

Bullied Out of Position

Black Women's Complex Intersectionality, Workplace Bullying, and Resulting Career Disruption

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ABSTRACT—Though the framers of the constitution penned a social contract providing liberty and justice for all, 240 years later, people originally excluded from this treatise struggle for inclusivity through amendments and legislation. Many women of color, religious minorities, and gender/sexual minorities experience how those in power frequently suppress and coerce marginalized populations. Those in an intersection of these demographic positions may feel increased oppression. Despite several constitutional amendments and federal legislation, I argue that a more contemporary abuse is workplace bullying that occurs when the dominant person exploits his or her position to denigrate people in marginalized positions. In higher education, vulnerable and marginalized populations typically work in the least powerful positions (Hollis, 2016a). Within Mithaug's (1996) theoretical frame regarding self-determination, the sample reported their experiences in 2017–2018. Of a sample in which $N = 669$, 58% of all respondents reported being affected by workplace bullying. A chi-square analysis confirmed that as the intersectionality became more complex (female, black, religious minority, and gender/sexual orientation), the respondent was more likely to be affected by workplace bullying in higher education.

KEYWORDS—intersectionality, workplace bullying, higher education

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Introduction

Background

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT IS WOVEN OF A FABRIC ORIGINALLY EXCLUDING the current American minority-majority. The Declaration of Independence's primary author, Thomas Jefferson, borrowed directly from Locke's *Second Treatise* (Jayne, 1997). While embracing this British philosophy, Jefferson envisioned a society that privileged male property owners.

The social contract story yields several morals. First, it implies that private citizens are not the mere chattels of their rulers; they are not slaves or emancipated minors or inferiors by nature. Rather, they are self-determining agents . . . through an exercise of their own wills (Lomasky, 2011, p. 50).

In turn, this philosophy originally denied Native Americans, African slaves, and women the right of self-determination. As the country has evolved, American society has modified public policy to stretch this social contract fabric attempting to include those initially disregarded.

Jefferson's constitutional ideals have been updated with the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery in 1864, the 14th Amendment calling for equal protection under the law in 1868, the 15th Amendment in 1870 giving male citizens the right to vote regardless of race, and the 19th Amendment in 1919 for women's right to vote (U.S. Const. amend. XIII, XIV, XV, & XIX). Notably, the 1979 Equal Rights Amendment was three states short of ratification in its attempt to grant women equal rights within the United States' Constitution. Other federal legislation such as Title VII (1964), the American with Disabilities Act (1990), and the Equal Pay Act (2009) attempt to provide that elusive "justice for all."

Frederick Douglass foretold in his 1857 West Indian Emancipation Speech that those in power are reluctant to relinquish such power.

If there is no struggle there is no progress . . . This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. (Douglass, Kindle Locations 21621–21625, 1892)

This prophetic message remains applicable to contemporary power struggles for women's rights, racial equity, and voting rights. The social con-

tract requires contentious modifications to protect the marginalized positions of race and gender. Nonetheless, those seeking a fair application of the social contract often find abuse, resistance, and admonishment from hegemonic structures reluctant to release their powerful grip.

Within higher education, a pathway often used to create social equality (McCluskey, 1999), power structures maintain the cultural norms that protect exclusionary traditions. Despite a call for diversity, women and people of color remain underrepresented in higher education. The American Council on Education recounted that women earn more than 50% of all doctoral degrees, but women held only 31% of the full professor positions in 2014 (Johnson, 2016). Further, women faculty members make approximately \$15,000 less than their male counterparts, regardless of discipline. These issues are more severe for women of color as black women make \$.63 on the dollar compared to white men, and Hispanic women earn \$.54 on the dollar compared to white men (Johnson, 2016).

Within the power structures that erode opportunity for disenfranchised groups, I argue that workplace bullying is a compelling element in higher education that destroys self-determination and career progression for those in marginalized positions. Some researchers have considered the constrained choice, that is the tough life and career choices that face women who simultaneously seek family and career advancement (Broadbridge, 2010; Hakim, 2002). Further, Hollis (2016a) shows that as women climb the career ladder and seek promotion, supervision, budgetary responsibilities and tenure, they are more likely to report being the targets of workplace bullying.

