

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Intersectionality and Education Work During COVID-19 Transitions

Navigating white academe during crisis: The impact of COVID-19 and racial violence on women of color professionals

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Abstract

Scholars have shown that women of color experience racial and gender aggressions in different workplaces but strategically in predominantly white institutions. This article explores how women of color professionals in academic institutions perceive their experiences during this time of multiple pandemics induced by COVID-19 and racial violence. By examining research on women of color in academe and other white institutional spaces, we discuss how systemic racism is embedded within organizational practices that sustain racial inequality. Drawing on data from a qualitative online survey of women of color in academe ($n = 25$), our theoretically grounded research employs Black feminist thought as a methodological practice to examine how COVID-19 and racial violence have impacted women of color through the continued perpetuation of racial and gender inequities. The findings provide important insights on how institutional responses to public discourses about racism can influence the experiences of women of color and their career trajectories.

KEYWORDS

emotional segregation, inclusion tax, invisible labor, racism-evasiveness, women of color

1 | INTRODUCTION

The years 2020 and 2021 have been tumultuous, with multiple pandemics shifting people's everyday lives across the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic halted our daily practices, personally and professionally, especially those

disproportionately impacted by systemic racial and economic disparities (Millett et al., 2020; Pirtle, 2020). Moreover, the racial awakening caused by the continuous killings of Black people in America (Coleman, 2020; Melaku, 2020a) created a perfect storm of social, economic, and political unrest that led to nationwide conversations about inequality in American institutions. COVID-19 and racial violence have amplified historic inequalities prevalent both in the workplace and at home. Several recent studies have addressed the impact of the pandemic and resulting racial violence on people of color (Beaman, 2020; Obinna, 2020; Sewell, 2020; Solomos, 2021). These studies have given voice to the heightened emotional distress experienced by Black, Latinx, and Asian American people (Cobb et al., 2021; Isaac & Elrick, 2021; Ren & Feagin, 2021; Simms, 2021; Wu et al., 2021) as well as the public health policing that impacts immigrant communities (Donà, 2021). The multiple layers of oppression people of color have faced in recent times has been referred to as “COVID-racism” (Elias et al., 2021).

In addition, women have become the “she-fault” parent, managing distance learning with children, caregiving, and picking up most household responsibilities while attempting to maintain their professional responsibilities. Numerous reports reveal that women are disproportionately burdened with childcare and family responsibilities that negatively impact their careers (Madgavkar et al., 2021; Masterson, 2020; Thomas et al., 2021). They were also more likely to face furloughs as organizations moved toward financial austerity measures. A recent McKinsey report (Corry et al., 2021) reveals that COVID-19 had an immediate impact on women's employment, noting that one in four women were contemplating “leaving the workforce or downshifting their careers” (p. 6) as compared to one in five men. The Thomas et al. (2021) report also notes that the groups most affected by COVID-19 are working mothers, women in senior management positions, and Black women (Thomas et al., 2021). In considering the impact of this moment on women of color in academe, it is vital to examine the historical marginalization they have faced based on their racial and gender location and other stigmatized identities. We therefore aim to answer the following research question: *How are women of color impacted by COVID-19 and racial violence as they navigate predominately white educational institutions?*

In presenting a review of the literature on women of color in higher education, we highlight the persistent barriers they face navigating white spaces. We utilize systemic racism (Feagin, 2006), white institutional spaces (Moore, 2008), invisible labor clause (Melaku, 2019a), inclusion tax (Melaku, 2019a), racism evasiveness (Beeman, 2015a), and emotional segregation (Beeman, 2007) as critical theoretical frameworks. In addition, we employ Black feminist thought as a methodological practice (Collins, 1986, 2000a), as well as an intersectional approach (Collins, 1986, 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Essed, 1991; Segura, 1989) to offer a nuanced depiction of women of color's experiences in academe in this time of multiple pandemics. Following the literature review, we formulate our research question, outline the research design and methodology, and present the findings from a qualitative online survey with women of color in academe ($n = 25$). The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of COVID-19 and racial violence on the work experiences and career trajectories of women of color in academe and recommendations for future research.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Ivory tower as white institutional spaces

Academic organizations tend to be predominately white institutional spaces (Moore, 2008) that predicate the existence of a system of social hierarchy, embedded practices and policies, and culture that help to reinforce and maintain a white male superstructure inherently designed to benefit whites and white males more specifically (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Feagin, 2006; Moore, 2008; Moore & Bell, 2011). Critical race scholar Wendy L. Moore (2008) contends that “white institutional spaces” are constituted and reproduced by “racial demographics and distribution of institutional power along racial lines; racialized institutional and cultural practices and justifying racial ideology and discourse; hidden signifiers of white power and privilege within the space; and post-civil rights legal and political

frame that protects white racial group interests” (Moore, 2008:32). She further argues that the historical exclusion of people of color bolstered the construction of white “norms, values and ideological frameworks” (Moore, 2008: p. 27) resulting in the development of a “white racial frame that organizes the logic of these institutions” (Moore, 2008: p. 27).

