

## Chapter 6

# The Perspective of Black Women Watching Crises at a Standstill

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In this chapter, the authors discuss the effects of working from home amid two pandemics. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) struck hard in March 2020, shifting what we know as higher education and magnified racial and income disparities in America. Higher education institutions quickly decided to close their doors to hundreds of thousands of students and send them home to their families across the country. Students, faculty, and administrators alike all scrambled to persevere and complete the Spring 2020 semester. Simultaneously, the untimely and gruesome murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Abury, and Breonna Taylor were watched in real-time and magnified racial tensions and violence in America. The authors use anti-Black womanism to introduce the tale of two professionals who work in higher education. This chapter aims to detail the experience of working in higher education while being Black women professionals during two pandemics. Throughout this chapter, they have the goal to share narratives of being Black women professionals.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Students and higher education professionals experienced unprecedented times in March 2020 with higher institutions closing their doors and shifted instruction online or prematurely ceased the academic term because of the rapid spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19). Faculty and staff quickly changed course to make the teaching and the administration of higher education accessible to students. Just as quickly, economical and racial disparities unveiled a truth that America was unprepared to face. COVID-19 demanded students to adapt quickly to virtual realities. Black professionals were inclined and ultimately expected to continue to provide frontline service to students. Collins (2009) and Nzinga (2020) makes

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the claim that Black women professionals hold the innate ability to “other-mother” Black students and other professionals. While Black women professionals exhausted their energy to serve students while helping with the transition to acclimate to remote-campus life amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the world saw the live recordings of the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor. The Black community faced back-to-back trauma of experiencing the death of Black and Brown people from COVID-19 while watching the murders of two Black men and a Black woman.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the effects of working from home amid COVID-19 and racism in 2020 using the perspectives of two higher education professionals, one administrator and the other faculty member. The authors will use anti-Black womanism, a dual lens of both Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit) and womanism (Garner, 2021), to introduce the tale of two Black women professionals who work in higher education at an HWI. This chapter also will discuss how anti-Black woman racism has played a role in the higher education institution’s efforts to overwork Black women amid the two pandemics, the Coronavirus and racism. Furthermore, the authors will discuss resistance and how it reveals itself at Research I institutions.

### **MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter focuses on the praxis of Black women in higher education amid two pandemics. While racism is alive and well and is a form of oppression that has existed for over 400 years in American history, modern society is witnessing brutal racist events for the first time rather than reading about them in the history books. The threat of Coronavirus has changed what is considered normal; people are no longer able to gather in large groups, hugs are prohibited, wearing a mask is mandatory, and we must maintain social distancing by staying at least 6 feet apart. Collective spaces like in-person study groups or potlucks became extinct. Students and professionals lost their sense of community, as kitchen tables turned into virtual offices and the classrooms. Higher education institutions have now lost their marketability and have demanded Black women to continue to bear the brunt of institutional keeping and preservation. Higher education institutions appealed to students by providing amenities that created a social life for them. Sporting events were canceled, on-campus housing features like residence halls and dining centers cut back on services, which all features that attracted students to enroll at some higher education institutions. As the authors reflect on their experience as professionals in higher education, they adjudge the reality that Black women have sacrificial roles in society. In this chapter, the authors will tell their stories using the theoretical frame of anti-Black womanism. The authors will also share their “how-to’s” of overcoming the institution baggage that comes along with nationwide events.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Black Women in Higher Education**

Black women have a long-standing history of working in higher education. During the colonial era, enslaved Black women worked as administrators and administrative assistants at ivy league institutions (Berry & Gross, 2020; Wilder, 2013). Black women held the responsibility to be the engine of the institution, even before higher education was formalized by physical buildings and spaces to meet

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