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Why Are There so Few of Us?
Counterstories from Women of Color in Faculty Governance Roles

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Abstract

Women scholars are underrepresented in faculty governance positions in the university settings. This initial descriptive study described the successes and challenges faced by eight (n = 8) women of color in current or former governance roles in California universities. A semi-structured interview schedule was administered that focused on their perceptions in the three areas: competence, confidence and credibility. The findings were analyzed and implications as well as recommendations for further research were made.

"who told you anybody wants to hear from you, you ain't nothing but a black woman."
– Hattie Gossett

"*Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks, to think I could write."*
– Gloria Anzaldua

A common scenario in the Spring across universities in the U.S. is that of school counselors and/or families taking high school students to visit prospective colleges. Students are most likely to get tours of campuses, and it is likely that these visits will include information about who are the college deans, provosts and presidents on these campuses.

For students of color, though, and in particular for young women of color; the names of college presidents will not resonate with their own surnames. Women, in general, are underrepresented in these roles of governance in higher education. The situation is worse, however, for women of color. The numbers of women of color in governance positions are so small that they are almost non-existent. Statistics from a recent Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) Report, *A Measure of Equity: Women's Progress in Higher Education* (2008) reported the following: Twenty-eight percent of Chief Academic Officers, a clear pipeline to the college presidency, are women (35% are white women and 3% are women of color). Among all senior administrators 38% are white women and 7% are women of color. Twenty-three percent of college presidents are women with 19% of all female presidents being women of color. These statistics impacted our own research as we found it difficult to identify eight women of color to participate in this study.

An obvious pipeline to governance roles in a university is the professoriate. We examined the literature on women of color in the professoriate and found a small body of knowledge on this topic. In a review of the literature, Balderrama, Texeira, and Valdez (2006) reported that in 1997 women of color accounted for only 2.5% of all full professors, compared with 72.1% for White males, 17.3% for White females, and 8.1% for women of color (Harvey, 2001). The Chronicle of Higher Education (2005) reported that nearly half a century after the civil rights movements of the l960s, 35% of tenure track faculty (assistant, associate and full professors) in all academic fields are female. Of these, only 5% are females of color.

These statistics are mirrored in the California State University (CSU) system. The CSU system employs over 22,814 faculty members (California Research Bureau, 2002). Of these, 76% are White and 24% are faculty of color. The following chart shows a distribution of all faculty by gender and ethnicity at San Jose State University (Institutional Studies, 2010), the location of this study.

San Jose State University (SJSU), established in 1857, is the oldest educational institution in the 23 California State University System. SJSU is a four year university with 7 Colleges, 1,590 faculty, and 31,280 students as fall 2009. Eighty-six percent of our students are California residents (SJSU Public Affairs Office, 2010).

Distribution of All Faculty by Gender and Ethnicity
Fall 2009

Headcount		Tenured			Probationary			Temp Lecturer			**Total**
		Female	Male	**Total**	Female	Male	**Total**	Female	Male	**Total**	
San Jose State University	AmInd	1	2	**3**	1		**1**	4		**4**	**8**
	Asian	28	53	**81**	24	20	**44**	51	75	**126**	**251**
	Black	7	9	**16**	1	2	**3**	12	14	**26**	**45**
	Filip	5	3	**8**		1	**1**	8	9	**17**	**26**
	Hisp	10	18	**28**	5	4	**9**	47	27	**74**	**111**
	Other	6	9	**15**	16	10	**26**	59	48	**107**	**148**
	PacIsl							1		**1**	**1**
	White	129	199	**328**	63	51	**114**	349	304	**653**	**1095**
Total		**186**	**293**	**479**	**110**	**88**	**198**	**531**	**477**	**1008**	**1685**

As reflected in the chart above, there are 1,685 reported in Fall 2009. Of this total, female faculty of color accounted for .2% (n = 249) of tenure track and temporary faculty. When disaggregated by tenure-track female faculty of color, the percent decreased to .06% (n = 103) of the total.

