Challenging the Brick Wall: A Narrative of Misogynoir, Institutional Courage, and Post-Traumatic Healing

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Black women in the United States experience burdensome and unwarranted barriers as they navigate higher education environments. Hate violence and racial trauma are significant barriers to the health, mental health, and well-being of Black women on college campuses. Further, Black women faculty are mired by racial battle fatigue, disparate service burdens (Schuh, 2021; Shalaby et al., 2020), and feelings of being undervalued, unappreciated and overextended (Harley, 2008; Lee et al., 2022; Turner, 2002). Importantly, The Black Lives Matter, Black in the Ivory and Cite Black Women Movements sparked important efforts among numerous academic disciplines and institutions to recognize how structural racism differentially impacts Black women. This has in turn sparked dialogue on anti-racist action strategies and tools needed to better understand and dismantle structural racism in the academy. “The struggle to recognize institutional racism can be understood as part of a wider struggle to recognize that all forms of power, inequality, and domination are systematic rather than individual” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 44). The challenge to eliminate racism is not new to academia but achieving its eradication has proven onerous as systemic racism is pervasive and deeply embedded in systems, laws, written and unwritten policies, and practices that impact both society and the academy throughout the United States.

Central to effective anti-racist interventions and creating equity in higher education are understanding the unique experiences of Black women. To create equitable systems, policies, and practices, we must understand the vulnerability of Black women to microaggressions, unequal expectations, and academic trauma. Counter-stories authored by Black women can challenge stock stories and metanarratives common in academic culture. Only through greater

understanding can we create academic policies that allow all persons to succeed and contribute in emotionally healthy work environments.

Many scholarly personal narratives (SPN) highlight the experiences of Black women as students and faculty (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Love et al., 2021; Porter et al., 2022). However, fewer narratives address the experiences of Black women administrators and their efforts to facilitate institutional transformation by centering equity, inclusion, and belonging in higher education. Distinctly, I use SPN as a research method to explore my personal experiences as a Black woman and tenured faculty member and administrator navigating these spaces. I explore several organizing themes in my SPN. First, I describe my experiences with misogynoir, institutional trauma, and betrayal with academic institutions across my lifespan. Second, I describe strategies of resistance I use to redress racism in academic settings. Third, I describe my own healing journey. Central to my own healing has been my efforts developing institutional programs and practices on behalf of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) described in this manuscript. Implications for institutional transformation as it relates to both gender and racial equity in STEM are provided.

Methodology and Guiding Theoretical Perspective

Both intersectionality and scholarly personal narrative are used to provide a guiding methodological framework to explain the experiences of the author. Using critical race theory (CRT) as a central theoretical framework, this personal narrative discusses interpersonal interactions, witnessed events, and felt experiences. The scholarly personal narrative is placed within historical context (Unger, 2014). It focuses on past and present while considering implications for hope, social transformation, and institutional courage through anti-racist work.

Crenshaw (2017) describes intersectionality as a critical framework to explain how a person's multiple identities (i.e., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, social class, and others) can intersect to create overlapping and distinctive forms of oppression and discrimination. Similarly, misogynoir must be understood in the context of positionality and power structures within institutions. Bailey and Trudy (2018) coined the term "misogynoir," which rests at the intersection of anti-blackness and misogyny and can be used to describe how the intersectionality of race and gender work together to create an exclusive brand of racism directed at Black women. I have experienced this consistently my entire life in education systems from K-12 to graduate school, and throughout my twenty-year career as an academic.

SPN is a method of choice for many underrepresented scholars in academia as it presents an epistemological shift aimed at developing research honoring the experiential and intellectual voices of persons historically underrepresented in higher education settings. Further, it legitimizes first-person singular perspectives about social justice (Nash & Viray, 2013). SPN as a methodology features organizing themes which represent beliefs, meanings and perspectives important to the writer (Nash, 2015). It uses existing research, theory, and scholarship to ground and enrich the narrative.

