ready to take on the world again. Laura has a similar network, “One of our Vice Chancellors gathers all the Black women on campus a couple times throughout the semester. A lot of times

we go to happy hour, we have a book club, and we strategize about which grants and presentations we can partner up on.” Others expressed how other Black women welcomed them to campus and the community by assisting with finding a diverse neighborhood when available, recommending churches and sharing other details the institution may not have considered in their orientation information. Professional mentoring address specific aim 2 and research question 1.

### **Summary**

When studying Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work as a single case of the relationship between higher education and Black females, prior empirical findings are withstanding. In seeking to understand these experiences consideration should be given to ambiguity surrounding tenure and promotion, imposter syndrome, lack of social and political preparation and professional mentoring. The findings of this study provide a unique look into the lived experiences of nine Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work. As a qualitative study, these findings cannot be generalized, but they do highlight patterns of behavior and experiences that may be applicable in similar situations. It is clear through in-depth interviews that these Black females unfortunately had similar challenging experiences throughout their time in academia.

The theories used to frame this study are Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality as they address issues of stereotypes, lack of autonomy, questioning one’s ability as a result of power distribution and building upon existing histories. The primary theme of ambiguity of tenure and promotion relates to Black feminist thought in that these women are experiencing the opposite of empowerment with regards to understanding the protocol and expectations, constant engagement with invisible labor and low-quality service activities. Imposter syndrome is framed by Critical Race Theory in that a lack of inclusion, concerns

around authenticity and student interactions are rooted in either maintenance by the dominant group or challenging the dominant ideologies and providing a counter narrative. Lacking social and political preparation is a manifestation of unique ways in which isolation, representation and a need for post-doctoral opportunities are tied to Intersectionality as these narratives have shown, this group faces unique challenges based on their multiple minoritized identities of race and gender. Finally, professional mentoring both formal and informal are supported by all three of the aforementioned theories in that this unique group can benefit from empowerment, guidance in challenging dominant ideologies and opportunities for fellowship and collaboration with those who share in these identities.

When asked why they continued to endure these often-raging waters, they primarily spoke of the benefit of being able to ask and answer valuable questions they believed improved the human experience. Many spoke of improving the lives of those with whom they share identities. There were also many references to the freedom and flexibility that being a professor afforded them. Not feeling as though they are being micromanaged was important to many of the participants. Another common response as to why they remained in their positions was the students. They spoke of the Black students who needed to see them to know that it was possible to pursue this line of work as well as to be a resource to these students. It was also a common response that non-Black students needed to gain experience with Black women as well. In preparation for direct practice and other career paths, these women felt they were broadening the cultural competency of students who may not otherwise encounter a Black faculty member and engage in the conversations they were often having with their students about power and oppression.

It is important that the academy acknowledges and works to address the additional burdens the identities of Black and female place upon these faculty members. They have to expend time and effort on matters that not only negatively impacted their morale but had tangible consequences for their productivity. Many faced a trade-off by spending more time with students and engaged in committee work, leaving little “bandwidth” for research and writing. Many of these women believed they must work twice as hard to be viewed as mediocre.

## Chapter 6: Study Limitations and Implications

### **Limitations**

There are a few methodological limitations this study encountered that would be important to address in future research. Qualitative work is less generalizable than quantitative study designs; however, it often reveals patterns of behavior, perception or experience that may be applicable to other similar situations as was the outcome of this research. This study interviewed current faculty members to understand their lived experiences, but it is worth noting these women have developed coping mechanisms that have allowed them to remain in what was often labeled a hostile environment. It would be useful to expand the study to Black women who have left professorships to understand how they arrived at those decisions and what if anything could have led them to stay. This study did not have the benefit of a formal interview piloting protocol. However, the researcher has several years of prior experience in developing, administering and analyzing campus climate surveys and relied upon these experiences and the research literature in crafting the interview instrument.