Collins (2017) and Mirza (2015) also utilized black feminist theory and the backlash women experience within the dominant culture that shapes experiences for female academics with multifaceted identities. While the aforementioned amendments and legislation should have presumably granted more access, many are still excluded from “. . . life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Therefore, the following data-driven analysis of workplace bullying in higher education gives insight to how those with complex intersectionality are deterred by bullying which denies equity granted for all, but still denied to some.

Theoretical Frame

Symington (2004) noted that intersectionality analysis is a product of women of color scholars in the 1970s who insisted that the identity of women

could not be fully considered by isolating one position without the inclusive consideration of the whole person. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term itself in the late 1980s (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Crenshaw argued that Black women are not simply the subject of racism, or the target of sexism, but instead both forms of discrimination collide in the lives and experiences of Black women. However, racism and sexism are not the only demographic markers that potentially intersect for Black women striving through the dominant culture. Unfavorable class, sexual orientation, religion, language, and national origin, identities potentially outside of the mainstream, are positions that can keep women of color locked out of opportunity (Smith, 2013).

Employees from society's marginalized positions often do not have the dominant culture's organizational power and executive rank in higher education. Consequently, the marginalized endure compromised self-determination and often make choices that align with the need for safety instead of the goal of advancing. As a result, the quest to seek terminal degrees, tenure, and career advancement are compromised (Hollis, 2016a). According to Mithaug (1996), self-determination is an inalienable right. However, those with power have access, while those with minimal power have compromised access to this right. To create equitable access to self-determination, "all societies optimize prospects for self-determination for [the] least advantaged members by increasing their capacity and improving their opportunity to self-determine" (Mithaug, 1996, p. 11).

Intersectionality is a complex amalgam of identities, which extends from elements such as race, age, language, culture, sexual orientation, and religion (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001). The multiplicity of these identities yields obstructions to "empowerment and advancement" (Center for Women's Global Leadership, 2001, p. 1). Further, a theoretical lens that considers intersectionality recognizes that these identities are not mutually exclusive (Australian Human Rights and EOC, 2001), a point made in the seminal work *Ain't I a Woman* (hooks, 1981). The intersection of race and gender, along with other identities a singular person may embody, must be simultaneously analyzed, instead of parsed apart, or dissected into specific categories. For example, just as a Black woman with a disability experiences and proceeds through her life path with all of these identities simultaneously, the holistic approach to analyzing her positionality should be inclusive of all three demographic markers, black, woman, and disabled. Therefore, intersectionality "addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class

oppression, and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes and the like” (Center for Women’s Global Leadership, 2001, p. 1).

Brah and Phoenix (2004) wrote that the complexity of race, gender, and social class inform a more complex social position. Their comments align with Andersen (1996), who extends West’s discussion (1993) regarding race matters. “Actually, class, gender and race matter, and they matter because they structure interactions, opportunities, consciousness, ideology and the forms of resistance that characterize American life . . .” (Andersen, 1996, ix). Race, class, and socioeconomic status cannot be relegated to neatly define categories that are analyzed in isolation (McClintock, 1995).

Workplace bullying within this context is potentially the product of many positions embodied by the target, not a singularity of identity. Previous research elucidates how workplace bullying is based on a power dynamic (Hodson, Roscigno, & Lopez 2006; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Hollis, 2016). The person with more power controls the dominant culture and sets the stage for access, fairness, and career advancement. Looking at workplace bullying with a perspective on intersectionality acknowledges that targets may be harassed for several identities experienced by one person. Hence, Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008) stated that researchers should proceed with this understanding, that there is a “myriad [of] overlapping and mutually reinforcing oppressions that many women face in addition to gender. It is no longer acceptable to produce analyses that are embedded solely within an essentialist or universal collective experience as ‘woman’” (p. 5).