CRT can provide an important lens for understanding the complexity of systemic racism and institutional transformation. CRT is the ideal theoretical framework to understand racial inequality as endemic within U.S. culture. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) assert that CRT is a movement seeking to understand and change society through its unique theoretical lens. Thus, its activist dimension provides an important action-oriented focus that sets it apart from other theoretical perspectives. Proponents of CRT assert that the functions and effects of racism are

often invisible and not easily understood by those with racial privilege (Constance-Huggins, 2012; Gharbi & Baffour, 2023). Status as a member of a historically underrepresented group confers a presumed expertise to speak about ones' own experiences about race, racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and intersectionality. Notably, this lens acknowledges the centrality of experimental knowledge that people of color acquire in their fight against hegemonic spaces (McGee & Stovall, 2015).

Counter-storytelling is a central tenant of CRT used to examine racial and gender discrimination (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Thus, their stories and perspectives are important, legitimate, and valid for creating spaces to continue to engage in institutional transformation. Importantly, the recognition of BIPOC authors and their narratives can uplift the cultural knowledge, memories, and ancestral linkages of Black and Indigenous populations (de Sousa Santos, 2016). Thus, CRT can serve as an important framework to understand institutional betrayal and academic trauma as well as address institutional solutions.

Intersectionality, Trauma, and Resilience: Trauma and Institutional Betrayal

My relationship with institutional betrayal in educational settings began in middle school. My world changed drastically around 1980, when I relocated to rural Chester County, Pennsylvania. My mother had recently acquired her Ph.D. and was teaching at a nearby Historically Black University. Notably, I spent a good deal of my childhood along the Baltimore-Washington, D.C. corridor in both racially segregated Black communities and newly created "diverse" cities like Columbia, Maryland. In sharp contrast, Chester County has a poignant history of racism and segregation; including the lynching of a Black man in 1911, witnessed by a crowd of thousands, that garnered no prosecution (Jones, 1999). Like much of the Northeast U.S., Chester County witnessed the peaceful desegregation of restaurants, while other practices

such as discrimination in hiring and banking required political activism and legal challenges to facilitate change during the 1970s and 1980s (Jones, 1999).

While *Brown v. Board of Education* made state-issued school segregation illegal in the U.S. in 1954, the Oxford (Pennsylvania) School District did not fully integrate until 1970. According to newspaper archives, "the state's previous resistance was overturned by the Supreme Court for districts in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Mississippi ("50 Year Anniversary," The Oxford Eagle, September 30, 2020, p.1). The court ruled that integration must be enforced in the Oxford School District in the spring semester of 1970. I had no idea I was entering middle school little over a decade after the full integration of public schools. I was the only person in the class that identified as Black and female. I was regularly bullied by other students which included being slapped, kicked, and called racial slurs. Although I tried my best to do well academically, I was always given the lowest grade in the class. Other students made fun of me, called me "stupid" and worse. I experienced both violence and invisibility simultaneously. Often as these things were going on I would look around the room and the teacher was looking directly at me. I never remember him stopping it. As an 11-year-old, I realized the teacher was not there to support or protect me and this was in some way connected to my intersectional status. I clearly understand today that the teacher's behavior was an act of institutional betrayal. As an agent of the institution, it was his job to ensure my physical and psychological safety. After some time, I stopped trying academically. I would go to school and put my head down on the desk and stay like that for most of the day.

The presence of race-based traumatic stress has been documented, and more recently researchers have begun to demonstrate that harm or injury from racism can be operationalized and assessed (Carter & Pieterse, 2020). When an individual has experienced an emotionally

painful, sudden, and uncontrollable racist encounter, they are at risk of suffering from a race-based traumatic stress injury. Manifestations of racialized trauma can include stress, depression, anxiety, feelings of isolation, and alienation (Williams et. al., 2020).

Notably, I became withdrawn, depressed, anxious and frequently tearful. I had a hard time articulating to my family what I was experiencing. About a year later, I went to live with my father outside of Washington, D.C. Although my father was a social worker (and grew up in the rural segregated South in the 1950s and 1960s), I don't think he or anyone else in my family understood that I was experiencing racialized trauma or what that really meant. I carried those experiences in silence for most of my life, rarely talking about them to anyone. There was an indescribable shame I felt associated with this experience, as if something I did caused people to treat me inhumanely. Four decades later, after the death of George Floyd, other former Black students from the Oxford School District began posting on Facebook about the harsh racial experiences they were subjected to in the 1980s. I posted too. Others acknowledged and affirmed my experiences. For decades I thought I was the only one as I rarely ever shared this story with anyone.