Feagin's conceptualization of the “white racial frame” argues that it operates both consciously and unconsciously to convey racialized stereotypes, narratives, images, emotions, ideology, and penchants to discriminate that posit whites as superior to racially subordinated groups (Feagin, 2006: p. 25–28). This white racial frame provides clear insights into the deeply rooted nature of systemic racism in American academic institutions (Feagin, 2006). The frame perpetuates and maintains hidden mechanisms of racial inequality in higher education institutions, working to breed racist practices, policies, ideologies, and discourses that are reflected in the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) professionals (Moore, 2008; Moore & Bell., 2011: p. 597).

Furthermore, Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations, conceiving academic institutions as racial structures, facilitate our understanding of how these spaces maintain institutionalized racial inequality. Specifically, Ray defines racialized organizations as “meso-level social structures that limit the personal agency and collective efficacy of subordinate racial groups while magnifying the agency of the dominant racial group” (Ray, 2019: p. 36). By legitimating a hierarchy of unequal access to and hoarding of institutional resources and means (Moore, 2008; Ray, 2019), using whiteness as credentials, and racial decoupling, racialized organizations enhance or inhibit agency differently based on race (Ray, 2019). Therefore, to conceptualize academe as white institutional spaces that operate with hidden mechanisms that fundamentally disadvantage racially subordinated groups and maintain racial inequality supports the consistent findings that women of color are inherently disadvantaged in higher education. Evans' (2008) examination of Black women's experience gaining entry into and navigating the ivory tower from students to educators details the historical educational and intellectual journey of Black women in predominantly white institutions (“PWIs”). Evans' research provides concrete evidence suggesting that Black people have always faced racial and gender barriers in educational institutions, and particularly in PWIs where they were “subject to racism by students, staff, and faculty, or by institutional policies that regulated curriculum, housing, meals, and social stratification” (Evans, 2008: p. 25).

2.2 | The cost of being in white institutional spaces

In a study examining the pervasiveness of racial and gender inequities (Essed, 1991; St. Jean & Feagin, 1998) in law firms through the experiences of Black women lawyers, Melaku (2019a) uncovers the patterned existence of invisible labor that Black women are forced to engage to both navigate and be present in white spaces (Evans & Moore, 2015). Melaku theorizes the existence of an *invisible labor clause*, an unwritten clause in the employment contract of Black women, and other marginalized groups, including women, BIPOC, LGBTQ+ members, or people with disabilities, that require them to perform unrecognized and uncompensated labor to sustain their positions (Melaku, 2019a: p. 16–19). For Black women, this labor is negotiated through constantly managing daily racial and gender aggressions (Sue et al., 2008) manifested in biases, stereotypes, negative beliefs, and perceptions held by majority of colleagues that implicitly and explicitly work to posit Black women as inferior in white institutional spaces (Branch, 2011; Evans, 2008; Feagin, 2013). Only through repeated and consistent exposure to unrecognized obligatory labor expended is the invisible labor clause revealed.

This invisible labor manifests in an organizational *inclusion tax* that highlights the economic value of uncompensated work. The inclusion tax is the additional resources “spent,” including time, money, mental, and emotional energies to be allowed in white spaces (Melaku, 2019a: p. 17–18). Melaku specifically articulates how the inclusion tax operates as a recursive and co-constitutive model where emotional, cognitive, relational, and financial labor are expended by marginalized groups within a dynamic feedback loop (Melaku, 2021). This labor is required to be allowed in white spaces and to resist and or adhere to white normative expectations (Melaku, 2021). Through in-depth interviews conducted with Black women lawyers, Melaku contends that they spend considerable energies concerned

about performance, perceived ability, appearance, invisibility, hypervisibility, developing mentor and sponsor relationships, racial and gender aggressions, as well as other important issues that arise due to being one of very few Black women in white institutional spaces (Melaku, 2019a; Opie & Phillips, 2015).

One example of the inclusion tax is how BIPOC women are forced to negotiate their appearances in white spaces that adhere to white normative standards of beauty (Bryant, 2013; Davis, 2003; Kaw, 1993; Melaku, 2019a; St. Jean & Feagin, 1998). As a result of the white racial frame that conceptualizes Black women as inferior, the expectation that they conform to white corporate esthetics to be successful requires an incredible amount of invisible labor. The time spent worrying about appearance, whether to conform to or reject this ideal, takes a significant toll on BIPOC women in organizations. It normalizes whiteness while diminishing other racial groups, thereby imposing an inclusion tax meted out in cognitive, emotional, financial, and relational burdens for BIPOC women. Academic institutions are classic examples of white institutional spaces that perpetuate the forced invisible labor and resulting inclusion tax that disadvantage BIPOC women. The invisible labor clause and inclusion tax concepts provide nuanced insights into the experiences of women of color as they navigate systemic racist practices, policies, and cultures that promote white supremacy.

2.3 | Racism-evasiveness, liberal white supremacy, and emotional segregation in white institutional spaces

Beeman (2015a) conceptualizes racism evasiveness as an action that results from systemic racism, one that is informed by ideologies of denial. Cazenave (2016) has examined racism-evasive and racism-denial practices in what he calls linguistic racial accommodation (LRA), particularly in academia (Cazenave, 2016). He distinguishes these terms from racism-blind, which he argues is “the dominant ideology and practice of not seeing systemic racism in highly racialized societies in which strong sanctions are applied in the denial of its existence, pervasiveness, and consequences” (p. 23). Beeman (2015a) addresses racism-evasiveness as the product or consequence of color-blind ideology rather than racism-blind ideology. The actions of denying racism, avoiding it, being blind, or oblivious to it, she argues, stems from a dominant societal belief in color-blindness as a goal (Beeman, in press). A commonly accepted term to describe these practices and strategies is color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Carr, 1997). Beeman (2015a) argues that this term conflates three separate but related issues—the dominant societal ideology of color-blindness, the system of racism of which it is a part, and the racism-evasive consequence.