Another limitation of this study is that all the women interviewed attended PWIs throughout their academic careers and may have had an advantage over those who have experiences in more diverse institutions. Targeting this demographic at historically Black colleges and universities could be informative though it is worth noting none of these institutions are currently identified as research-intensive. Future studies may benefit from interviewing multiple faculty members from the same institution when possible to compare and contrast their experiences in hopes of gaining a richer understanding of the culture and climate.

Finally, as someone who herself identifies as a Black female transitioning into a faculty role at a research-intensive school of social work, the researcher was an insider to the

experiences of this group. To prevent these biases and personal experiences from excessively tainting the study, a reflexive journal was used. This journal was used to critically examine why and how decisions were being made throughout the study, various logistical approaches and coding execution to ensure that these decisions were being made in the best of interests of the study and not being unduly influenced by the researcher's own biases, perspectives, and personal narrative. A few examples of these journal entries cover topics on the researcher's decision to forgoe the original plan to include focus groups due to logistical challenges, the low representation at most institutions and the concerns of confidentiality as possible contributors to the high nonresponse in the study and the ongoing concern for some completers of the study. Also, consideration was given to including additional primary themes and coding of sub-themes. The researcher faced moments where the experiences being shared by the participants would lead to fear in joining a faculty. The timing of this study was challenging as the researcher was simultaneously on the job market and struggling to manage the emotions that would arise during job talks at institutions whose faculty composition often mirrored those of the majority (nonwhite) group. Another way these struggles were countered was to discuss the concerns with both a therapist and colleagues.

### **Implications**

This study confirmed that nine Black female faculty members in research-intensive schools of social work had lived experiences similar to those of Black female faculty members in other disciplines as described in prior empirical studies. While social work as a discipline is guided by the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics—social justice, dignity, and worth of the individual, importance and centrality of human relationships, integrity, and competence—this study revealed that these women's experiences did not align with these values. Each of the women interviewed

for this study was excited to participate, and they all stated no one had ever asked them questions about the ways their gender and race impacted them professionally. It is vital that we provide opportunities for those with lived experiences in areas we seek to intervene are given the opportunity to provide insight and guidance.

### **Practice**

Many of the practice considerations around supporting Black female faculty members in research-intensive schools of social work will be the responsibility of both the school and university leadership teams. The first suggestion is to develop hiring practices to support this demographic. Developing postdoctoral programs that if successfully completed result in a tenure-track faculty position could provide the social and political preparation many of the respondents wished they had received prior to transitioning to assistant faculty roles. Within these post-doctoral positions there should be structured opportunities focused on networking and navigating the academy. This study found that while these Black female faculty members felt mostly prepared academically, many felt less prepared socially and how best to manage their feelings of being othered. Best practices such as determining which optional events were important in building their network and how to best develop long-term, productive and supportive relationships and selecting highly valued service opportunities both within their school and beyond. Additionally, access to professional development opportunities they may not otherwise be privy to should be woven into these post-doctoral positions. These appointments could be targeted at those with minoritized identities, specifically Black women. Doing so would require allocation of funds for this initiative by either the university or the schools of social work themselves. Another hiring practice these institutions may benefit from is cluster hiring. Cluster hiring is a practice of bringing in multiple new employees together to create a cohort experience,



which could eliminate the challenges of isolation and lack of representation this study discussed. While it may be ideal for the entire cluster to be in the same school or department, transdisciplinary hires with structured support can also be a benefit to new faculty members.