While experiencing a profound sense of relief and validation about finally being heard regarding my childhood experiences, I continued to experience racial exclusion, overwhelming service burdens, and microaggressions in my academic College. As the only tenure-line Black faculty member in my college, the largest and most looming issue was that I felt my workload was overwhelming and unrealistic. I did not feel valued in terms of the numerous contributions I made to the service and curriculum of the College.

Unequal Service Burden

The experience with overwhelming service commitments is consistent with other personal narratives by other BIPOC women scholars (Schuh, 2021). The overwhelming number of service commitments stifled my ability to commit to my research, each year resulting in the bare minimum requirement for research productivity and making my chances for promotion non-existent. I also perceived that my service workload was much higher than most faculty, including other program directors within the College. When I transitioned to my Associate Dean role (which was outside of the College) I was asked to take on several very heavy service burdens. I was shocked at the "asks" and politely declined them all.

Exclusion and Microaggressions

Constantine et. al. (2008) defines microaggressions as brief, frequent and subtle indignities (verbal, behavioral or environmental) that communicate negative and disparaging messages to people of color. A faculty member who has experienced microaggressions must demonstrate that the microaggressions were directed toward a protected group, that a reasonable person would find the microaggressions harassing, and they were persistent and severe enough to constitute a hostile work environment (Lukes & Bangs, 2014).

Thus, many BIPOC faculty avoid reporting microaggressions out of fear that their concerns will be ignored or invalidated, which in turn may increase stress, anxiety, and feelings of isolation and alienation (Gillian-Daniel et al., 2021). Microaggressions targeted towards faculty members can cause continuing, unrecognized harm that often goes unaddressed (Lukes & Bangs, 2014) even when reported. Many Black women must police their behaviors in the workplace using a prism of media perpetuated stereotypes such as the angry Black women

(Corbin et al., 2018). This can be emotionally draining and can cause racial battle fatigue (Corbin et al., 2018; Smith, 2014).

In my faculty role, I have often been the subject of hostile, negative, and derogatory comments that were often directly tied to the intersection of my race and gender. Microaggressions were typically not from tenure-line or tenured faculty but from clinical faculty, staff, and students that I interacted with either in the class or in my role as Program Director. For example, I was told repeatedly by a staff person who is no longer at the University that I look "exactly like" the only other Black woman working in the College. I was very clear with this person that their comments were inappropriate and asked them not to repeat them. I reported the incident to a senior administrator within my College who laughed about my experiences. There was a consistent campaign, particularly by some staff to undermine my authority and circumvent my decisions.

At the beginning of the pandemic, there were very rapid policy changes and some of the information sent to students was not in accordance with university or policies set by the accrediting body. I was characterized as "heavy handed" by a white female colleague because I asked for time to review documents before they were distributed to students. This comment was documented through e-mail. After I reported the incident, there was a follow-up meeting with myself, a senior administrator who mediated the meeting, the person who sent the e-mail, and her supervisor. I provided the senior administrator with all the e-mail documentation about the incident in advance of the meeting. The supervisor lied in the meeting to say that I was unresponsive to e-mails and was causing delays. The documentation provided demonstrated that I replied to e-mails responsively, usually under 24 hours. I was thankful that the senior administrator reviewed the documentation in advance of the meeting and called out these

statements as untruthful. I shared with everyone in the meeting that the characterization of my request to review material as “heavy handed” drew on racial stereotypes and was very harmful. Further, it reinforces common cultural stereotypes of Black women as overbearing and emasculating (Kwate & Threadcraft, 2015). The person who sent the communication spent much of the meeting crying and defending her behavior. The senior administrator did her best to demonstrate that this behavior would not be tolerated but I left the meeting further traumatized by this interaction. It was shocking and disappointing to see that the person did not have the maturity to accept feedback about their behavior and seemed unwilling to hear their actions were problematic and unprofessional. One positive thing was the person who sent the e-mail was much more respectful in her communication moving forward. However, I did notice that this person had a pattern of meeting me to garner feedback on how to execute curriculum or programs but would come to group meetings and present these ideas without providing me with any credit for our partnership. As a Black woman, I have learned to choose my battles. Although I thought this was inappropriate and unprofessional, I also know that if I brought this up, I would likely be perceived as negative, demanding, and not a team player. As time went on, I was intentional in lessening my interaction with this person and rejecting requests for consultations especially in one-on-one settings.