Color-blind ideology has its roots in liberal notions of equality and the idea that people should be judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Brown et al., 2003; Carr, 1997). While this ideology may be well-intended, it has the negative consequence of racism-evasiveness. Beeman (2015a) examines the effect of this color-blind ideology on progressive, interracial organizations. She argues that this external racial ideology interacts with organizational cultures pressuring individual activists to engage in racism-evasive language and response, even as they attempt to challenge racist practices in their communities. Through a 3 year ethnography of an interracial social movement labor union and community organization and in-depth interviews with progressive activists, she finds that this racism-evasiveness is used strategically to maintain solidarity. Respondents avoided explicit discussions on racism because they feared such discussions would create divisions and detract from their common goals and immediate projects. These practices placed racism in a secondary position, which ironically could lead to the very divisions organizers feared (Beeman, in press, 2015a). Studies have found similar complications in education, the criminal (in)justice system, and welfare (Alexander, 2012; Crenshaw et al., 2019; Ernst, 2012; Lewis, 2003; Pollock, 2004; Risman & Banerjee, 2013). For example, Pollock's (2004) study of a California high school found that policies requiring students, teachers, and administrators to take a color-blind approach did not lessen divisions, and in some cases, only worsened them.

Beeman (in press) argues color-blind ideology and racism-evasiveness sustain *liberal white supremacy*, which she defines as “a set of behaviors and practices progressive European Americans engage in to assert their moral

superiority" as the most sophisticated anti-racists. Strategic organizational racism-evasiveness, liberal white supremacy, and LRA in academia, can impact the experiences women of color have with racial hostility and harassment in their workplaces (Crenshaw, 1991) as well as the institution's delay or lack of response in addressing these conditions. By not naming racism explicitly, organizations limit their ability to challenge systemic racism embedded in their practices and policies.

Emotional Segregation refers to a "lack of empathy that exists between African Americans and 'whites', which is supported by institutional structures and a history of systemic racism in the United States" (Beeman, 2007: p. 690; Rush, 2006). Beeman (2007) argues that emotional segregation was created by various laws and practices that persistently dehumanized African Americans and placed European Americans into a superior position of dominance and authority. Emotional segregation can manifest in microlevel interactions, where African Americans and other people of color are treated with less empathy and can also be coded within institutional practices and decisions that impact people of color. Progressives fail to treat BIPOC as emotional equals when they objectify BIPOC as "color capital" (Hughes, 2012) or their association with them as evidence that they are not racist (Beeman, in press). Or when they engage in white fragile behaviors, using emotional manipulation to recenter discussions on racism to their feelings and good intentions of trying to be anti-racist. Leaders and colleagues within organizations can perpetuate emotional segregation by acting paternalistically toward people of color, denying or dismissing their experiences with racism and overburdening them with "diversity" work without recognizing or rewarding their contributions.

In these scenarios, people of color are not treated as emotional equals whose time, emotions, experiences, and contributions are equally valued. In fact, people of color must expend additional emotional energy to manage their impressions and suit the comfort levels of their white colleagues (Feagin & McKinney, 2005; Wilkins & Pace, 2014; Wingfield, 2010). This emotional inequality is compounded for women of color, who must simultaneously navigate racialized emotions and sexist perceptions of women as less competent and overly emotional. Thus, the physical spaces of white normed institutions can be emotionally alienating, particularly for women of color as they are forced to expend greater amounts of energy managing their own emotions and that of white colleagues. In addition, women of color are dealing with isolation, racial and sexual harassment, and retaliation—all of which adds to their already exorbitant inclusion tax.

2.4 | Women in academe

Women have always had to contend with being in precarious positions in workplaces of any kind, constantly fighting to gain access to the public sphere and create a foothold strong enough to maintain their positions. Research continues to point to how women faculty face challenges that negatively impact their career trajectories compared to their male counterparts (Gabster et al., 2020). Initial data on journal submissions indicated a decline in female authorship, revealing that women academics were publishing less during COVID-19 (Fazackerley, 2020; Frederickson, 2020; Gabster et al., 2020; Shurchkov, 2020). Many scholars attribute women's diminished research activity to their disproportionate work in caregiving, service roles, and increased emotional labor due to the pandemic (Vincent-Lamarre et al., 2020a, 2020b). Women in all professions have been forced to contend with balancing their work expectations and household responsibilities without previously available systems of support, such as schools, childcare, or house services. These issues amplify existing inequalities that derail women's abilities to do their work and maintain their career trajectories.