Problem Statement

The literature on intersectionality shows a need to consider the multifaceted positionality of women, instead of dissecting their personas creating mutually exclusive categories of race, gender, age, religion, culture, and sexual orientation. Further, the body of literature on workplace bullying emerging from seminal scholars of Northern Europe typically analyzes a population that is comparatively more homogenous than the diverse American populations (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2010; Glasø, Matthiesen, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2007; Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

In addition, even previous American studies have not tackled how increasing intersectionality may be a contributing factor in the targets’ propensity to experience workplace bullying. Hence, this analysis considered the complexity of intersectionality and whether such increasing complex-

ity increases the likelihood that a target faces harassment and abuse in the workplace. I have conducted my research studying the following research questions.

Research question #1. Will the reported experience with bullying increase as the target's intersectionality becomes more complex?

Research question #2. Will the reported experience with vicarious bullying increase as the target's intersectionality becomes more complex?

Purpose Statement

Previous studies have shown that the frequency of workplace bullying in higher education is higher than reported workplace bullying in the general American working population (Hollis, 2016). In a sector that has become increasingly competitive with fewer full-time tenure-track positions (Hollis, 2015) and continuous budget cuts (Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2014), those facing bullying and abuse may leave the higher education sector. The loss of diverse faculty and staff cripples the educational mission of an increasingly diverse educational system. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to consider the intersectionality of targets that face workplace bullying and consider if increasingly complex positionality increases the likelihood that a target faces bullying on the job.

Research Methods

Review of methods

If race is America's birth defect (Fluker, 2008), then the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexual orientation becomes the nation's foster child, frequently disadvantaged and overlooked. Hence, those from multiple marginalized positions often face more intense oppression. McCall (2005) has noted that studying intersectionality can pose complex methodological questions. Often qualitative methods such as ethnographic and phenomenological approaches bring forward the respondents' voices, potentially aligning with social justice thinking that is more inclusive and holistic. The complexity within intersectionality presents a challenge for researchers striving to pinpoint the experiences and positions of women of color (McCall, 2005). Therefore, this research method aligns with Else-

Quest and Hyde's (2016) recommendation for quantitative research to embrace the dynamic and interconnectivity of women.

This methodological approach, while primarily quantitative, will use a statistical analysis to illustrate that women of color are increasingly targeted for workplace bullying and harassment as their intersectionality becomes more complex. The larger data set in turn makes these findings plausibly more generalizable, though I would not make the claim that any single study could universally represent the complexities of women's experiences of marginality.

Therefore, this study will utilize a data set, $N = 669$, from a nationwide data collection conducted via SurveyMonkeyTM in late 2017/early 2018, to examine the central research question: *What is the likelihood of facing bullying as one's intersectionality becomes more complex?* The sample was based on faculty and staff who were printed in the Higher Education Publications (HEP), a directory of higher education professionals. The sample included four-year schools, two-year schools, and professional schools.

A chi-square test was used to examine the prevalence of bullying as the positionality became more complex. First, the frequency of bullying for all participants was considered. Next, the frequency of bullying for women was considered. Third, the frequency of bullying for Black women was considered. The most complex intersectionality considered was black women in a religious minority (not Catholic or Protestant). The following two hypotheses guided this study.

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): There is an increased likelihood of reportedly being affected by workplace bullying as the target has increasingly complex intersectionality.

Hypothesis 2 (H_2): There is an increased likelihood of reportedly being affected by vicarious workplace bullying as the target has increasingly complex intersectionality.

Data Collection and Analysis

The specific instrument used to guide this study was developed in 2017 and beta-tested by two professors, a diversity consultant, and two human resources professionals with experience in higher education. I used a relay service to distribute the instrument via email to higher education professionals from October of 2017 through the first week of February 2018. This

Table 1. Respondents affected by workplace bullying

All respondents	58%	386/669
Women	62%	294/473
Black Women	68%	52/76
Black Women Rel*	76%	22/29
Black Women LGBTQ**	100%	7/7

*Note for Black women Religion, gender, race and religion were tabulated; **Note for Black women LGBTQ, gender, race and gender/sexual minority were tabulated

instrument was sent to potential participants in all types of higher education institutions. Both four-year and two-year schools were included in this sample. The resulting sample from this primary data collection was of size $N = 669$.