I have been asked inappropriate and offensive questions such as how often do I wash my hair by a staff person with a high-level administrative role within the College. The same person made comments about a family picture on my desk, stating that my daughter looks “foreign” and “exotic.” In another meeting this individual commented about my son attending the University, stating he would get scholarships because of his race. As this was an ongoing pattern of behavior, I did report this after the third instance to the College leadership. The staff person

became increasingly rude to the point I felt uncomfortable meeting alone with them. I either asked someone else to join the meeting (without explaining my uncomfortableness) or communicated via e-mail with this person. About a year later there was a change in leadership at the College level. I reported these incidents to an office external to the College. The incidents were eventually addressed individually with the person who demonstrated the ongoing microaggressive behavior. The mediating outside office also requested that some training take place with all staff around issues of equity, diversity and inclusion. While this may seem like a win, it took over a year of documenting injustice before I was heard.

In another example, I was excluded from communication sent to all other members of the Promotion and Tenure Committee (this has happened several times over the course of several years). For example, e-mails and documents about materials went out to all tenured faculty members except for myself at least one month prior to the committee meeting. Several years in a row, I documented e-mails where the person sending the communication “forgot” to include me and I was not notified until a few days prior to the meeting. This is consequential in several respects. I was not provided the opportunity to participate in sub-committees which provide more intensive review and feedback on candidates, I was not able to review the materials at such short notice prior to the meeting, and in at least one case I could not re-arrange my schedule to attend at such short notice. When I addressed my concerns to the new Chair of the Promotion and Tenure Committee, he replied quickly with a strategy to ensure that my exclusion would not happen again. I was appreciative of this response; however, I again addressed this issue with the office external to the College as I thought it was important to document my exclusion repeatedly over time. About five months after documenting my concerns, I received an apology in writing for one incident in which I was excluded from participation in promotion and tenure

proceedings. Again, I spent considerable time documenting these incidents and communicating with several administrative leaders to achieve resolution. Ultimately, these experiences were never clearly acknowledged as misogynoir but generally explained away as a series of mishaps or poor communication, which was disappointing and retraumatizing, but expected. My experiences with exclusion and microaggressions and my frustration regarding the long process of resolution caused ongoing racial trauma. I continue to experience symptoms such as ongoing stress and anxiety, exhaustion, feelings of helplessness, acute migraines, and chronic neck pain.

My symptoms of racial trauma and battle fatigue worsened over time as the experiences accumulated and continued to go unaddressed for long periods of time. However, I never lost hope or stopped praying for an improvement in my circumstance. In addition, I continue to attend a mindfulness-based support group for BIPOC regularly. I also utilize integrative medicine as an approach to facilitate post-traumatic healing. This approach often stresses the patient's individuality and preferences, as it attempts to incorporate the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of health (Caspi, et. al., 2003). It incorporates complementary and alternative medical approaches. I frequently incorporate both acupuncture and massage into my wellness and healing routine.

This story is about resilience and success. *Racism never ever defeated me.* There is a healing power in documenting this story and knowing others will read it and hopefully be changed by it in some way. "Turn your test into a testimony" was a frequent saying I heard growing up in church in the Black communities where I was heard, seen, and nurtured. It simply means to use one's challenges and negative experiences in a positive way to help and support others. After the death of Mr. Floyd, I began to think: What can I do so others don't experience trauma and institutional betrayal? How do I become a more active agent for change in my

institution and within my profession? How do I become a more active and effective mentor and support system for students of color on campus? How can I facilitate my own post-traumatic healing from the racial trauma I experienced in past and present?

