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**Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, I present theoretical and empirical context from the literature on faculty diversity, particularly with respect to race and gender. First, I present the theoretical framework informing this dissertation, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and outline two tenets which are central to this study, interest convergence and intersectionality. Second, I review the current state of racial and gender diversity in university faculty along with trends in faculty diversity over time. Third, I discuss how racial and gender diversity within faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure is influenced by both overarching and context-specific factors, including economic uncertainty, partisan control, and the recent coronavirus pandemic. Fourth, I outline gaps in CRT and faculty diversity literature and describe the theoretical and empirical contributions of this dissertation. Finally, I present a set of research questions and hypotheses which guide this study’s analyses.

*Theoretical Framework*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in the 1970s as a movement in critical legal studies aimed at challenging race-neutral understandings of the U.S. legal system. This framework expanded upon conventional civil rights and ethnic studies scholarship by placing discourses of race and racism within a broader perspective that includes sociopolitical, historical, economic, and psychological factors. There are numerous key tenets of CRT, as outlined by Delgado and Stefanic (2023) in their book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction (Fourth Edition):*

1. Racism, rather than being an aberration, is pervasive, permanent, and normalized in U.S. policy and culture. The ubiquitous nature of racism makes it more difficult to address, especially for more covert expressions of racism such as microaggressions or racial profiling.
2. The social construction thesis holds that race and racism are not rooted in an objective, inherent, or biological reality. Rather, races are social categories that society “invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (2023:9).
3. Racism affords numerous material and psychological benefits for the dominant group, leaving little incentive for them to challenge the existing racial hierarchy. This tenet is often referred to as interest convergence or material determinism.
4. Differential racialization refers to the ways in which the dominant group racializes different groups in response to shifting needs and circumstances at a particular time, such as the labor market or geopolitical climate. Different minority racial groups experience unique forms of racism which may change over time due to political, economic, or social factors.
5. Beyond race, an individual’s identity and experiences are also shaped by a myriad of other social dimensions such as gender, age, religion, nationality, and sexuality. This tenet is known as intersectionality and challenges the assumption that racial groups are monolithic.
6. Finally, CRT emphasizes the importance of counter-storytelling. In opposition to the majority narratives that dominate social life, counter-stories amplify the unique voices, perspectives, and experiences of racial minority groups.

Although its origins lie in legal scholarship, CRT has been applied and further developed within the fields of sociology and education as well (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995). Sociologists of education have utilized Critical Race theory and methodology to examine a broad range of issues such as affirmative action and race-sensitive post-secondary admissions, curricular tracking, residential and school segregation, and the school-to-prison pipeline, among other phenomena (Dutil 2020; Parker 1998; Solorzano and Ornelas 2004). Two core tenets of Critical Race Theory which are often employed in sociology of education scholarship are interest convergence and intersectionality. Together, both constructs highlight how systems of domination and subordination shape diversity in higher education, specifically in terms of race and gender.

Interest Convergence

The principle of interest convergence was coined by Derrick Bell (1980) in his analyses of the landmark Supreme Court case Brown v. Board of Education (1954). This case ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, overturning the “separate but equal” clause established in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). Bell argued that this decision was not solely motivated by a governmental commitment to furthering racial justice. Rather, whites in policymaking positions recognized the economic and political value of ending segregation – primarily to gain power and legitimacy on the global stage amid the Cold War era. From this, Bell developed the concept of interest convergence to describe the tendency that “the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites” (Bell 1980:523). In other words, white individuals and institutions will only support efforts towards racial equity when these efforts stand to benefit white society as well.

Within the study of higher education, the interest convergence principle has primarily been used to examine affirmative action and race-sensitive admissions as well as the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and institutional responses to campus racial incidents (Davis and Harris 2016; Nishi 2020; Tichavakunda 2021). Baber (2015) conducted interviews with program administrators of STEM diversity initiatives at 10 research-intensive institutions listed among the top 40 public universities by the U.S. World and News Report. Participants noted increasing the enrollment and retention of underrepresented minorities as the primary goal of their program, focusing their efforts mainly on meeting specific recruitment targets based on historical trends and comparison with peer institutions. However, some program administrators expressed frustration with stalling progress and the lack of a plan for creating an inclusive campus environment. One program director shared that “the numbers have been roughly 2 or 3% [increase] each for African Americans and Latinos [over] 30 years, with all the money thrown in. Nothing has really changed. You can’t change it until you build the community” (2015:261). This study’s findings highlight that STEM diversity initiatives can oftentimes prioritize recruitment goals aligned with institutional competitiveness and reputation rather than fostering genuine inclusion through structural change, suggesting that progress is contingent on aligning the interests of underrepresented students with the broader institutional agenda.

