



Chapter 24

Re-Complicating Intersectionality Considering Differences in Language and Personality Type When Considering Strategies for African American Women's Career Development


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to use mini case studies as a method to explore how diversity in race and gender can affect the work-lives and career trajectories of African American women, and to suggest individual and organizational strategies to facilitate career growth of individuals whose identities intersect with multiple forms of diversity. This chapter will begin with a discussion of Black feminist thought and then proceed to discussions of research regarding African American women in the American workforce, personality type differences and linguistic diversity, and then proceed to a mini case study-based discussion of how these various forms of difference can dynamically interact to form highly nuanced sets of obstacles for African American women and other protected class categories whose identities intersect with one or more intersectional identities. Finally, the authors conclude with a discussion of coping and resistance strategies to improve the career trajectories of African American women.

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INTRODUCTION

The Human Resource Development literature has seen increasing attention paid to how race and gender affect career trajectories and experiences with leadership (Beckwith et al., 2016; Byrd, 2009, 2014; Hughes, 2014). The discipline also has bodies of literature around how differences in personality types and linguistic diversity affect how employees relate to their organizations (Afshan et al., 2015; Dozier, 2017; Du Bois, 2013; McLaughlin et al., 2012; Turban et al., 2017). As of March 2015, there were only four African American males and one African American female CEOs in Fortune 500 companies. As of 2018, there are 24 women total and only 3 African American CEOs in Fortune 500 companies. All current Fortune 500 African American CEOs are men and the first and last Fortune 500 African American CEO was Ursula Burns, former CEO of Xerox, who stepped down in early 2017. Leadership characteristics that are traditionally deemed admirable are often viewed as undesirable in women, especially women of color and particularly African American women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). These biases position African American women negatively and ultimately affect their social position in the workplace by preventing them from being considered for leadership roles. Similarly, African American women and women of color who are linguistically diverse or who have introverted work styles are at a disadvantage in American workplaces which frequently stigmatize diversity in all of these areas.

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Black Feminist Thought

Feminism is a multilayered intellectual movement and although it was originally conceived to promote equality among women, feminism's true initial purpose was to promote the agenda of white women and failed to include other marginalized groups (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 1986, 1989). The feminist movement has been critiqued for its narrow focus on middle-class, white female issues of equality (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 2002). Historically, women's voting rights and the suffrage movement demonstrations excluded or marginalized African American women who wished to participate in struggles that had the potential to benefit all women. The intellectual tradition of Black Feminist Thought traces its roots to nineteenth-century African American women reformers and activists including Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper, emphasizes the intellectual contributions of women in Anti-Lynching and Civil Rights era protests, and frequently credits the Combahee River Collective as pivotal in articulating the interlocking nature of race, class and gender oppression which drives most contemporary Black Feminist Thought (Taylor, 2017).

Black Feminist Thought acknowledges that African American women have been refused rights as basic humans and were not positioned to enjoy the privileges of white women. African American and Black Women are repeatedly confronted with a system that seeks to disregard their agency and destroy them as both human beings and as women. Although the terms African American women and Black Women are often conflated or used interchangeably, it is important that we recognize the distinction of the African American female experience. African Americans hail from an ancestral lineage of slavery in America. Although African American women are part of the Black population, there are specific nuances and deeply rooted lived experiences and identity in American chattel slavery. African American women were subjugated to and victims of the American slave trade while being maligned for their race

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