Institutional Courage & Post-Traumatic Healing to Promote Change

Importantly, I am deeply committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) work and institutional transformation. During the pandemic, my writing became therapeutic and an important form of post-traumatic healing from the racism I experienced in my institution. As the world exploded with stories about systemic racism, I felt like I finally had permission to research and write about race in a powerful, truthful, and meaningful way *to me*. I began a new research project aimed at examining anti-racism interventions within higher education. My national service aimed to dismantle racism in the social work profession. For the first time I had the ability to interact with academicians from across the country that were interested in addressing institutionalized racism. In our meetings, we laughed, cried, and collectively strategized for change. I saw other Black women in these spaces speaking up and sharing their voices and opinions. It gave me hope that I could also lead social transformation and develop spaces for institutional courage within my institution. After having the experience of serving in a national leadership role to facilitate EDI in my profession, I garnered the courage to apply for a EDI role on my campus. I transitioned from the role of Program Director in my College to an Associate Dean of Graduate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, helping to coordinate efforts on behalf of more than 200-plus programs. *Hallelujah*. I felt a profound sense of relief that I could work towards institutional change while simultaneously creating some distance from the traumatizing interactions with colleagues in my department.

As a Black woman I experience both institutional betrayal and institutional courage in different spaces within my institution. As an Associate Dean of Graduate EDI, I have the capacity to facilitate institutional courage. In my administrative space, I interface with my colleagues in the Graduate School and other departments across campus who support EDI efforts and genuinely want to create a safe and equitable space for faculty, staff, and students of color. I feel supported, affirmed, and encouraged in these spaces. I often participate in affinity groups, workshops, and support groups that are exclusive BIPOC spaces that affirm my humanity and provide support for the work of racial equity. In these spaces I am celebrated. Simultaneously, I experience institutional racism in other spaces where I am treated differentially and institutional racism presents itself through a convergence of ignoring the problems and concerns, deception to cover up behaviors, gaslighting, exclusion and indifference.

It takes a lot of time and courage to address institutional injustice. Documenting, recording, and advocating to address institutional racism is incredibly time-consuming and a painfully slow process for those experiencing injustice, particularly when it is related to misogynoir. This and similar efforts represent a form of racialized labor, often unacknowledged, that is only extended to Black women and other BIPOC as they navigate racist and discriminatory environments (Grier-Reed et. al., 2022).There is the knowledge that as a Black woman your performance is judged in intangible ways (Cheeks, 2018). This makes the process of speaking up risky for one's career. It can take an emotional toll for the person experiencing the problem.

Institutional courage demonstrates an institution's commitment to seek truth and engage in moral action, despite unpleasantness, risk, and short-term cost (Center for Institutional Courage, n.d.). It is a pledge in which its agents protect and care for those who depend on the

institution. Its commitment can help institutions transform into more accountable, equitable, healthy places for everyone. Cheeks (2018) asserts that sponsorship is necessary. If you have no one in your corner, it is nearly impossible to succeed. Thus, it is important to have someone in a position of power within the workplace to advocate for promotions, raises, and a prominent role on important projects (Cheeks, 2018). Sponsorship is a hidden expectation of academia. Often new faculty are paired with mentors, but mentors differ from sponsors in that they provide critical advocacy. Sponsors that promote justice-oriented and equity-driven models of teaching, research, service, and administration are crucial to demonstrating institutional courage and change.

For example, I have been able to feel affirmed in my ability to address the racism within my College at a higher level within the institution as well as develop programming for students that addresses race and gender equity. I met with a senior administrator at the University who was affirming and responsive to my documented concerns. I felt heard and supported for the first time. I provided a detailed list of outcomes that I would like to see addressed through informal resolution. Some of the solutions I suggested are a formalized policy to address microaggressions. I have also asked for an evaluation of my salary, as well as a letter from my supervisor detailing a formal evaluation of last year's performance and whether a merit raise was provided. Not all my requests were addressed. However, a powerful sponsor within the University facilitated meetings on my behalf to ensure that my workload and pay were more equitable. I found that documentation can be a powerful and necessary act of resistance for Black women in the academy.