Scholars have used the interest convergence principle to draw attention to the “window dressing” of post-secondary diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts (Bhopal and Pitkin 2020; Masutha, Naidoo, and Enders 2023; McKinley Jones Brayboy 2003), highlighting that institutions often utilize diversity-focused initiatives, programs, and policies as a public relations measure without committing to tangible, substantive institutional change. Lewis and Shah (2021) applied the interest convergence principle in their qualitative study exploring how Black students make meaning of the implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives at their predominantly-white institution. Many of the respondents viewed their institution’s diversity initiatives as falling flat, relying on surface-level diversity efforts and neglecting to focus on inclusion and access. Further, respondents noted that these diversity initiatives were only put into place by the institution after immense pressure from the Black student body. One respondent stated that “if the pressure’s not put on them, they’re not gonna do it” (2021:195). In line with the interest convergence principle, these findings suggest that post-secondary institutions may often adopt diversity initiatives in response to external pressure rather than a genuine commitment to equity, using such efforts more as a means of public appeasement than as a path to meaningful institutional transformation.

The interest convergence principle doesn’t only apply to the numerical diversity of students and faculty or equitable institutional policies and procedures, but also to more symbolic forms of inclusion and representation of racial and gender minorities. Castagno and Lee (2007) applied the principle of interest convergence in their case study of a predominantly-white Midwestern university’s policies towards the use of native mascots. After rising concerns from Indigenous students about the co-option of native imagery in college athletics, the university adopted a policy in which they would refuse to schedule games against teams using native mascots *unless the team is a traditional rival or a conference member*. The interests of the university and its Indigenous students converged and led to the adoption of this policy discouraging the use of native imagery. Their interests diverge, however, at the point where this policy could threaten the university’s operational status quo, athletic conference standing, or revenue from ticket sales. Although the university addressed its students’ concerns and acknowledged the harm that using native mascots can do to Indigenous communities, the university’s concession came with stipulations that ultimately protected the reputation and revenue of the institution itself.

Critiques of Derrick Bell's interest convergence theory highlight several key limitations. First, Driver (2011) argues that Bell's conceptualization of "Black interests" and "White interests" is overly broad, failing to account for significant intraracial disagreements on what constitutes genuine progress toward racial equity. Using the case of segregation in the Civil Rights era, Driver illustrated how many Black business owners benefitted from being the only establishments to serve Black clientele and thus were against ending segregationist policies. According to Driver, the interest convergence principle would be better applied using a broader view of “Black interests” and “White interests,” allowing for the possibility of a wide array of ideological viewpoints within a given racial group. Second, the interest convergence principle has been criticized for obscuring the agency of Black and White actors in the struggle for racial equity. The theory relies too heavily on “fortune and happenstance” (Driver 2011:176) and treats Black Americans as passively awaiting moments of sociopolitical opportunity, without acknowledging the many Black activists and cultural leaders that have played a pivotal role in achieving racial justice in the United States. Similarly, it minimizes the role of White Americans in either actively upholding or challenging the existing racial hierarchy.

Third, the interest convergence principle is severely limited by its assumption that the interests of Black and White Americans are primarily divergent and may only converge momentarily and opportunistically. Johnson (2024) introduces the concept of “perpetually convergent interests” (2024:1352), which are white interests that are so deeply interconnected with racial equality that they remain consistently aligned with corresponding Black interests and will never diverge. Two examples given to demonstrate this concept are spiritual and democratic interests. Spiritual interests refer to the spiritual, emotional, and psychological harm to White Americans from engaging in a white supremacist social structure. Democratic interests refer to the aim of cultivating a robust and equitable democracy. Both Black and White Americans may consistently align on these values, challenging the assumption that Black and White interests are inherently at odds and highlighting the potential for sustained alignment in the pursuit of racial justice.