Historically, women academics have always faced an uphill battle of gender inequities that remain persistent today (Lapan et al., 2013). Women face significant barriers navigating universities and other academic institutions, which prevent them from accessing resources and opportunities that would lead to their advancement. Women are less likely to be in tenure-track faculty positions, more likely to be overrepresented in junior positions, with less job security (August & Waltman, 2004) and higher wage gaps in comparison to male faculty (NCES, 2018). Numerous studies focusing on gender barriers highlight how women navigate systemic barriers that lead to disparities in terms

of rank, recognition, research funding access, and publication productivity (Holliday et al., 2014); review processes (Witteaman et al., 2019), stereotypes, implicit biases, and microaggressions (King, 2008; Sue et al., 2007, 2008). All these issues hinder women's access to both informal and formal networks, developing mentor and sponsor relationships, and their overall visibility (Bowen, 2012). In addition, research on women faculty who become mothers reveals that they are less likely to attain tenure than their male counterparts who become fathers simultaneously (Bingham & Nix, 2010). Furthermore, women faculty who are married with children take significantly longer to reach the rank of full professor than their male peers who are either married or single (Townsend, 2013).

2.5 | Adding color to the ivory tower

The nuanced experiences of women of color (Essed, 2010; Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012) and particularly Black women faculty (Benjamin, 1997; Green and Mabokela, 2001; Gregory, 1999; Moses, 1989) demonstrate how race and gender are inextricably tied. Race, gender, and other identities overlap, intersect, and combine in multiple and simultaneous ways to produce systemic disadvantageous outcomes (Collins, 1986, 1998, 2000a, 2000b; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Essed, 1991; Segura, 1989). According to the most recent National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar et al., 2020), women of color only make up approximately 11% of all full-time faculty in degree granting post-secondary institutions. While this is alarming, drawing explicit attention to the fact that women of color continue to be significantly underrepresented in academic institutions, we find stark differences in accessing advancement and opportunity by disaggregating the data. For instance, Asian/Pacific Islander women make up 3% and Black women make up 2% of all full-time professors (Hussar et al., 2020). At the same time, Latin/Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and multiracial women make up 1% or less of all full-time professors, respectively (Hussar et al., 2020). These numbers reflect the impact of race and gender on the career trajectories of women of color faculty, particularly the prominence of systemic racism and sexism embedded within institutional practices and policies that continue to disadvantage women of color (Melaku, 2020b).

Previous studies (Lee & Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Vargas, 1999) on women of color point to race and gender stereotyping, which compounded by persistent sexism stifle their opportunities and often lead to outsider feelings and presumptions of incompetence (Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Walkington, 2017). The lack of access to various critical resources within academic institutions, such as mentoring, networking, access to funding, that would bolster women of color's ability to reach the rank of full professor points to the many inequities women of color face. Furthermore, being one of very few people of color in white spaces creates pressure to prove oneself and a sense of exclusion, where their presence is highly visible when mistakes are made and rendered invisible when needing support (Bowen, 2012). For example, women of color struggle from the very beginning, in terms of navigating the academic job market, getting hired, building critical relationships, receiving feedback, coping with racial and gender aggressions, and accessing tenure and promotion (Beeman, 2015b; Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Vö, 2012).

These issues were prevalent for women of color before COVID-19 and have been magnified by the new pressures created by remote work while disproportionately picking up the bulk of home responsibilities, including distance learning and caregiving (Farinde-Wu, 2020; Malish et al., 2020; Roberts, 2020). In addition, racial violence has exacerbated the level of invisible work required on diversity, equity, and inclusion projects that unequally fall on BIPOC (Jones & Williams, 2020). Diversity work is not adequately being recognized or compensated, illustrating the impact of the inclusion tax (Melaku, 2019a, 2019b). This invisible labor and inclusion tax become even more pervasive as statements of racial equity are produced *en masse*, while the experiences of BIPOC do not reflect the idealized notions projected in these declarations (Melaku & Beeman, 2020).

2.6 | The gap

The current COVID-19 pandemic interacts with conditions that have already challenged women of color's ability to gain gender equity in academe. Challenges include the lack of access to professional development, mentorship, and sponsorship relationships; negative perceptions about competence; commitment to the work; limited networking opportunities; navigating appearance and various other pervasive issues. Research has begun to address how women of color faculty fare in recruitment, professional development, and advancement and their daily experiences navigating academe (Gutierrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Lee & Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Vargas, 1999). However, there is an urgent need to thoroughly and sufficiently examine how women of color's social location impact their daily experiences during this time of COVID-19 and racial violence. To better understand how women of color faculty and nonfaculty are faring in predominantly white academic spaces considering this moment of amplified crises, this article seeks to answer the following research question: *How are women of color impacted by COVID-19 and racial violence as they navigate predominately white educational institutions?*

3 | RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The main goal of this study is to unmask how COVID-19 and racial violence have amplified preexisting racial and gender inequities that continue to disadvantage women of color faculty and nonfaculty disproportionately. To do so, we utilize Black feminist thought (Collins, 1986, 2000a) as a methodological practice to share the narratives of women of color and draw connections between their lived experiences to understand the challenges they face in white spaces. As theorized by Patricia H. Collins (1986, 2000a), a Black feminist thought perspective acknowledges the rich, nuanced, and complex work, intellectual contributions, activism, and knowledge production of Black women. By employing Black feminist thought in grounding our qualitative understanding of women of color's experiences in white academe, we challenge the status quo, decenter whiteness, and draw on an intersectional approach that highlights the intricacies of multiple marginalizing identities which develop a distinctive standpoint rooted in their unique positions in society (Collins, 1986, 2000a).