Improving hiring practices is great and is the approach most institutions take to diversify their faculties, but attention needs to be given to matters of inclusion and equity as well. It is not ideal to recruit people into what may become a toxic environment for them without paying any attention to improving the culture and climate of the institution. Leadership is tasked with communicating the priority of equity and inclusion while backing this priority up with practice. For example, there could be staff training around these issues as well as incorporating these expectations into annual reviews. Deans and department chairs should also make an effort to inquire with minoritized staff as to how their experience is going, what their challenges have been, and what would they like to see going forward. There are of course concerns around anonymity, but a general climate survey administered across the school or campus could be an avenue to gather this information with little concern of repercussions. As this study has found some members of this group are eager to share their experiences and are not necessarily concerned with anonymity. It would be beneficial to institutions to explore the most effective means to gain insight into the day to day experiences such as insubordinate students, microaggressions and other negative occurrences these females have encountered to inform problem-solving activities. This could be regularly scheduled meetings with leadership such as standard office hours held by the dean or department chair or the chief diversity staff personnel when applicable. It will prove invaluable to address these matters immediately rather than learning of them during employee exit interviews or never learning of these details at all.

Higher education leaders also have an opportunity to reduce some of the ambiguity surrounding tenure and promotion. There is an expectation that tenure packets are evaluated on a departmental basis, resulting in some degree of ambiguity, but some guiding principles with more details could especially benefit this group, who are often working to overcome knowledge gaps and various disadvantages. Similarly, institutions should provide opportunities for invisible labor to be included in tenure and promotion packets and value such service for its benefit to the institution. Serving as a resource to the mental health and retention of students deserves to be respected and valued towards tenure and promotion. Tenure and promotion packets should provide specific and weighted opportunities to discuss this service in a manner similar to other service that is currently more highly regarded. For example, this study found that much of the invisible labor these Black female faculty members are engaged in is actually retention efforts for Black students across their campuses. Higher value should be placed on different aspects of service that may be more time consuming than others and those that Black females are disproportionately engaged in.

Protecting the time of Black women faculty members needs to be a priority of their school and institutional leadership. For example, restricting the commitments these faculty members can make on service projects within their school for the first year as they get acclimated to their roles. Leadership should avoid appointing this group to service opportunities allowing for agency in selecting projects of their interests. Creating and nurturing a culture of collaboration is important to aid in the success of Black female faculty members. Many of the women I interviewed conduct research associated with one or more of their identities, but they should not be pigeon-holed to these areas of research. Honoring the rigor and quality of their

research will help them manage the challenges they face with imposter syndrome. Leadership can model these behaviors for other members of faculty.

Ensuring those faculty members with minoritized identities have access to and support in providing quality service to both the campus and broader community is essential in countering feelings of isolation as well as aiding in successful tenure and promotion applications. It will also be important to protect the time of this demographic to prevent them from being tokenized through service work that is not seen as valuable to them or tenure review committees. Often institutions have long-standing relationships with organization in their surrounding communities. Work with these organizations or stakeholders can be seen as prestigious but it can also be limiting. Being more receptive to the community service that is personal to these faculty members with underserved, under resourced or unknown organizations is critical. Many of the respondents spoke about addressing the status quo and here is an opportunity to support these efforts.

Shoring up mentoring for Black female faculty members is something leadership can provide in order to show commitment to their success. Both formal and informal mentoring has proven to be an effective coping mechanism for this demographic, not only in this study but in prior empirical work. It is not required that Black female faculty have Black female faculty mentors as representation currently prevents that for most. It is important that formal mentoring has structure around it that provides training for mentors, financial support, and clear expectations for all participants. Similarly, informal mentoring can be supported by the schools by way of affinity groups and other opportunities to ensure these minoritized individuals are aware of who is on campus as well as throughout the community who could be a valuable resource.

In addition to support, opportunities to create and maintain trust with this group is vital. When trust is absent, these negative experiences will continue to overshadow the positive aspects of these females' professions. Transparency, empowerment and asking these individuals what they need are good ways to begin committing to genuine and informed change. A lack of transparency was often the source of mistrust. Schools of social work will benefit from attacking this issue directly. Sharing with new hires some of the hurdles other faced will show awareness of the issues while bearing in mind everyone's experiences are unique. Discussing changes that leadership would like to see as well as the plan of action to achieve the changes will let the faculty members know that improving the culture is a value and resources are being allocated toward improvements. If there is not currently a strategic plan in place, it is best to be clear that while there is awareness, the work has not formally begun. This level of transparency is important in that it is an opportunity to provide support and respect to this group immediately who often believe they are not typically afforded either.