While the interest convergence principle has been applied in studies of institutional diversity and inclusion policies, programs, and initiatives with regard to enrolled students, it has not yet been used to examine the racial and gender diversity of faculty. It is possible that patterns in the hiring and retention of racial and gender minority faculty will mirror that of the student body. However, it is also possible that faculty face unique challenges due to their positioning within the institution. The two groups may have differing interests, and thus differing conditions for their interests to converge with that of the institution. Further, the role of contextual factors in mediating the convergence and divergence of interests is left unclear. Are the interests of racial groups consistent across time, place, and circumstance, or are they variable in response to social, political, and economic context? As Driver highlighted, Bell’s original theorization of interest convergence treated “Black interests” and “White interests” as monolithic and immutable. More research is necessary to better understand the variability of the interests of racial groups, both with regard to intraracial differences as well as macro-level contextual factors.

Intersectionality

The principle of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), emphasizes the interconnectedness of social categories such as race, gender, age, sexuality, and socioeconomic status. It argues that individuals experience multiple layers of privilege and oppression simultaneously, and these intersections shape their experiences and identities. At its core, the principle of intersectionality recognizes that a person's identity is multifaceted, and different forms of oppression or privilege can't be understood independently. Instead, they intersect to create complex, and sometimes contradictory, experiences.

Crenshaw coined the concept in her study of court cases involving discrimination against Black women in hiring and promotion (1989). Her analysis demonstrated how the courts dismissed the grievances of Black women by mounting counterexamples of Black men to negate claims of racism, and of white women to negate claims of sexism. For example, in DeGraffenreid v General Motors (1976), the court dismissed allegations of sexist and racist discrimination in the company’s hiring, promotion, and layoff practices on the basis that the company had historically hired both white women and Black men. In these cases, the courts overlooked the possibility that Black women experience unique challenges in the workplace due to the overlapping and compounding effects of both racism and sexism. This study highlights the importance of considering the impact of multiple intersecting systems of oppression rather than relying on single-axis frameworks.

Although intersectionality is most often applied within a critical race lens, the framework expands far beyond analyses of variance within and between racial groups. The intersectional approach considers the complex interrelations of categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, nationality, ability status, ethnicity, and age, among many others. In her book *Intersectionality* (2020), Patricia Hill Collins illustrates how intersectional analyses can assume many different forms to accommodate a wide range of social problems. Intersectionality can be deployed as an analytic tool to understand intersecting power relations across a range of domains including queer liberation movements, global economic inequality, and indigenous land rights. For example, Collins demonstrated how studying the FIFA World Cup through an intersectional lens highlights the complex interplay of wealth, citizenship, race, gender, and ability which shapes patterns of opportunity and disadvantage within the sports industry.

Within the context of higher education, intersectionality has primarily been used to study outcomes and experiences of undergraduate and graduate students. For example, Morales (2014) wielded the intersectional lens in her interview study of Black university students’ experiences with microaggressions on campus, finding distinct differences depending on gender and perceived socioeconomic status. However, several scholars have applied the principle of intersectionality to examine disparities in faculty hiring and tenure promotion processes, professional expectations, and the efficacy of initiatives promoting faculty diversity. Research shows that women of color in academia face multiple challenges in the field including high teaching and service loads, ambiguous standards for tenure promotion, and a lack of culturally responsive mentorship (Corneille et al. 2019). Women faculty of color also face increased scrutiny from their colleagues and administrators. In qualitative studies of women faculty of color’s experiences with microaggressions in the workplace, respondents reported having had their professional qualifications and quality of work questioned as well as being presumed incompetent by students, colleagues, and administrators (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Young and Anderson 2021).

Further, interventions aimed at promoting diversity in faculty hiring and retention often neglect to account for intersectional factors. In practice, these initiatives tend to primarily benefit white women over men and women of color. Hunt and colleagues (2012) analyzed the language of program announcements for the National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE diversity initiative, finding that the program privileges the racially unmarked location of White women. The program announcements list numerous specific interventions which institutions and academia at large can implement to foster the equity and inclusion of women generally, while only passively and vaguely discussing women from underrepresented groups such as women of color or disabled women. One quantitative analysis of the impact of NSF’s ADVANCE initiative on faculty racial and gender diversity revealed a modest improvement in women’s representation in academia between 2000 and 2020 (Mcquillan and Hernandez 2021). The magnitude of increasing representation, however, differs by race. White women experienced the largest gains in representation, while the proportion of women faculty of color remained well below their share of the workforce. By placing gender equality as a focal concern without also attending to racial, socioeconomic, and other structural barriers facing underrepresented women in the academy, the ADVANCE program has primarily favored the outcomes of upper-middle class White women.