Our historical understanding of the social world and privilege as researchers is deeply entwined in how we make meaning of our findings (Clemons, 2019: p. 6). Given our positionality—women of color researchers conducting research examining women of color's experiences in white academe—our use of Black feminist thought as a methodological practice is a political stance (Clemons, 2019). Moreover, we are deeply committed to being reflective about our position by engaging in qualitative work that aims to center the voices of women of color and bring about social change.

Data was collected using a qualitative online survey conducted via Qualtrics (see Appendix). The survey consisted of several open-ended questions that center women of color's perceptions of their institution's commitment to diversity and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and racial violence. The survey also targeted specific questions about how respondents are directly impacted by COVID-19 and racial violence with respect to emotional and cognitive well-being and the impact on both their personal and professional trajectories. Additionally, there were several questions on demographics, including identifying race, ethnicity, gender, age, occupation, and employment status.

Participants were recruited using three strategies, snowball sampling, contacting membership organizations, and identifying participants through university websites. In terms of snowball sampling, each respondent was asked to refer other potential respondents to participate in the study. The second recruitment strategy employed sending emails to academic organization leaders, including writing groups, affinity groups, and internal university listservs to distribute the study details to members for participation. Utilizing these strategies is necessary to identify and secure underrepresented groups' participation, particularly women of color professionals in white institutional spaces. The final technique used to secure respondents was reviewing university websites and self-identifying potential

TABLE 1 Demographic information of survey respondents ($n = 25$)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	24	96
Non-binary	1	4
Race		
Black	17	68
Asian	2	8
Indigenous	1	4
Mixed-race	2	8
No response	3	12
Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic/Non-Latino	17	68
Hispanic/Latino	3	12
No response	5	20
Age		
21–34	4	16
35–44	9	36
45–54	4	16
55–64	2	8
65+	2	8
No response	4	16
Position		
Faculty	17	68
Non-faculty	7	28
No response	1	4
Employment status		
Full-time	20	80
Part-time	1	4
Emeritus	1	4
No response	3	12

participants as women of color, then sending cold recruitment emails directly to likely respondents requesting their participation.

Data has been collected during May and June 2021 and yielded a total of 25 complete responses ($n = 25$), which build the foundation for this study (see Table 1). The sample comprised of 24 women and one respondent who identified as nonbinary. Twenty respondents were working full-time in academe, one part-time, one emeritus, and three nonresponses. Seventeen respondents who work in academe reported faculty as their primary employment status, and seven indicated that they hold other nonfaculty positions. One person did not respond to this question. The respondents are primarily Black (17), with two identifying as Asian, one indigenous, and two as mixed-race. Three individuals did not respond to this question. Three respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino. Approximately half of the respondents are below the age of 45.

By utilizing Black feminist thought as our methodological practice, we employed open coding, a line-by-line process of analyzing raw data for “embedded phenomena, patterns, concepts, and themes” (Price, 2010: p. 156).

We build our theoretical conceptualizations from the ground up by constantly questioning and reflecting upon the experiences of women of color presented by the data. To analyze our data, we organized individual responses to each question in a spreadsheet. We subsequently read through these responses independently by meticulously identifying common themes on work experiences and emotional responses across study participants. In a next step, we compared the results of our individual analysis to identify common themes found to be most persistent in the data (e.g., exhaustion women of color experienced as related to both the COVID-19 pandemic; increased racial violence; and dissatisfaction with institutional support). Finally, we based our subsequent analysis on those emerging themes and patterns (Price, 2010) to present our findings.

Our data analysis employed a critical race (Crenshaw et al., 1995) framework that centered on an intersectional approach to understanding what types of invisible labor women of color are required to perform during this time and the resulting inclusion tax paid. Academic institutions operate as racialized social structures (Bonilla-Silva, 1997) that are embedded with systemic racist practices. Women of color confront daily racial and gender aggressions, emotional segregation, and racism-evasiveness, or denial that create distinct barriers to their recruitment, professional development, and advancement in the academic workplace.

4 | DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate that COVID-19 and racial violence have continued to exacerbate existing challenges that women of color face navigating academe. We argue that systemic racist practices persist, where women of color are forced to confront daily racial and gender aggressions that negatively impact their career trajectories. While the study produced robust qualitative data, this article focuses on two emerging themes: (1) managing invisible labor and (2) racism-evasive, lukewarm institutional commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The following analysis details invisible work concerning emotions, white Allies, BIPOC perceived as buying into the white racial frame, institutional expectations, feelings of detachment/abandonment, safety, and respondents' perceptions of their institution's commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

4.1 | Invisible labor, emotional segregation, the inclusion tax, and liberal white supremacy

4.1.1 | Managing invisible labor

Emotions: There are levels to the emotional segregation and inequality women of color experience. Many aspects of our lives and who we are, or are allowed to be, are determined by white-dominated institutions that impact women of color's perceptions of themselves and their work. The physical space of predominantly white institutions is not only physically segregating but emotionally segregating, such that our emotional experiences are not equal (Beeman, 2010). This can cause a sense of emotional alienation for women of color as individuals, and a sense of alienation from our institutions, work, and communities (Beeman, 2018). This hinges on the invisible labor exerted by women of color, in the form of emotional work done to be in these spaces, which negatively impacts their psychological well-being. Of the 25 respondents, twenty or 80% expressed increased stress, anxiety, sadness, fear, or other turmoil related to racial violence and the pandemic. Respondents stated that they were "psychologically, emotionally and physically exhausted most of the time" (R6), "sad...and traumatized" (R5), "distracted" and having "trouble sleeping and focusing" (R5).

