

Research proposal on coping strategies used by african american women to deal wit...

[Business](#), [Strategy](#)



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Racism has been dismissed as a vice of the past by many leaders; indeed some of them argue that the end of apartheid in South Africa marked the end of racism in this era of civilization. However, to any one who lives in a racially diverse community such as America, racism is not yet a vice of the past- it is still existent. It may not be well pronounced like was seen in South Africa or even during the Jewish Holocaust but it is still existent in our various social structures. In America, racial connotations such as the words ' nigger' and ' red Indian' are still being used even in some of the mass media. Of particular interest is the minority black group which is normally considered as inferior due to their skin color and perhaps their roots; there is a general perception that Africa is an inferior continent and hence the African Americans are considered as inferior owing to the fact that their fore-fathers came from Africa, as slaves.

African American males often experience racism when they are misjudged as criminals or even drug addicts just because there are members of their race who involve in the vice. The issue is however complicated when it comes to African American women who are not only exposed to stereotyping based on their race but also based on their sex- sexism. Sexism is in a way similar to racism in that in both vices a person is judged based on aspects of who they are that they have no control over; sexism however is stereotyping based on a person's sex. In this vice a person presumes that they are superior or even inferior to another based on their sex.

African American women are exposed to racism and sexism in different aspects of their lives, some of which include in their work lives, social lives and even family lives. This may interfere with their lives, for example at work, or as many have learnt to do- it may just be another ignored problem in their life. However there is not a single strategy that can be identified as being used by these women as each one of them has a different way of dealing with sexism and racism they receive due to the fact that they are African American in their race.

Racism and sexism are widely practiced vices though there are numerous efforts to reduce their existence. One of the reasons these vices have become so hard to eliminate is because they are deeply rooted in people's cultures and also in their attitudes. However some of those who these vices are directed to, such as black women, have learned to cope with them as a part of day to day life (Shaw, 1998, p. 16). It is hence important to identify these strategies not only to understand them but also to help enlighten other women on how they can deal with sexism and racism instead of succumbing to it.

The research is aimed at identifying the coping strategies used by African American women to deal with sexism and racism in various aspects of their lives. The research will also seek to establish why these women have chosen the coping strategies that will be identified above.

The research will also aim at establishing whether there exist a single strategy that can be applied uniformly among African American women so as to cope with racism and sexism.

Using the above objectives, the research will seek to answer the following questions:

- What are some of the coping strategies used by African American women to deal with racism?
- What are some of the coping strategies used by African American women to deal with sexism?
- Is there an acceptable strategy that can be applied by African American women to deal with racism and sexism?
- What are the reasons behind the choice of a coping strategy to deal with racism and sexism for African American women?

With this in mind, the proposed hypothesis is:

- African American women are forced to work hard and to look tougher so as to cope with sex based discrimination they experience.
- African American women are use spirituality as one of the strategies of coping with racism towards them.

This research is necessary so as to show some of the agonies African American women go through in trying to cope with racism and sexism. The research is also necessary as it will sensitize people more on the thorny issue of racism and sexism towards African American women.

The research findings may be used to teach African American women on strategies they can use to cope with racism and sexism directed towards them. The findings can also be used to provide an analysis of how African American women respond and cope with sexism and racism towards them.

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Definition of Terms

- Sexism: discrimination of a person based on their sex.
- Racism: perception that differences in race are also responsible for superiority or inferiority of a person.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have identified that indeed there exists racism and sexism stereotyping instigated against African American women. According to Kumea (2006), black women have come up with several coping strategies to deal with racism and sexism. This research identified three categories of coping strategies which include: role flexing, internal strategies, and external strategies. The internal strategies are based on the women trying deal with racism and sexism intrinsically through their religious beliefs, drawing strength from past African American women icons, and also valuing themselves. The external strategies included the women relying on social support from those around them and specifically those who they perceive as close to them. Role flexing as a coping strategy is rather intricate process as it involves African American women changing their roles based on who they

are with and where they are. This coping strategy also involves the women fighting back when they feel that they are being misjudged based on their race or sex. Also, the strategy was identified to involve African American women avoiding particular people based on the fact that they feel these people judge them based on their race or sex (Terhune, 2008, p. 548).

Everett (2011) notes that one of the areas where African American women feel obligated to come with coping strategies to deal with racism and sexism is in the work place. This research identified that most women feel that it's like they do double work at the work place; as they have to do what their job description states and also to always be alert to people who might want to discriminate them based on their race or sex. This research however identified an important aspect of research on coping strategies by African American women, most of the research on this topic is generalized and there is little on specific aspects of the women's lives such as coping strategies at the work place. Everett also pointed out that some of the coping strategies come about subconsciously as racism and sexism influences some aspects of African American women's lives such as the benefits they receive at the work place.

Though it might be discounted, racism has become rooted in American life-permanent. Cook (2011, p. 18), identifies the existence of micro-aggressions as an aspect of racism in the country. Micro-aggressions involve subtle insults and which sometimes are made subconsciously. Cook points out that 90% of African American women have been subjected to discrimination ant one point of their lives. Out of the 90%, 10% still remember being referred to as '

niggers' while 69% can recall being discriminated based on their gender. This data shows that yes indeed racism and sexism towards black women does exist. The study by Cook seems to support the findings made by Kumea discussed previously in this literature review. Cook notes that meetings made NASPA on racism and sexism stereotyping against black women seem to provide a good avenue for many of these women to cope with racism and sexism. This can further be proved by the fact that these meeting always grow in numbers each time they are organized (Cook, 2011, p 18). This data shows that though many African American women may seem tough when it pertains to dealing with racism and sexism stereotyping they face, they still find strength in the masses. This is perhaps based on the psychological security of knowing that someone else is undergoing the same problem they are subjected to.