Blake (2022) applied the principle of intersectionality in their qualitative study of nine academic couples undergoing the dual career hiring process at Association of American Universities (AAU) institutions. All couples interviewed were heterosexual and both partners were racially minoritized, shedding light on how gendered dynamics occur within racial groups. Findings revealed that most women interviewed made career sacrifices in accepting dual career offers with their partner, while none of the couples accepted offers that disadvantaged men’s careers with respect to fit or tenure status. For example, one couple’s move required the woman to accept a position at an institution that did not align with her career interests (a research university rather than her preferred liberal arts university), leaving her institution which was more progressive and inclusive of women and people of color for an institution described as “very conservative” and “very White” (2022:125). In addition to this, she was placed in a department in a different field than the one she was trained in due to the institution not having a department in her area of expertise. These observations illustrate the gendered and racialized concessions that women of color in academic couples may be expected to make.

Women faculty of color also face a lack of clarity on tenure and promotion pathways and requirements. Kulp et al. (2022) analyzed data from the 2013 to 2018 iterations of the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) *Survey of Faculty Satisfaction* to assess the perception of promotion clarity among tenure-track associate professors. In their analyses, they considered three separate stages of associate professorship: early stages (1-5 years as an associate professor), middle stages (6-10 years), and late stages (11-20 years). Their findings revealed that women had less promotion clarity than men throughout each stage, especially for women of color in the middle stages of the associate career. Similarly, Domingo and colleagues’ (2022) mixed methods study of STEM faculty, deans, and members of the university tenure and promotion committee found that women faculty of color face unclear promotion requirements within their departments along with a devaluation of the service work that is inequitably distributed to them. For example, in response to the survey question “How would you rate the Retention, Tenure and Promotion (RTP) criteria established by your department in terms of providing guidance for successful tenure and promotion?”, women of color were more likely to rate their departments as “poor or terrible” (approximately 67% of WOC) compared to White women (approximately 25% of white women).

Social science scholars have raised some concerns with the intersectional framework. In her article *Re-thinking Intersectionality,* Nash (2008) identified four main paradoxes within intersectional literature. First, the concept of “intersectional” is often vaguely defined and leaves unanswered the question of *who* is intersectional. Because of the theory’s focus on Black women’s experiences, it remains unclear whether *all identities* are considered intersectional or only those that are multiply marginalized. For example, would a white woman or black man be considered to have an intersectional identity within this theoretical framework? Both subjects experience intersecting racial and gendered dimensions of identity, yet neither is multiply marginalized by this intersection. Scholars continue to debate this issue (Ferguson 1998; Runyan 2018; Zack 2005). Second, intersectional scholarship overwhelmingly centers the intersection of race and gender, paying little attention to other factors of one's identity such as socioeconomic status, sexuality, nationality, disability status, etc. In using Black women as “prototypes” to juxtapose against the experiences of Black men and white women, there is a lack of concern for the ways in which Black women’s experiences of oppression can differ based on their social class, level of education, and ethnicity along with many other axes of identity.

Further, there is little attention paid to the ways in which the intersecting forces of racism and sexism are shaped by historical context, positioning Black women’s experience of race and gender as “trans-historical constants” (Nash 2008:7) that affect *all* Black women similarly throughout history. Admittedly, this dissertation is limited by the nature of IPEDS data and will only be able to account for the intersection of race and gender. Fourth, scholarship on intersectionality lacks a defined intersectional methodology, highlighting the empirical difficulty of systematically examining a complex myriad of intersecting dimensions of identity simultaneously. The experiences of multiply marginalized people cannot be adequately understood using a purely additive approach (race + gender = racially gendered identity), posing a methodological conundrum for quantitative studies of intersectionality (Hancock 2007). Further, modeling can become cumbersome and unwieldy when including increasing numbers of variables to account for the many relevant axes of identity beyond race and gender that shape people’s experiences and social positionings.

Research applying intersectionality within higher education predominantly utilizes qualitative methods, using interviews and focus groups, storytelling, and content analysis. There is a need for more quantitative analyses of women of color in academia that employs intersectionality as a theoretical framework, in order to understand factors such as nationwide hiring and retention rates, tenure promotion patterns, and gaps in salary and grant funding. Both perspectives are necessary to cultivate a deeper, more holistic understanding of the gendered and racialized dynamics experienced by women faculty of color.