White Allies: The invisible labor expended and resulting inclusion tax paid by women of color faculty and nonfaculty were visible throughout participants' responses. In connection with emotional inequality and liberal white supremacy (Beeman, in press, 2010), respondents expressed having to expend greater energy in managing their emotions and caring for white Allies. In particular, the racial violence of summer 2020 compounded fears and

anxieties for women of color, who already navigated everyday racism. In addition to managing their own emotional turmoil, they were further exhausted by white Allies who wanted advice on how to help. As Allies used women of color to validate their role as good anti-racists, they also gained recognition from their institutions for their work on diversity, all behaviors associated with liberal white supremacy (Beeman, in press, 2017). A Black Assistant Professor noted her exhaustion in relation to these white Allies stating, "I now wonder how much will I have to perform gratitude for Allies? Like I am glad you care but also I am done validating that care." (R29). A biracial/Black Assistant Professor emphasized how her devastation since the murder of George Floyd was worsened by having to advise Allies who wanted to "invest in equity" (R47).

Additionally, respondents were distressed by the career advancement of white Allies while people of color continued to face systemic racism. A Latina Professor Emeritus stated, "It is depressing to see so many white faculty rise to the top as the experts on diversity when they have done so little to challenge the status quo" (R36). Others noted that they had no more patience for white Allies who were not making real change. They were resentful of white colleagues who "were free of responsibility" while they, as women of color, were "working overtime during the summer" (R28). One respondent, identifying as an Asian full-time Senior Research Associate summed up the problems of white Allies this way: "They are trying now to be 'woke' but really have very little ideas about what it means to be anti-racist." (R3). Moreover, a Black Postdoctoral Fellow added that "Most of these forums are to educate people of European descent" (R4), while another Black Assistant Professor stated, "I think a lot of people are patting themselves on the back and so the real anti-racist work is not getting done" (R6).

These examples highlight the increased level of invisible labor women of color are forced to engage in during this time of racial violence. The emotional, cognitive, and relational labor expended attempting to mitigate the impact of managing colleague emotions and institutional expectations create a stressful work environment that continues to disadvantage women of color in academe. Several respondents exhibited this emotional alienation in feelings of detachment, distrust, defeat, and withdrawal. A Black Assistant Professor asserted, "I have days where I don't want sympathy; an ally; I want to be left alone. I want to not see one more video. I want to not have to cry...I also just need to detach" (R29). Another, a Black Postdoctoral Fellow expressed, "Emotionally I have found myself crying from seeing and hearing continual death and harm inflicted on our Black communities. I have been stressed which results in withdrawing for a bit so that I can regroup...I find myself just wanting to escape from all the Racial Upheaval" (R13).

Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color Adopting Problematic Frames: In addition to mitigating the invisible labor required to manage white Allies during this time of racial upheaval, several respondents acknowledged an added level of work, engaging with other BIPOC who they perceived as buying into the white racial frame, with narratives that negatively impact BIPOC. For example, a Black Assistant Professor discussed how she withdrew from engaging with other Black people, especially individuals who could not understand her intersecting oppressions: "I weirdly... can't even be around other black people that are at odds with my own social expectations. Like I feel newfound tension with black men as a black woman. And I know it isn't either one of our faults, but I have no space for the annoyances of heterosexual-patriarchy" (R29). The need to withdraw from engaging with other BIPOC who one perceives as adding to the trauma and invisible labor exerted upon communities of color creates a tension that is processed through navigating emotional and relational labor, which is exhausting. Furthermore, this Assistant Professor emphasizes that she "cannot accept black conservatives anymore. If your respectability politics entails secondary violence toward communities of color for failing to meet a standard in order to be perceived as a victim, I have no time for you."

Institutional Expectations and the Inclusion Tax: Many women of color underscored their feelings of detachment from their work and sense that their institutions had abandoned them. With the increased institutional expectations placed on BIPOC within organizations, academe was no different. Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color in higher education were called to organize, lead, participate and facilitate workshops, dialogs, forums, and programming that center on race and racism. The added pressure associated with doing work situated within a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens have not historically provided support and access to BIPOC, which was also suggested by multiple respondents. A heightened inclusion tax is experienced during this time of crisis for women of color

in academe. They are pushed to engage in diversity work that is neither recognized nor compensated in ways that afford them access to resources, professional development, and advancement in the workplace. An Asian American Associate Professor shared experiences with racial harassment that linked emotional segregation on a personal and community level and to detachment from her institution:

Racial upheaval only contributes to my everyday stress. It affects my everyday life, my family, and my community. At work, when I faced racial harassment, it was ignored and I had to address it every day, seeking advice and spending months of my time meeting with people to get a simple resolution. Leaders and staff who are supposed to be committed to addressing diversity and violence in my organization responded with disbelief and disrespect...I learned that my organization's leaders and staff were there to protect the institution; not me. Knowing this worsened my stress and anxiety. I experienced increased migraines and illness as a result of the racial upheaval in my own life and the time I was dedicating to assisting others (R1).