SPSS IBM was used to conduct the chi-square analysis to determine if the reported experience of workplace bullying increased as the positionality of the target became more complex. I considered chi-square tests versus a regression line. A regression shows the strength of the relationship between bullying and a particular category. The chi-square will show the likelihood of an association. Given the research question posed, analyzing the likelihood of the workplace bullying experience was more relevant than the strength of the relationship.

Findings

Overall, 58% of the higher education respondents reported being affected by workplace bullying. This is a four-percent decline from a recent four-year study (Hollis, 2015) and two-year study (Hollis, 2016). In these studies, the sample sizes were smaller, yet the same question was asked via an Internet survey hosted in SurveyMonkey. The slight decline could be attributed to the increased attention workplace bullying has received in the American workplace. Further, four states, Tennessee, California, Utah, and Minnesota, have enacted anti-workplace bullying legislation since the data collection of the previous two studies; see Table 1.

To address the central research question, the responses were filtered by demographic information. First, all respondents were tabulated; then women, Black women, and finally Black women who are religious minorities. Also, Black women who are gender/sexual minorities were analyzed; see Table 2.

Table 2. Workplace bullying increased as intersectionality becomes more complex

	<i>All</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Black Women</i>	<i>Black Women Rel</i>	<i>Black Women LGBQ</i>
Bullied CT	386	295	51	22	7
Bullied Exp	406	288	45	17.6	4.2
Not B CT	283	179	24	7	0
Not B Exp	263	186.3	29.5	11.4	2.8
Total	669	474	75	29	7

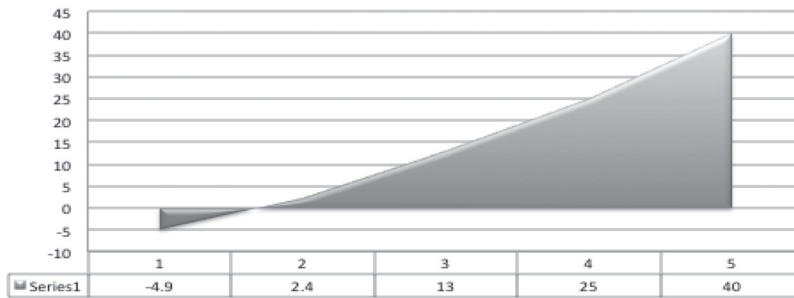


Figure 1. Increasing percent of those bullied as intersectionality becomes more complex. 1=All; 2=Women; 3= Bl. Women; 4=Bl. Women Rel. Minority; 5= Bl. Women LBGQ

Of all respondents, the actual count of respondents who are affected by workplace bullying is 386, which is 4.9% less than the expected count of 407 for this sample. For all women respondents, 295 reported being affected by bullying, which is 2.4% higher than the expected count of 288 for this sample. For Black women, the actual count was 51, 13% higher than the expected count for this sample, which was 44. For Black women who are also a religious minority, 22 reported being affected by bullying, which is 25% higher than the expected count for this sample, which was 17.6. For Black women who are also gender/sexual minorities, all seven reported being affected by bullying, which is 40% higher than expected for this sample.

Therefore, regarding hypothesis H_1 for this study (there is an increased likelihood of reportedly being affected by workplace bullying as the target has increasingly complex intersectionality), the hypothesis is accepted, $X^2 = (4, N = 669) = 14.67, p < .05$, because the chi-square test for this sample con-

Table 3. Respondents affected by vicarious bullying

All respondents	42%	283/669
Women	45%	213/473
Black Women	54%	41/76
Black women Rel*	62%	18/29
Black Women LGBQ**	100%	7/7

*Note for Black women Religion, gender, race and religion were tabulated; **Note for Black women LGBQ, gender, race and gender/sexual minority were tabulated

finds that as the intersectionality becomes more complex, the likelihood of facing workplace bullying proportionally increases.