*Diversity in the U.S. Professoriate*

The importance of faculty diversity extends beyond numerical representation, as research demonstrates its significant impact on key student outcomes such as retention, graduation rates, and academic achievement. For example, Stout (2018) examined the relationship between faculty diversity and graduation rates of racially minoritized students using IPEDS data. Their analyses included data on 15,917 faculty and 234,224 students from 64 public post-secondary institutions across the United States. Findings revealed that higher racial/ethnic variance among faculty is associated with higher graduation rates for all nonwhite racial/ethnic groups. Student graduation rates were most strongly correlated with the percentage of same-race/ethnicity faculty at their institution. Numerous studies have found similar results, showing that increased faculty racial diversity and same-race professors are associated with improved graduation rates (Bowman and Denson 2022), transfer and drop-out rates (Cross and Carman 2022), and average GPA (Llamas, Nguyen, and Tran 2021). These findings underscore the importance of faculty diversity for student success and sense of belonging.

Much of the literature on trends in post-secondary faculty diversity have been analyses of specific fields, particularly medical and clinical fields such as radiology, oncology, and family medicine (Ali et al. 2023; Kamran et al. 2022; Omoruyi et al. 2022; Xierali et al. 2017; Zhang et al. 2021). However, one study stands out as examining cumulative national faculty diversity trends over time and serves as a model for this dissertation. Kim et al. (2021) used data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to evaluate the diversity of newly hired faculty between 1999 and 2015. Analyses included a sample of 1,170 public and private not-for-profit institutions that offer baccalaureate and higher degrees in the United States which hired new faculty at least twice within the observed timeframe. The study centered eight key racial and gender groups: White women, White men, Black women, Black men, Asian women, Asian men, Hispanic women, and Hispanic men. The researchers plotted faculty hiring patterns by race and gender across three time periods (before, during, and after the Great Recession) and three Carnegie classification groups: “very high research activity” doctorate (R1), “high research activity” doctorate and master’s (R2/MA), and baccalaureate (BA). Several controls were accounted for including institutional revenues, total tenure-track hires, and total tenure-line faculty.

Findings revealed an overall decline in tenure-track hires which disproportionately affected Black, Hispanic, and Asian American scholars. Between 1999 and 2007, hiring of Black, Hispanic, and Asian men and women in public institutions had been rising. The number of newly hired Asian women faculty nearly doubled between these years (97.8% increase). Following Asian women, the largest hiring gains were observed by Asian men (46.2%), Hispanic men (32.1%), and Black women (29.5%). Hiring of White women remained fairly constant (4.0% increase) and hires of White men were declining (8.5% decrease). During the recession, all six minority groups saw the biggest proportional declines in hiring in R1 schools while White women and men saw the biggest gains. This trend was much more prominent in public institutions than private not-for-profit institutions. The steepest hiring losses in public institutions during the Great Recession were experienced by Black women (45.6% decline) and Black men (43.0% decline), notably larger than the losses observed for White men and women (31.5% and 31.9%, respectively). Between 2009 and 2015, only three groups were able to recover their positions in faculty hiring: Hispanic men (returned to pre-recession levels), Hispanic women (exceeded pre-recession levels by 13.5%), and Asian women (exceeded pre-recession levels by 5.1%).

R2/MA schools saw the largest numerical declines in the hiring of women and people of color after 2007 and experienced the slowest recoveries. After controlling for institutional revenue, total hires, and faculty size, the greatest proportional declines in diversity of newly hired faculty were in R1 institutions, followed by R2/MA institutions. To explain this, the authors concluded that institutions facing financial pressures may prioritize cost-cutting measures that negatively affect the recruitment of women and racial minority faculty. These findings highlight how budgeting constraints due to broader economic uncertainty can contribute to the underrepresentation of faculty of color, regardless of whether the university seeks to have a more diverse faculty. This study is limited in that the analysis accounts only for meso-level institutional factors including revenue and faculty size, leaving out data on macro-level contextual factors such as economic conditions or political influences which may also affect diversity in faculty hiring. As such, their conclusions on the cause of disproportionate declines in hiring are more speculative than inferential. Although Kim et al. provide a compelling look into the overarching trends of racial and gender diversity in faculty hiring across time, we still do not understand if or how larger social, political, and economic factors contribute to shaping faculty diversity. This dissertation will extend the work of Kim and Stout to provide a comprehensive analysis of faculty diversity over time, and the impact of macro-level political and economic factors on faculty diversity.