Charise and Kumea (2003, p 78) point out that one of the coping strategies used by African American women to deal with sexism and racism is role flexing. The authors however note that this strategy is not advisable as role changing is always a hard task and makes one not enjoy their lives to the fullest. Cook (2011, p 18), seems to support this finding as she compares constant role changing to shifting gears manually in a car- it is tiresome. It is however interesting to note that some women still use this strategy despite the negative implications it may have in their lives (Greer, 2011, p. 47). Some of the negative implications include a woman always being alert to make sure that they always fit the role stipulated by their environment. The fact that this coping strategy is still in use shows that some of the strategies

used by African American women are not always favorable to them and they are at times only driven by circumstances to choose a coping strategy (Garland, Spalek & Neil, 2006, p. 430). This is an important aspect of the topic that can be further explained by more research on the area. This would help identify the implications of African American women being forced to adapt to particular coping strategies to deal with racism and sexism.

Everett (2011) was able to show in their study on coping strategy that racism and sexism are indeed stressors for women in various aspects of their lives. This study which was specifically focused on the existence of the two vices at the work place noted racism and sexism was evident in African American women's lives when it came to them getting job promotions, relating with mentors and workers, during exclusion, and also during shifting from one place to another. It is however interesting to note that this study identified the instances given above that women are subjected to racism and sexism as merely factors that cannot be avoided- they are an ongoing element of the environment which the women are. The perspective introduced by the study discussed above is new and is perhaps also a good subject for research as there is need to establish whether racism and sexism experienced by black women are simply elements of the environment. This would help in establishing whether the coping strategies used by the women are similar to strategies formulated by businesses to cope with their environment (Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2008, p. 210).

One of the leading strategies identified by most researches is that of African American women turning to spirituality as a way of dealing with sexism and

racism (Dawn & Obiri, 2011, p 454). Spirituality in this case involves the women in question going to church, praying, participating in church activities, and also sharing with other black women on issues related to sexism and racism. There has been speculation that spirituality offers African American women a chance to share their troubles with a supreme being, God (Meyer, 2003, p. 689). The idea here is that these women find solace in knowing someone stronger than other races that perceive themselves stronger is taking care of them.

Another thing that was noted by Cook (2011, p. 19), is that due to their difference in physique from other races, most of the black women tend to be quite smaller and look younger than their counterparts. This means that African American women in leadership positions tend to be confused for other members of the organization which they lead (Murray, McLean & Haygood, 2010, p. 73). Cook gives examples of an African American woman who has been mistaken for a student while in actual sense she is a lecturer at a university, she even has a doctorate. It is a pity that all these achievements cannot be seen by merely looking at a person and hence these women are forced to work even harder as they try to prove their place in society. This coping strategy then results in these women losing out on their social lives as they lay much emphasis on their academics and profession (Camp, Barden & Sloan, 2010, p. 228).

The coping strategy discussed above brings about an important issue in African American women dealing with sexism and racism, the issue of creating a balance between their professional and social life. This means that

as much as these women may seem to cope with sexism and racism, they may be creating a bigger problem in their life- the lack of a social life.

Katie, Mark and Katherine (2010, p. 1477), sexism and racism and the related coping strategies are also known to implicate negatively on their health. In their research, it was noted that the two general categories of coping, disclosure and acceptance, both have negative implications to a person's health. Acceptance was noted to result in higher blood pressure and interesting to note is that the resulting increase in blood pressure was more in black women than black men (1477). This study also showed that people who had undergone some form of discrimination were at a higher risk of suffering psychiatric disorders as compared to other people. This shows that despite the coping strategy that an African American woman may use, they are still at risk of suffering health wise though with their coping strategy they may seem to cushion themselves from suffering emotionally (Greene & Diaz, 1994, p. 369).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants: This research will have a sample size of 500 black women from different states and also from different social levels. Stratified sampling will be used to ensure that characteristics of the population of black women in the country are still present in the sample. This will help in reducing disparities between sample results and what would be found in the population. Among the characteristics that will be considered will be employment and geographical location of the women in the sample.

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Exclusion Criteria

Psychological: Women with psychiatric disorders will not be involved in the study to avoid getting unreliable information. Also women who are seen to possess a deep rooted hatred against other cultures will be avoided as these will definitely overstate the racism experienced so as to appear as the victims.

Measures

Since the research will use a qualitative approach the data will be first measured through grouping it to identify trends in the data collected. The results from participants will first be grouped according to the research questions so as to ensure that throughout the research process, focus of the objectives is not lost.

Data Collection

The research instruments to be used in this research will be questionnaires, observation checklists and interviews. However a greater emphasis will be on questionnaires and interviews with the observation checklists being limited to analyze the actual feelings of African American women towards racism and sexism towards them.

Data Analysis

Data collected will be first organized at the field using note cards owing to the fact that data expected from this research will be voluminous and hence may be overwhelming. This step in data analysis will also help to ensure that field notes are edited before the actual analysis begins. The second step in

data analysis for the research will involve creation of categories so as to note trends in the data collected. An important process in this analysis will involve establishing of relationships between different data categories. The third step in data analysis will involve coding of the data for easier retrieval. The data will then be analyzed and finally the report shall be written based on all these data.

Limitations

Owing to the fact that the research shall draw its data from interviewing people, there is a possibility that some of the participants may overstate or understate their coping strategies either to appear victimized or superior to other races. This may result in unreliable data from the research. The researcher however acknowledges this limitation and hence will seek to ensure that the interviews remain as unemotional as possible. Another limitation is the existence of the Hawthorne effect. This is where there is possibilities that some of the participants involved in the research may only give coping strategies that they do not use just because they know they are participants in a research.

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