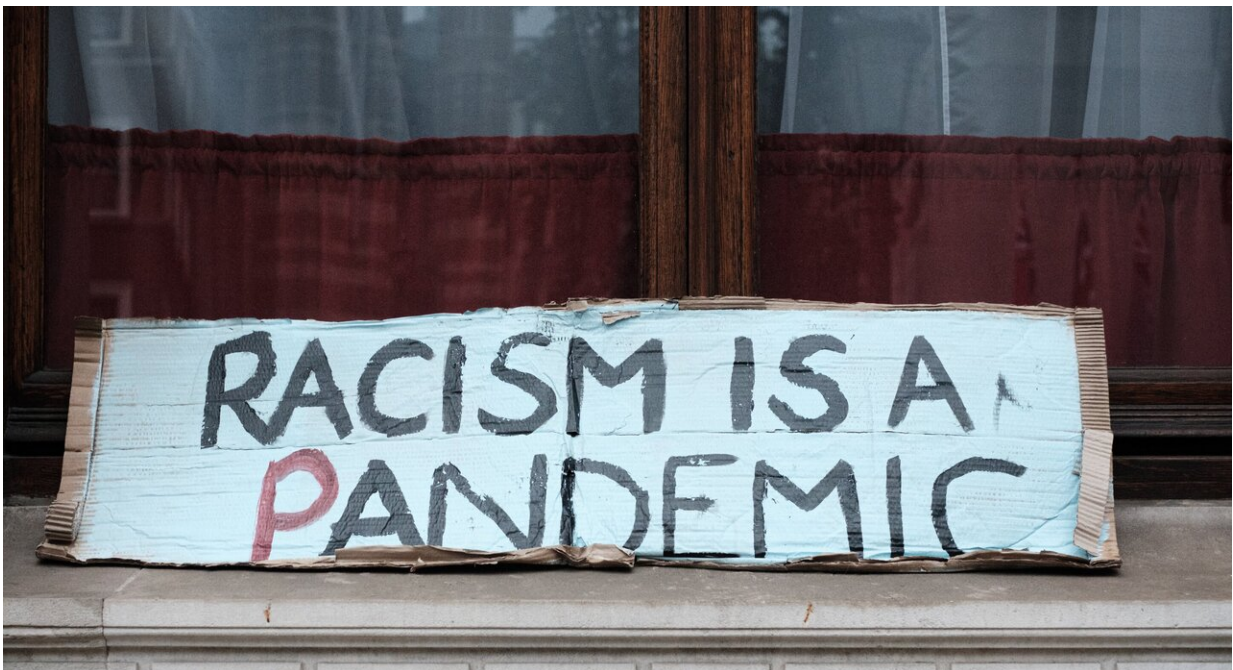


Researcher explores how the hostility Black women face in higher education carries dire consequences

March 16 2024, by Ebony Aya



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Isolated. Abused. Overworked. These are the themes that emerged when I invited nine Black women to chronicle their professional experiences and relationships with colleagues as they earned their Ph.D.s at a public university in the Midwest. I featured their writings in to get my Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction.

The women spoke of [being silenced](#).

"It's not just the beating me down that is hard," one participant told me about constantly having her intelligence questioned. "It is the fact that it feels like I'm villainized and made out to be the problem for trying to advocate for myself."

The women told me they did not feel like they belonged. They spoke of routinely being isolated by peers and potential mentors.

One participant told me she felt that peer community, faculty mentorship and cultural affinity spaces were lacking.

Because of the isolation, participants often felt that they were missing out on various opportunities, such as [funding and opportunities to get their work published](#).

Participants also discussed the ways they felt they were duped into taking on more than their fair share of work.

"I realized I had been tricked into handling a two- to four-person job entirely by myself," one participant said of her paid graduate position. "This happened just about a month before the pandemic occurred so it very quickly got swept under the rug."

The hostility that Black women face in higher education can be hazardous to their health. The women in my study told me they were struggling with depression, had thought about suicide and felt physically ill when they had to go to campus.

Other studies have found similar outcomes. For instance, a 2020 study of 220 U.S. Black college women ages 18-48 found that even though being seen as a strong Black woman came with its benefits—such as being

thought of as resilient, hardworking, independent and nurturing—it also came at a [cost to their mental and physical health](#).

These kinds of experiences can take a toll on women's bodies and can result in [poor maternal health, cancer, shorter life expectancy](#) and other symptoms that impair their ability to be well.

I believe my research takes on greater urgency in light of the recent death of [Antoinette "Bonnie" Candia-Bailey](#), who was [vice president of student affairs](#) at Lincoln University. Before she [died by suicide](#), she reportedly wrote that she felt she was suffering abuse and that the university [wasn't taking her mental health concerns seriously](#).

Several anthologies examine the negative experiences that Black women experience in academia. They include education scholars Venus Evans-Winters and Bettina Love's edited volume, "[Black Feminism in Education](#)," which examines how Black women navigate what it means to be a scholar in a "white supremacist patriarchal society."

Gender and sexuality studies scholar [Stephanie Evans](#) analyzes the barriers that Black women faced in accessing higher education from 1850 to 1954. In "[Black Women, Ivory Tower](#)," African American studies professor Jasmine Harris recounts her own traumatic experiences in the world of higher education.

In addition to publishing the findings of my research study, I plan to continue exploring the depths of Black women's experiences in academia, expanding my research to include undergraduate students, as well as faculty and staff.

I believe this [research](#) will strengthen this field of study and enable people who work in [higher education](#) to develop and implement more comprehensive solutions.

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