*Factors Shaping Faculty Diversity*

The condition of racial and gender diversity within faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure is complex and influenced by both overarching and context-specific factors. Broadly, patterns of inequity persist across academic institutions, where women and racial minorities face barriers to career advancement. However, this dynamic is further complicated by factors such as economic uncertainty, state partisan control, and the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which have distinct impacts on faculty diversity.

Racial and Gender Diversity in Faculty Hiring, Promotion, and Tenure

Race and gender strongly influence the experiences of faculty in hiring, promotion, and tenure processes. Among those institutions, administrators, faculty, and students who support the promotion of diversity in academia, this support often remains abstract and does not translate into tangibly improved outcomes for women and racial minorities in the academic job market. Carey et al. (2020) investigated this discrepancy though their experimental study of faculty and student preferences for diversity in hiring decisions at two large public universities in the Western U.S. Participants were presented with the profiles two hypothetical candidates with identical qualifications, differing only in the listed race and gender of the candidate, and asked which candidate they prefer to be hired. Faculty at both universities included in the study were between 11 and 21 percentage points more likely to prefer a Hispanic, Black, or Native American candidate to a white one. Similarly, students and faculty at both universities were more likely to prefer women and non-binary faculty than men faculty.

These findings, however, only capture preferences for hypothetical candidates in an experimental setting and may not reflect the hiring preferences and decisions of academic search committees in practice. For example, Bagues et al. (2017) analyzed academic search committees consisting of over 8,000 total evaluators for associate and full professorship positions in Italy and Spain, finding that a larger presence of women on academic search committees did not increase the number of qualified female candidates moving forward. Further, male evaluators included in the study became less favorable toward female candidates when there was one or more women present on the committee. Disparities in the representation of women and racial minorities in academia persist, particularly at senior leadership levels and in research-intensive universities. This disparity is most pronounced at the full professor level, with men making up the overwhelming majority in these roles across the United States (O’Connor 2019). Similarly, racial disparities in the professoriate also persist despite representative gains over the last several decades. Underrepresented minority faculty, particularly Black and Hispanic scholars, occupy a smaller share of senior and leadership positions compared to their white counterparts (American Association of University Professors 2020; Fox Tree and Vaid 2022).

Women of color face compounded challenges in the academic job market that are distinct from those encountered by their white and male counterparts. One review of the literature concluded that implicit biases and stereotypes significantly disadvantage women of color in academic hiring, where they are often perceived as less competent and less “fit” for prestigious positions (Turner, González, and Wood 2008). One systematic literature review found that once hired, women of color experience disparities in citation rates, grant funding, and letters of recommendation compared to their colleagues, in addition to being less likely to be first or sole authors on their publications, less often invited to give presentations and addresses, and less likely to be given leadership positions (Fox Tree and Vaid 2022). Further, women of color report carrying disproportionate service and mentorship loads compared to their white and male colleagues. For example, in one time diary study, women faculty reported spending more time on campus service, student advising, and teaching-related activities while men faculty spent more time on research (O’Meara et al. 2017). This discrepancy was even more pronounced among women faculty of color. These barriers hinder the professional advancement of women of color and exacerbate their underrepresentation in academia, reinforcing a cycle of exclusion that limits diversity and equity within the academic workforce.

Contextual Factors Affecting Faculty Diversity

The racial and gender diversity of university faculty is also shaped by context-specific factors, including economic uncertainty, state partisan control, and, within recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors influence institutional priorities and decision-making processes, which may exacerbate existing disparities in faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure among women and racial minorities. Beyond Kim et al., there are no other quantitative analyses of the impact of macro-level political and economic conditions on faculty diversity. This dissertation will fill this gap by including state partisan control and state appropriations to higher education in its analyses of faculty diversity between 2015 and 2023, a period containing both political and economic strain. This timeframe saw the COVID-19 pandemic along with growing republican opposition to DEI programs, organizations, and curricula in public schooling, both of which may have negatively impacted the racial and gender diversity of post-secondary faculty.