The second research question addressed if targets with increasingly complex intersectionality are more likely to endure vicarious bullying. Vicarious bullying is an action where the bully sends a subordinate to abuse and harass a third party (Hollis, 2017). A bully may use vicarious bullying when he or she wants to dominate the target or series of targets, but still be viewed as a nice or empathetic person. The vehicle for this style of bullying, or henchman, is typically subordinate to the bully, in need of favor, resources, or political clout. Hence, that person is willing to abuse others in exchange for the bully's favor or influence (Hollis, 2017). The findings show that as a target's positionality becomes increasingly complex, she is also more likely to be the target of vicarious workplace bullying; see Table 4.

For all respondents, the total count of those who are affected by vicarious workplace bullying was 283, which is 21% lower than the expected count of 357 for this sample. Of all women respondents, 295 reported being affected by vicarious bullying, which is 2.4% higher than the expected count of 288 for this sample. For Black women, the actual count was 51, 16% higher than the expected count of 44 for this sample. For black women who are also a religious minority, 22 reported being affected by vicarious workplace bullying, which is 25% higher than the expected count of 17.6 for this sample. For Black women who are also from the LGBQ community, all seven, or 100%, reported being affected by vicarious bullying, which is 51% higher than the expected count for this sample.

Therefore, regarding hypothesis H_2 for this study (there is an increased likelihood of reportedly being affected by vicarious workplace bullying as the target has increasingly complex intersectionality), the hypothesis is accepted, $X^2 = (4, N = 669) = 114, p < .05$, because the chi-square test for this

Table 4. Vicarious Workplace bullying increased as intersectionality becomes more complex

	<i>All</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Black Women</i>	<i>Black Women Rel*</i>	<i>Black Women LGBQ**</i>
Bullied CT	283	213	41	18	7
Bullied Exp	357	146	40.5	15.5	3.7
Not B CT	386	60	35	11	0
Not B Exp	312	127	35.5	13.5	33
Total	669	273	76	29	7

*Note for Black women Religion, gender, race and religion were tabulated; **Note for Black women LGBQ, gender, race and gender/sexual minority were tabulated

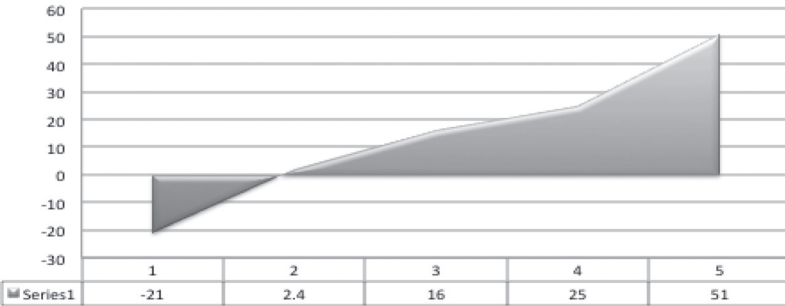


Figure 2. Increasing percent of those vicariously bullied as intersectionality becomes more complex. 1=All; 2=Women; 3= Bl. Women; 4=Bl. Women Rel. Minority; 5= Bl. Women LGBQ

sample confirms that as the intersectionality becomes more complex, the likelihood of facing vicarious workplace bullying proportionally increases. Further, the questionnaire collected the voices of women with the most complex intersectionality. Their open-ended responses point to the power differential they feel and how the complexity of their positions can make them more susceptible to workplace bullying.

Workplace bullying experiences affect black women’s careers, hurting their aspirations to excel in their respective career paths. Black women face unfair demotion, threats of job loss, or changed jobs more often than the rest of the sample as a result of workplace bullying. Changing jobs to escape a bully hurts job longevity, a quality many employers consider when looking at the stability of a job candidate.