A bi-racial/Black Assistant Professor expressed a loss of joy in her work and the cumulative impact of her emotional segregation and alienation as it affected her friends and family, saying: "It has been hard to feel consistently joyful, considering the nonstop negative and racist news. Professionally, I've also been exhausted because I don't get a break from discussing racism. It comes up in conversations with friends and family members...My research and teaching are race-centered, so it is difficult to be hopeful at times or to even be excited to teach, given how much progress needs to be made." (R47). Our findings point to feelings of exhaustion, hopelessness, hypervisibility, and exploitation, which abound among women of color forced to take up work that is neither recognized, compensated, or valued in meaningful ways. This bolsters our argument that systemic racist practices are deeply embedded within the rhetoric and fabric of academic institutions, which continues to silence BIPOC and maintain racial inequality.

4.1.2 | Racism-evasive, lukewarm institutional commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion

Safety: Although many institutions may argue that they strive to be diverse, inclusive, and equitable, most respondents acknowledge that their institutions primarily engage in performative commitments rather than substantive efforts. The level of invisible labor women of color are forced to expend and the kind of emotional segregation they feel is partly a result of their institution's racism-evasiveness through performative allyship. Nearly all respondents (23) indicated that their university's efforts to address issues of "diversity," race, and racism were merely symbolic and did not provide any protections for them. An emerging theme of feeling unsafe consistently appeared in the narratives of respondents. For example, a Black Assistant Professor emphasized safety as a key issue, saying, "The actual change has been very slow...and it's very frustrating. Especially since I am a queer Black woman in a BIPOC hostile, predominantly white state. It often feels unsafe" (R6).

Safety is paramount in creating workplaces that embed equitable policies, practices, and behaviors, which work to limit or prevent harmful work environments. This sense of safety begins at the top of any institution and academe is no exception. Respondents acknowledging their sense of feeling unsafe calls attention to the lack of institutional leadership actions addressing systemic racist practices that undermine their solidarity statements. Another Black Assistant Professor said, "Words such as BLM [Black Lives Matter], anti-racism, white supremacy need to be said and no longer whispered or swept under the rug" (R27). Respondents clearly saw an evasion of racism in university statements on diversity. Yet another Black Assistant Professor, noted: "The commitment feels superficial at times, and there is a noted failure to acknowledge the impact of issues like anti-black racism and white privilege on the trajectory of employees of color. The generic "diversity" emphasis elides deeper reflections on these key issues" (R23).

The Paradox of Institutional Performance and Contradictory Behavior: These respondents indicated that university efforts at addressing racial inequality are racism-evasive in that they do not explicitly address the key issues of race, racism, racial harassment, and/or racial barriers to hiring, tenure, and promotion or name actionable steps to deal with the racial violence the statements were written to respond to in the first place. The performance of commitment to racial injustice only creates further anxiety and feelings of defeat for women of color, who indicate that they have lost faith in their institutions. In this time of racial uproar, the emotional and cognitive labor expended dealing with the public institutional commitments that are not met within the actual practices of the institution is demoralizing and disheartening for women of color. In describing this paradoxical phenomenon, brought on by social media and public impression management campaigns, a Black Assistant Professor states:

Frankly, I have given up hope that my institution and its current leadership can offer anything of substance even at the level of a statement of solidarity with communities that have been targeted/face racism, racial violence, and antisemitism daily—which is a baseline of showing concern for the communities involved. I know the students feel even less supported on these issues (R31).

Finally, a Latina Professor Emeritus highlights the invisible labor faculty of color expend fighting equity issues to no avail, expressing that she had given up on the university, saying:

No changes are made but a lot of faculty of color spend lots of time and energy trying to push for change. The university is very good at having us perform rituals of meetings, writing reports, etc. that are ignored but...tire us and cool us out (R46).

Therefore, these statements, which may be intended to show that the university cares about its faculty of color, ultimately make them feel abandoned, unheard, unprotected, and exploited. Furthermore, the emotional and cognitive labor expended attempting to create an equitable workplace and gain a foothold in academia is exhausting and detrimental to the psychological well-being of women of color and their career trajectories.

5 | DISCUSSION

2020 and 2021 have been tumultuous years with people across the globe facing multiple pandemics. Professionals in various workplaces were forced to contend with the shifting paradigms of remote work dynamics brought on by COVID-19 and an intensified focus on racism resulting from public displays of brutality against Black people in America (Melaku, 2021). These occurrences amplified prevailing challenges and workplace dynamics for marginalized groups. The original inquiry of this article was: How are women of color professionals in academia impacted by this time of crisis as they navigate predominately white educational institutions? Our findings suggest that COVID-19 and racial violence have exacerbated existing inequities that continue to have deleterious effects on women of color's experiences in academe. By grounding our analysis within a critical race framework and intersectional approach driven by a Black feminist thought lens, the qualitative narratives of women of color provide deep insight into their perspectives and lived experiences. The respondents' descriptions point to an increased level of invisible labor exerted in academe, with clear examples of racism evasive behavior, heightened sense of emotional segregation, steeper inclusion tax, and blanket use of liberal white supremacy to maintain the status quo and racial inequality.

In this study, we find several themes that are driven by the distinct and nuanced articulations of women of color's experiences in higher education. First, women of color are forced to engage in significant invisible labor that is neither recognized nor compensated and for which white faculty are credited. They do so to negotiate their presence in predominantly white academic institutions and maintain their positions. Women of color perform "invisible work" navigating entrenched racist practices and white racial frames, whether in person or remote. Maneuvering white

institutional spaces further burdens women of color with emotional, cognitive, and relational work required to resist racial and gender aggressions in their daily interactions.