Numerous states in recent years have passed anti-DEI legislation including Alabama, Florida, Texas, and North Carolina, and many more have proposed such legislation (Knox 2024; Landry-Thomas 2023; The Associated Press 2024). These bills ban the use of diversity statements in enrollment and hiring decisions, mandatory DEI trainings for students or faculty, funding and/or operation of diversity or identity-based programs and organizations, and even prohibiting discussion of race and racism in classrooms. Figure 1 below illustrates the prevalence of anti-DEI legislation across all U.S. states since January 2023, using data from The Chronicle’s anti-DEI legislation tracker (Gretzinger et al. 2024). More than half of U.S. states (56%) have proposed anti-DEI legislation and almost a quarter of states (24%) have signed legislation into law.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Among states that have passed anti-DEI legislation, Florida stands out for the pervasiveness of its opposition to diversity and inclusion in public education. In 2021, the Florida State Board of Education passed it’s “Required Instruction Planning and Reporting” rule, which prohibited the teaching of Critical Race Theory, particularly the idea that racism is embedded within American society and its legal system (Florida Department of Education 2021). This ban was codified into state law through Florida’s “Stop WOKE” Act, also known as HB 7, which took effect in 2022 (Fla. 2022). This bill restricts the way that race, racism, and the country’s history of race relations can be taught in public institutions, prohibiting instructors from discussing topics including reparations, colorblindness, and systemic racism. Florida passed its most comprehensive anti-DEI legislation with Senate Bill 266 (Fla. 2023). This bill requires that the Florida Board of Governors monitor and possibly eliminate college courses or curricula grounded in theories of privilege or systemic racism, as well as banning institutions from using their federal funding to “promote, support, or maintain any programs or campus activities that ... advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion or promote or engage in political or social activism” (2023). As a result of these bills, many state universities have closed or renamed their DEI centers, fired or relocated DEI staff and faculty, discontinued their race and gender studies programs, or ended support for identity-based affinity groups.

Political factors such as legislative representation and state partisan control may shape racial and gender diversity in academia. As the proportion of Black and Hispanic state legislators increases, so too does minority enrollment in public universities within those states (Hicklin and Meier 2008). Further, public universities in states with Republican-controlled governments tend to have lower representation of women and racial minorities among their faculty compared to institutions in Democratic-led states (Hicklin and Meier 2008; Ortega 2020; Taylor et al. 2020). This dynamic can be partially explained by the relationship between state partisan control and appropriations to post-secondary education. The strength of the Democratic Party in the state executive and legislative branches is associated with higher levels of state appropriations to higher education, which can in turn support the recruitment and retention of diverse faculty (Dar and Lee 2014; McLendon, Hearn, and Mokher 2009; Ortega 2020). This relationship, however, appears to be conditioned by factors such as political polarization and economic conditions, with the positive effect of Democratic control diminishing as these contextual variables become more pronounced.

Finally, faculty diversity can be impacted by emergent national or global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic downturn prompted by the pandemic led many institutions to implement hiring freezes and budget cuts, which stalled efforts to diversify faculty and reduced opportunities for women and racial minorities to enter or advance within academia (Flaherty 2024). The pandemic caused not only an economic recession but also widespread closings of schools and a transition to virtual schooling. These conditions impacted women, especially women of color, disproportionately due to the gendered division of household labor and childcare responsibilities. Shouldering the majority of housework and childcare, including supervising children attending school virtually from home, leads to reduced research productivity for women faculty compared to their male colleagues (Malisch et al. 2020). For example, one recent study has identified a widening gender gap in journal article submissions in some fields due to the COVID pandemic (Amano-Patiño et al. 2020). In turn, women faculty were more likely to make use of tenure clock extensions which decrease long-term earning potential, preclude women faculty from leadership positions requiring tenure, and reduce the likelihood of achieving tenure (Malisch et al. 2020).