### **Research**

There are several opportunities to further build on this research. This study has provided a great deal of insight into the experiences of Black women faculty members and one area of further inquiry could be determining if there are mental health implications of the negative experiences these women shared. In addition to mental health, are there physical health consequences? It would also be interesting to try to expand the research to include Black females who chose to leave academia. Understanding if they left as a result of the "othering" these women discussed or due to different reasons would enrich this area of research.

It would also be interesting to talk with Black female administrators who have transitioned from being faculty members. What were their experiences? How did they persist to

take on leadership roles, and how do they currently support those coming up in the ranks behind them? Are they having similar experiences to the ones discussed in this study? If ever faced, does imposter syndrome eventually fade away? Are there generational changes in the way Black women faculty members are experiencing equity and inclusion? For example, when the most senior respondent joined academia in the year 1999, representation of this group was smaller, and there was less focus on equity, diversity and inclusion. Studies were just beginning to address these matters in higher education and the knowledge gaps were much wider. There was perhaps a perception that one had to settle for the way in which institutions operated whereas those who are younger or newer to the academy may believe they are called to fight for change and that change is possible. Do expectations fluctuate across generations based on the national climate on race relations and policies and practices of the current federal administration?

Finally, expanding this research to include current doctoral students who aspire to faculty roles could provide an additional layer of understanding the experiences of this demographic. All of the participants in this study attended PWIs for their doctoral studies, and many of the challenges they face in their faculty positions were present during their time as students. Research that investigates the experiences of Black women from graduate school through professorship and beyond could be a great addition to the literature on people of this demographic in social work education. Understanding and closing leaks in the pipeline of Black, female, social work faculty members is worth further exploration.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

This case study on the experiences of nine Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work has shown that the experiences are more often than not inequitable and unnecessarily exhausting at best. These women have and continue to endure toxic work environments that cause them to constantly question their decisions to stay and their ability to succeed. Sadly, many of these internal battles remain present in those who have seemingly successfully navigated these difficult situations for as many as 20 years.

It is through sheer determination and dedication to their scholarship that these women remain in these schools of social work that lack diversity, equity and inclusion. There are many ways in which administrators can intervene to work towards change that will reduce the gap between the experiences of those with dominant identities and those with marginalized identities. As many of the themes and subthemes identified in this study can be considered “low hanging fruit,” it is time leaders make a true commitment towards culture and climate change. Each of the interviewees stated that no one had ever asked the questions of this study or inquired about their experience as a Black female faculty member. Those with a social work background are trained to empower and include those who are impacted by interventions, yet these women have not been given this right.

These women and countless others have been conducting outstanding, life-altering research to improve the lived experiences for those facing a wide range of social ills while simultaneously fighting for their professional lives. It is the responsibility of administrators and colleagues to ensure social work as a discipline is adhering to the NASW (2017) values of social justice, dignity, and worth of the individual, importance, and centrality of human relationships, integrity, and competence as they will train the future stewards of the discipline to practice. CRT

encourages a shift from individual behavior to institutional and systemic responsibility and this study provides insight into a demographic that would greatly benefit from prioritizing of equity and inclusion in social work higher education.

Diversity of scholars leads to diversity of pedagogy and interventions. Social work as a discipline is stronger when there is diversity of thought, and one way to ensure this is by providing equitable experiences to those with minoritized identities. As the demographics of the nation continue to change, there will be an increased need for a variety of approaches to treatment and support. It is important that we distinguish among diversity, equity, and inclusion and speak honestly about the differences in reporting percentages of representation versus the lived experiences of those who are underrepresented in these academic spaces.

