

## Chapter 87

# The “Double–Whammy” of Being Black and a Woman in Higher Education Leadership

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### ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this chapter is to inform readers and to expand their understandings about specific challenges and solutions that are associated with the leadership of Black women in higher education. In particular, this chapter will present the views and experiences of two African American females, one being a new department chair at a small liberal arts college and the other being a new community college dean, committed to social justice and servant leadership. Using critical race theory, Black feminist perspectives, and intersectionality, the authors seek to document their investigation of society and culture through the sharing of their own lived experiences. Through their auto-ethnographies, the authors also answer the call to discuss how racial and gendered identities inform leadership development in order to challenge hegemonic discourses in higher education leadership.*

### INTRODUCTION

While research on the leadership development of women in higher education is beginning to receive attention (Waring, 2003), limited studies have intentionally focused on the intersection of gender and race and how together they shape the conception and leadership development of Black or African American<sup>1</sup> women (Collins, 1990; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Parker, 2005; Stanley, 2009; Byrd, 2009). While race and gender are socially constructed categories, they have created inherent power differences in the lived experiences of both women and people of color (POC)<sup>2</sup> (Collins, 2000). For Black women in particular, the ability to separate one’s existence as solely racial or gendered is nearly impossible (Beal,

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1970). This inability to separate racism and sexism creates a double standard dichotomy known as the “double-whammy” or “double bind” of being ascribed two marginalized statuses (Du Bois, 1903; Epstein, 1973; Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Therefore, in higher education Black women can face institutional opposition, devaluation, and alienation that is the result of both sexism and racism (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Myers, 2002). This opposition can limit Black women’s professional growth and ascendancy into leadership positions, thus creating a dearth of Black women in leadership positions in higher education institutions (Battle & Doswell, 2004; Benjamin, 1997; Mosely, 1980). For those who do ascend to leadership positions, Black female administrators face significant barriers that discourage them from being productive and invested members of higher education institutions (Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999).

As more women and POC increase in representation in the labor market, higher education institutions ought to seek to recruit and retain these individuals at all levels (Donahue, 1998). With this in mind, it is essential to bring some balance to the conversation where Black women identify the structures that impede their power and where they articulate how they combat these structures in order for them to be successful at leading (Alston, 2012; Collins, 1990). Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to inform readers and to expand their understandings about specific challenges and solutions that are associated with the leadership of Black women in higher education. In particular, the authors will present the views and experiences of two African American female academic affairs leaders, one being a new department chair at a small liberal arts college and the other being a new community college dean, both committed to social justice and servant leadership. Using critical race theory, black feminist perspectives, and intersectionality, the authors seek to document their investigation of society and culture through the sharing of their own lived experiences. Through their autoethnographies, the authors also answer the call to discuss how racial and gendered identities inform leadership development in order to challenge hegemonic discourses in higher education leadership (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

## **BLACK WOMEN LEADERS**

Across the nation, young women earned the largest shares of undergraduate degrees and certificates during the 2013-2014 academic year. In particular, Black women earned 64 percent of the bachelor’s degrees earned by Black students. This was the highest share of any other racial/ethnic category (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017a). Unfortunately, while Black women may be the most highly educated, a study found that black women make up just eight percent of private sector jobs and less than two percent of leadership roles (United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). In addition to limited representation in the private sector, Black women are also among the lowest paid employees (Women’s Bureau, 2012). In educational leadership, Black women represent just one percent of total number of school district superintendents (Finnan, McCord, Stream, Petersen, & Ellerson, 2015). While they have long served as founders, faculty, department chairs, deans, and presidents at historically black colleges and universities, their numbers remain small at historically white higher education institutions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Mosley, 1980; Oguntoyinbo, 2014; Patitu & Tack, 1998). Nationally, Black women represent only three percent of the total number of college faculty (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017b) lending to a statistically small pipeline to administrative positions and college presidencies. Blacks represent only eight percent of all college presidents, with Black women making up 34 percent of that total (American Council of Education, 2017).

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