*Contributions and Research Questions*

Although scholarship on women of color in academia is robust, numerous theoretical and empirical gaps remain. The CRT principle of Interest Convergence has predominantly been applied to studies assessing the diversity of the student body and has paid little attention to the diversity of the professoriate. While the dynamics observed with respect to student diversity may be reflected in that of the faculty, it is also possible that minoritized faculty experience unique challenges compared to minoritized students. More research is necessary to better understand the interests and outcomes of women and racial minority faculty in hiring, promotion, and tenure processes. This dissertation will contribute relevant insights to help resolve debates about Bell’s original formulation of Interest Convergence by considering the potential impact of the political and economic context on faculty diversity. Similarly, the Intersectionality principle has primarily been utilized to study the experiences of women faculty of color through qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups, but there is very little quantitative data on the representation of women faculty of color using the intersectional or interest convergence frameworks. Quantitative analyses of the representation of women and racial minority faculty would provide additional support for the trends observed in the existing qualitative studies. Rather than conducting case studies of one or two universities, this dissertation will provide nationwide coverage of all public four-year universities which report to IPEDS. Further, the two principles have not yet been used in tandem to investigate racial and gender diversity in the professoriate. Utilizing both would provide a more holistic understanding of the gendered and racialized dynamics experienced by women faculty of color.

There are few comprehensive assessments of the racial and gender diversity of the U.S. professoriate over time. Much of the research on faculty diversity focuses on race and gender separately, rather than considering how race and gender jointly shape faculty outcomes and experiences. Further, the bulk of literature on faculty racial diversity prioritizes Black-White disparities and pays little attention to the representation of other racial and ethnic groups such as Hispanic, Asian American, Indigenous, and multiracial faculty.[[1]](#footnote-1) Kim et al.’s (2021) study of the racial and gender diversity of U.S. faculty between 1999 and 2015 stands out within the faculty diversity literature as addressing each of these empirical gaps, and serves as a model for this dissertation’s updated study of the racial and gender diversity of faculty between 2015 and 2022. In addition to race and gender, however, this dissertation will also consider contextual factors such as state partisan control and major global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This will not only extend Kim’s work but will also help settle ongoing debates on the nature of racial and gender inclusion and exclusion. Bell’s formulation of Interest Convergence treats the interests of majority and minority groups as monolithic and permanent, while others such as Driver (2011) view them as more fluid and variable across time and place. This dissertation will clarify the extent to which state-level political and economic factors influence the racial and gender diversity of post-secondary faculty.

This dissertation will utilize the Interest Convergence and Intersectionality theoretical perspectives along with Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data on the demographic composition of university faculty to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent did the racial and gender composition of university change between 2015 and 2022?
2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact the racial and gender diversity of university faculty within this timeframe?
3. How did state-level partisan control impact the racial and gender diversity of university faculty within this timeframe?
4. How is faculty racial and gender diversity impacted by changes in state appropriations to higher education?

With respect to RQ1, I expect to find that the proportion of women and racial minorities in university faculty is generally increasing over time in the pre- and post-COVID years. This finding would be in line with the longitudinal trends observed in Kim et al. However, I expect to find that the economic and social contexts of the COVID-19 pandemic (RQ2) negatively impacted the representation of women and racial minorities in the professoriate, especially women of color. Widespread school and university closings, a nationwide recession, and freezes on faculty hiring and promotion resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic affected academics across the board, but our existing knowledge of racial and gendered dynamics in the workplace and domestically would suggest that women and racial minorities suffered the brunt of the impact. Similarly, I expect to find that Republican control of state governments and legislature (RQ3) is negatively associated with faculty diversity and representation of women of color. Republican control of state governments and legislatures would lend itself to decreased state appropriations to post-secondary institutions, decreased investment in DEI programs and initiatives or outright bans of such efforts, and a more hostile overall atmosphere towards minoritized populations. Finally, I expect to find that state appropriations to higher education (RQ4) will be positively correlated with faculty racial and gender diversity. Decreases in state appropriations to higher education due to the COVID-19 pandemic or shifts to Republican control in state governments and legislatures may, consequently, decrease faculty diversity and representation of women of color. Each of these factors would create a less-than-hospitable environment for women and racial minorities to navigate in order to become and remain a part of the U.S. professoriate alongside their white male peers. Answering these research questions will contribute both theoretically and empirically to the literature on faculty diversity by assessing the extent to which political and economic contextual factors influence the racial and gender composition of all faculty at four-year post-secondary institutions in the United States.

**Figures**

**A map of the united states

Description automatically generated**

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1. It is still undetermined the extent to which racial/ethnic groups will be disaggregated in my analyses. The most likely course will be to disaggregate as much as possible for the univariate and bivariate analyses and use a diversity index for the multivariate analyses. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)