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Appendix A:

Top 20 Schools of Social Work

According to US News and World Report, 2020

University of Michigan-Ann Arbor  
Washington University in St. Louis  
Columbia University  
University of California-Berkeley  
University of Chicago  
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill  
University of Washington  
University of Texas-Austin  
Case Western Reserve University  
Boston College  
Boston University  
University of Pennsylvania  
New York University  
Ohio State University  
University of California-Los Angeles  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Rutgers University-New Brunswick  
Smith College  
University of Denver  
University of Maryland-Baltimore

## Appendix B

### Email Recruitment Script

Dear [*insert name*],

My name is LaShawnda Fields and I am a doctoral student from the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study about Black female faculty members at research-intensive schools of social work. You're eligible to be in this study based on your demographics and occupation. I obtained your contact information from your institution's faculty website.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by me at a day and time of your choosing via Adobe Connect. I would ask that you dedicate an hour for our conversation. I will be providing small tokens of appreciation in the form of a \$10 electronic gift card for use at Amazon. I would like to audio and or video record your interview based on your level of consent. The information obtained will be used to complete my degree requirements as well as submission to scholarly publications.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at 314-401-3909 or [lashawndafields@wustl.edu](mailto:lashawndafields@wustl.edu)

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

LaShawnda Fields, MSW

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

#### Background Information

1. Which type of institution did you attend?
  - a. Undergraduate studies: \_\_\_ HBCU \_\_\_ PWI
  - b. Graduate studies: \_\_\_ HBCU \_\_\_ PWI
  - c. Doctoral studies: \_\_\_ HBCU \_\_\_ PWI
2. What is your sexual orientation?
3. In which state did you attend school?
  - a. Undergraduate studies: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Graduate studies: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Doctoral studies: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Did you feel prepared for your transition into your faculty role?
  - a. Please explain:
5. Have you experienced imposter syndrome (ask if definition needed) at any point throughout your journey to faculty member, and if so, how did it manifest in you?
6. Have there been times when you have wanted to leave the academy? If so, what made you decide to stay?
7. Have you worked full-time outside of higher education?
  - a. If so, how would you compare the inclusion and equity you have experienced between the two sectors?

#### Detailed Experiences

8. What have you enjoyed most in your time as a faculty member?

9. Do you present as your authentic self (ask if definition needed) at work? If no, why not?
10. How do you believe your race and gender have impacted your experiences in the academy?
11. List the NASW values (namely social justice, dignity, and worth of the individual, importance, and centrality of human relationships, integrity, and competence) to ensure everyone is on the same page:
  - a. Do you believe your experiences as a professor have been in alignment with the NASW values?
  - b. What were your expectations going into social work knowing the values of the discipline?
12. Have you experienced either hyper-or in/visibility?
13. What are your thoughts on invisible labor (define if needed)?
14. If you are currently or have previously worked as a committee member, how did the assignments come about?
  - a. Did you at any time feel pressured to join a committee you would rather not have participated in?
15. Have you been assigned a professional mentor by your institution? If so, how has that relationship been?
16. Do/did you feel that you clearly understood the process and expectations of tenure and promotion within your organization?
17. Is your scholarship related to one of your identities?
  - a. If so, do you feel it is supported and viewed as rigorous?
18. How do you define inclusion and equity?

19. Who has been your greatest source of support internal and external to your institution?
20. Was there anything you did in advance to prepare you for employment at a PWI?
21. Do you feel as though you are asked to collaborate on par with non-Black female faculty members in your school?
22. In general, how have your student course evaluations gone?
23. What supports and or institutional culture practices facilitate success in your roles as faculty members?
24. Do you know what has been the history of recruitment and retention of Black female faculty at your institution?
25. What are some of the key things you know now that you wish you had known upon launching your career?
26. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience that would further my understanding of what is has been like being a Black female faculty member?