One way I have facilitated post-traumatic healing for myself is to find meaning and purpose in my research, mentoring undergraduate and graduate students, and through my

administrative work facilitating diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and policies. I understand I have control over how my time is spent and prioritize protecting my sense of peace. I am intentional about spending time in community with students, faculty, and staff that value me and my contributions. When I can, I avoid traumatizing spaces and people. When I cannot, I interact with them virtually or electronically whenever possible.

Institutional Practices and Programs to Facilitate Gender and Racial Equity

Within the framework of CRT, the lived experiences of BIPOC with oppression must be at the center of forming new approaches to dismantling institutional constraints (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). My lived experiences have empowered me to protect and care for underrepresented students within the institution and to develop programs, policies, and services that center racial and gender equity. Members of underrepresented racial groups are not only underrepresented numerically but also systemically through social structures and the ways in which power is situated among groups. This systemic underrepresentation continues to impact access and equity issues for students of historically underrepresented groups within higher education. For example, BIPOC graduate students experience more profound challenges in accessing funding, mentorship, and building meaningful professional relationships (Griffin et al., 2016). Further, some experience acute levels of trauma, anxiety, and financial stress adjusting to new academic, social, and cultural environments. This can be exacerbated by dual pandemics of institutional racism and COVID-19. Together, these factors can negatively impact retention, time to completion, well-being, professional development, and sense of belonging for BIPOC students. Thus, there is a pressing need for colleges and universities to implement culturally relevant programs and evidence-based evaluation practices that address equity gaps. From

conceptualization to data analysis, CRT asks how race and racism influences the lens from which the research is viewed (Daftary, 2020).

I am the administrative head for the EDI Office, located in the Graduate School. Through our collaborative work across campus, we seek to improve academic integration, socialization, and community membership by centering inclusion, equity, and justice in higher education. *Belonging* and *mattering* are central to our work. Pedler et. al. (2022) suggest that students in higher education settings who have a stronger sense of belonging are likely to have more motivation, elevated academic self-confidence, higher achievement, and academic engagement levels. We provide opportunities for improving access and equity in graduate education through scholarships and professional and leadership development programming. This work addresses systems of oppression, intersectionality, and strategies for resistance and change in all academic disciplines, including STEM-focused disciplines. Personally, this is important to me as I have felt that I did not belong or matter in many academic settings throughout my life.

Gender and Racial Equity Within STEM

Systemic Approaches to Increasing Representation and Advancement of Women in STEM

Systematic approaches to increasing representation include creating safe spaces where students of color can gather to fellowship to discuss issues and concerns. For example, events in the Professional Development Series seek to assist students from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education to identify and develop skills needed to succeed in graduate school and to successfully transition to careers beyond graduation. This series is designed to broaden graduate students' career perspectives and develop competencies in communication, self-awareness, professional adaptability, leadership, mentoring, and professionalism. Speakers include notable faculty and graduate students from STEM disciplines who identify as Black, Indigenous, and

People of Color (BIPOC). The speaker series integrates topics that address topics such as gender and race bias in research.

Moya Bailey, MLK Visiting Professor in Women's and Gender Studies at MIT, notes that the institution prides itself on producing top STEM leaders in its field. Thus, Bailey developed a course that builds upon science training by incorporating humanities-focused questions and challenging the objectivity of science and building upon feminist epistemology that posits that scientists have situated knowledge which is biased (MIT News, 2021). This and similar courses have the ability to increase the representation of historically underrepresented groups in STEM by allowing students who identify as female from underrepresented backgrounds in particular to see themselves using critical approaches such as Black feminism. Additionally, courses such as the one developed by Bailey have the potential to have all STEM students engaged in critical conversations and problem-solving to address bias and learn about transformative institutional policies and practices.