Respondents in the study are forced to contend with navigating academic institutions, which work to isolate women of color physically and create segregated emotional experiences. The emotional work done during this time coping with amplified feelings of anger, stress, fear, sadness, hopelessness, and anxiety reproduces tangible forms of inequity, such as emotional segregation. Their white counterparts are not forced to mitigate these emotions related to systemic racism that directly targets them. The resources “spent” coping with increased emotional and cognitive labor do not lend itself to providing equitable workplaces where women of color can thrive. The inclusion tax women of color pay to be in white spaces, both resisting and attempting to find ways to manage white norms is exhausting and ultimately leads to perpetuating racial inequality.

Women of color share that they are managing their emotions and those of white Allies. This is a particularly challenging feat, as respondents recognize their positioning and the painful work they are forced to do validating white allyship to the detriment of their emotional and psychological well-being. Racism-evasive practices are toxic and antithetical to anti-racist work that is called for during this time of amplified racial violence. The emotional, cognitive, and relational labor expended by respondents because of institutional expectations as they teach, share, build, create, manage, and design diversity work to the benefit of their institutions and white Allies is arduous. Respondents tackle feelings of detachment/abandonment because of a sense of institutional neglect in terms of managing these added pressures. A far steeper inclusion tax is required during this time to deal with racism-evasiveness and to mitigate liberal white supremacist and white fragile behaviors. Whereas labor was exerted resisting the re-traumatization of white allyship, some respondents found themselves disengaging from BIPOC they perceived as adopting problematic frames that stood against communities of color.

Finally, recognizing and acknowledging the lukewarm institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is a major theme. Women of color hold their institutions accountable to the statements made regarding racial and social justice but acknowledge the reality of empty statements without clear, actionable steps to address pervasive inequality in the institution. For example, respondents consistently believe that institutional responses to diversity, equity, and inclusion are more performative than substantive in nature. Our findings confirm the emotional and cognitive well-being of women of color in academe is challenged by the pressures induced by COVID-19 and racial violence.

5.1 | Limitations, implications, and future research

There were several limitations of this research. First, the sample size is limited in scope. However, given the exploratory nature of this study, the underrepresentation of women of color in academe, and the challenges they face during COVID-19 and racial violence, the study provides unique insights into the experiences of women of color. Second, the reliance on written responses to online open-ended questions may have prevented potential respondents from participating. There were several individuals who clicked through the survey and only responded to closed-ended demographic information toward the end of the survey. They were therefore excluded in the final sample. Given the nature of the survey and subject matter, it seems reasonable to assume that women who opened the survey may have been interested but limited in time and therefore unable to complete it. This could be indicative of the time pressures and emotional exhaustion that women of color are facing during this time of multiple pandemics. Lastly, the survey was also conducted toward the end of the academic year, which traditionally is one of the busiest times.

The implications of this study are far-reaching. The study has important implications for understanding how academic institutions respond to public discourses about racism and the ensuing measures taken to address inequality. Additionally, this research points directly to the paradox professionals face in terms of their academic institutions' public commitments versus the actual practices necessary to tackle racial and gender inequality women of color confront daily. The entrenched nature of systemic racism continues to blind academia from recognizing their

complicity in perpetuating institutionalized racism. A deeper exploration of academic policies to address systemic racism as designed during this time of racial violence could potentially reveal opportunities for change.

Future research should evaluate how universities are responding to these issues, whether or not concrete actions are being taken, and the effectiveness of existing initiatives to ensure the retention of women of color faculty and nonfaculty in academe. Furthermore, future studies may also include in-person interviews to mitigate the time spent writing responses to open-ended survey questions. This approach may potentially provide even richer data to advance the theoretical frameworks presented in this study. Moreover, it would be useful to also explore the nuanced reasons why women of color are limited in time and opportunity to participate in open-ended online surveys.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Research data are not shared.

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APPENDIX

Survey Questions

Experiences of women of color in the workplace

Development/Inclusivity

1. To what extent does the organization demonstrate a commitment to diversity? How do you perceive and interpret the organization's efforts and commitment to diversity?
2. What changes have you noticed in relation to COVID-19 with respect to efforts to address your concerns?
3. What changes have you noticed in relation to Racial Upheaval with respect to efforts to address your concerns?

IMPACT OF COVID-19

4. How has COVID-19 impacted you personally and professionally?

5. Has COVID-19 impacted your emotional and cognitive well-being? If so, how?
6. How has your organization responded to COVID-19? How do you feel about that?
7. Do you believe you engage in more uncompensated and unrecognized work since COVID-19 or less? Please provide examples.

IMPACT OF RACIAL UPHEAVAL

8. How has Racial Upheaval impacted you personally and professionally?
9. How has your organization responded to the killings of Black people and Racial Upheaval? How do you feel about that?
10. Have you experienced stress, emotional, or cognitive since the Racial Upheaval in America? If so, in what ways has this stress manifested?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about how COVID-19 and Racial upheaval has impacted your trajectory in the workplace? And your personal life?

IMPACT OF THE 2020 ELECTION

12. How do you feel about discussing politics in the workplace?
13. How has the 2020 election impacted your experience in the workplace?