Table 5. Open-ended responses from black women in higher education

Respondent #5	I have been in my field for more than 28 years. This is my first job in higher education. I can truly say, I have NEVER seen ANYTHING like what goes on in higher education! I was SO surprised by the behavior! I made the assumption, when accepting this position, that I would be dealing with educated, intelligent individuals. I had no idea the level of bullying that goes on!
Respondent #67	I have never seen black women work so hard to destroy another woman of color
Respondent #20	I think the issue of race and gender identity are used to promote certain climates and communities of intolerance. It was interesting how straight and some queer members rally around squeezing me out of my job manipulated the White LGBTQ community.
Respondent #19	I have been in higher ed over 30 years, this is the most vicious place I have worked. Bully is supported by a lying provost- we have no support
Respondent #23	In this TRUMP era, not even HBCUs are safe from bullying and incivility . . . esp women
Respondent#47	Ignored by management when reporting of maltreatment of others. Demoted from job originally hired for and then blocked from being restored to position. Replaced by people who do not even work in this area. Lesser qualified applicant hired to supervise me in my area. I can go on . . .

These data show that the social contract promises to American citizens fall short in the higher education sector for women with complex intersectionality. While hostility and bullying is behavior faced by a majority of higher education professionals, this power differential and the resulting intensified abuse disproportionately hurt Black women's careers.

Discussion

Perhaps this examination of workplace bullying deconstructs the experience by examining the frequency of bullying with additional complexities. From the complex interplay of race, gender, and religion (Alinia, 2015), the women's responses in this study highlight the need to continue the strug-

Table 6. Adverse Career Events of Black Women Compared to the Remaining Sample

	<i>Black women</i>	<i>Remaining sample</i>
Unfairly demoted	54%	32%
Threatened job loss	46%	43%
Changed jobs	48%	25%
Planning to leave	16%	19%
	N=74	N=526

gle for equality in academia and the respective communities from which its scholars emerge.

Sorting through the layers and levels of oppression and privileges and understanding them collectively without fracturing them as an additive and separate components are crucial if we are to appreciate fully the shared and unique experiences of women as whole beings in their diverse roles and identities. [sic](Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008, p. 8)

Further, just as this study is representative of the women in the professional ranks, higher education professionals should consider the impact on the increasingly diverse student body attending higher education. According to estimates from the United States census documents of the increasing “minority-majority,” by 2020, over half of the nation’s children will belong to at least one minority group (DeVore, 2015; US Census, 2015).

Nonetheless, as McBride, Hebson, and Holgate (2015) note, intersectionality is typically not considered in research regarding employee rights, discrimination, and harassment. They offer a call to be more intersectionally sensitive and recognize that racism, sexism, and classism are not mutually exclusive categories or existing in a binary or ternary system of categories. The findings of this study show that harassment and workplace abuse are increasingly intense for those with unique and complex positionality. From this perspective, the increasingly diverse communities and academic populations cannot just acknowledge, but must further embrace intersectionality, and advocate against power structures to create a modified and more inclusive power structure (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

Though some will point to the aforementioned legislation as signs of progress to extend the social contract to all Americans, in practice this so-

cial contract has not expanded to address the disenfranchised positions of our community, let alone the amalgam of such positions, to Black women who may be from the LGBT community and/or the member of a religious minority. Yet the confluences of such identities are increasingly prevalent with the majority-minority population expanding and the intersections within such communities increasingly present. The following recommendations are offered to support the increasingly diverse academic community.

Recommendations

Higher education human resources professionals should conduct an annual policy audit to confirm if fairness in opportunity, pay, and promotion are occurring in practice, and are not just written in the institutional mission statement.

Academic affairs can encourage the inclusion of social justice in the curriculum across disciplines.

Include a visible and active ombudsman trained in diversity management to hear the concerns of an increasingly diverse academic community. The ombudsman can also tabulate data regarding trends across the university.

While this study may contribute to the conversation on how women face increased harassment and bullying as their complex intersectionality increases, the study could not embody all of the potential positions. Roth (2018) challenged scholars to expand beyond Western thought and consider Caribbean, Brazilian, and Middle Eastern perspectives. For example, while this particular study is based on a large sample, the examination of religious minorities conflated different religious experiences that were non-Western, Hindi, Muslim, and other. For statistical purposes in this study, the counts of non-Western religions were combined to provide introductory insight, but not to suggest that each religion should be melded into the experiences of the others. Therefore, as noted previously, the task of policy makers and human resources is to move beyond compartments, but to consider complexities within the populations served in the application of policy meant to provide social justice.

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