Developing Innovative and Sustainable Ways to Promote Gender Equity in the STEM Academic Workforce

Graduate Diversity Enhancement Grants support the retention and professional development of historically underrepresented graduate students. Graduate students, faculty, staff, and organizations within the University are invited to apply for funding to support initiatives that enhance retention practices that allow students to thrive or excel professionally. Graduate students embody several intersecting social identities that position them with valuable knowledge to address the most pressing needs for groups across disciplines and departments related to DEI. This grant opportunity serves as a mechanism for institutional change in graduate education. The cycle occurs bi-annually and funds up to four grants per semester. For example,

this semester the grant funded a speaker series called “Represent: STEM Voices,” which highlight the achievements of prominent individuals in STEM who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and/or belong to other historically marginalized groups in STEM. The speaker series was primarily supported through an NSF grant, and received supplementary funding through the Diversity Enhancement Grant mechanism. The series, developed by several STEM faculty and post-docs, aims to provide influential and high-profile speakers from both academia and industry with the goal of inspiring graduate and undergraduate students from historically marginalized groups to engage in the STEM workforce.

Contributing to the Research Knowledge Base on Gender Equity and Other Identities in STEM Academic Careers

There is a considerable need for colleges and universities to implement equity-minded practices that include culturally relevant and evidence-based evaluation practices, tools and frameworks that address equity gaps for all students, including those in STEM disciplines. The Graduate EDI Office assesses not only its recruitment and retention efforts, but the social determinants of health that include a wide variety of quality-of-life outcomes, including socioeconomic status, educational attainment, access to healthy and affordable food choices, employment and job stability, housing status, and access to health insurance. It is important to used mixed methods approaches that measure personal, social/relational, and institutional factors influencing student retention and well-being. A mixed methods approach provides both comprehensive and contextualized insights from the data. Quantitative data can provide more generalizable findings while qualitative data can provide information about unanticipated benefits and outcomes for students regarding programs and services. Data is collected on all students, including those from STEM disciplines, on involvement in programming and barriers

to persistence. Data can help us understand barriers to persistence for graduate students in STEM. Importantly, there is extensive research on the factors that predict the retention of BIPOC in undergraduate education; however, little is known about barriers and facilitators for the persistence of graduate students in STEM (Curry & DeBoer, 2020). Thus, this data can have important implications for expanding the knowledge base both institutionally and nationally.

Conclusion

Due to recent racial injustices in the United States, there is an urgent need for institutional strategies to address systemic racism. To honor the individual and collective experiences of groups underrepresented in higher education such as Black women, it's important to honor their counter-stories of institutional courage. Using the scholarly personal narrative as a research perspective, I sought to highlight several themes, including institutional betrayal, academic trauma, post-traumatic healing, and institutional change. It's important to note that students and faculty of color often experience racial trauma and institutional betrayal across the lifespan. As Black women experience a distinctive form of racism and sexism, they must often navigate environments where they lack psychological safety. Simultaneously, they must fight their personal struggles with systemic racism while empowering, mentoring, and nurturing other faculty and students. Promoting structural and institutional transformation is challenging, particularly within Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). It involves the support of institutional actors, including administrators, faculty, staff, and students across the institution.

Challenging the brick wall involves documenting institutional racism and seeking redress through informal and formal channels. The hidden and often undiscussed result of institutional betrayal experienced by BIPOC is racial trauma and injury. It is often difficult for individuals to move on from betrayal and heal when biased treatment is explained away or ignored. Thus,

institutional transformation requires the receptivity of institutional actors to address problems and develop policies to prevent and mitigate harm to underrepresented groups within the institution.

Interventions aimed at providing a sense of belonging for BIPOC students must be part of strategic institutional efforts that consider intersected experiences for students. These efforts must consider campus climate, race, class, and gender equity, LGBTQIA+ student experiences, socioeconomic background, students with disabilities, undocumented students, and the possible intersections of these identities and others. My experience “challenging the brick wall” involves using what power and influence I have as a tenured faculty and administrator to develop and evaluate programs and services that encourage both racial and gender equality for students. This work has facilitated institutional change and my own post-traumatic healing. This narrative demonstrates that programs can be developed, supported, and evaluated by partnering with non-STEM DEI administrators. They often can obtain resources that can support and promote structural and institutional transformation, specifically addressing the intersections of gender and STEM fields with other forms of social identity.

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