Methods and Findings

The purpose of this descriptive study was to describe the challenges and successes faced by the female faculty of color in their governance roles, past and present. All faculty participants were employed at San Jose State University as either tenure-track faculty and/or adjunct faculty. The

governance roles held were primarily at San Jose State University although two of the participants spoke about former positions in other universities.

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed for this study that focused on participants' perceptions in the three areas: competence, confidence and credibility as related to successes and challenges. We interviewed eight university female faculty of color at SJSU: Four Chinese female faculty and four Latina female faculty at San Jose State University (SJSU).

The four Chinese female professors are all naturalized Americans. They were born in foreign countries, came to the United States for advanced degrees, became tenure-track faculty at San Jose State University and decided to immigrate to the United States. Of the four Latina faculty who were interviewed, only one was born in another country (Mexico). The remaining three were all born and raised in the U.S.

Theoretical Framework

To analyze the data from the interviews, we used the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Tara Yosso (2005) noted

> CRT shifts the research lens away from a deficit view of Communities of Color as places full of cultural poverty disadvantages, and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. (p. 69)

It is through the framework of CRT that scholars of color can create spaces to tell the stories of their lived experiences. The women faculty of color in this study tell their "counterstories" about surviving in academia, a profession that is denied to many people of color.

Common Themes from the Data -- Counterstories

"Working Twice as Hard"

All of the faculty interviewed commented on having to work twice as hard to be seen as credible, competent and confident. Oftentimes this meant serving on extra committees, taking on more tasks than the normal workload of others in similar roles, and/or completing tasks to perfection, no matter how much time was necessary. It was important not to be perceived as inefficient or less than capable. One faculty member stated,

> … I was tolerated and seen as an "Affirmative Action" hire. I was not seen as capable by my white male peers…Even with a Ph.D. from Stanford…that helped somewhat but
> not much… the message I got was that it was a Ph.D. in Education, after all.

"Creating Our Own Niche"

Several of the participants commented that they created special "niches" or areas of interest outside of the university where they were recognized in ways that did not occur in their university setting. Oftentimes, it was this work that sustained and gave them the confidence to survive their home campuses.

For example, one of the participants was a former Provost in the University of California. She created a niche for herself by purposefully partnering with the local K-12 system. This was at a time when the UC system had not yet done so. By the time the UC system recognized the value in partnering with K-12, this particular faculty member was often called upon as an expert by the UC Chancellor's office.

Another participant became a Coordinator for one of the CSU system-wide programs. In this capacity, she became recognized by an entire CSU system as an expert but not at her home campus.

Many of the participants were recognized on a national level for their scholarship and work in the larger educational community. This was in contrast to little recognition at their home campuses.

"Tokenism"

Another theme that emerged from all of the participants was that of "tokenism." The faculty spoke about tokenism particularly at the early stage of their tenure-track career. For example, they felt like they must be the spokesperson of their entire race. The majority of the faculty, however, has been in academia for over 20 years so they commented that perhaps tokenism was more prevalent at that time. One participant noted,

> …the ethnicity of faculty was quite different 20 years ago… faculty were comprised of mostly white males.

"Double and Triple Oppression"

Many of the faculty spoke of experiencing double and triple oppression. For example, several faculty named themselves as a "triple minority" – minority in their professional field, gender, and ethnicity. The spoke of being "invisible" to their peers and sometimes made fun of and perceived as "dumb" They felt that they worked in a hostile environment that required a lot of stamina and outside support to survive.

Underprepared for Governance

The majority of the faculty stated that they did not feel they were adequately prepared in graduate school for governance roles. Many of them felt that they learned "on the job" about effective governance.

Confidence, competence and credibility.

The majority of the faculty reported in the beginning of their tenure track career, they did not feel confident. This may due to age (28 year-old facing an existing faculty team where the median age is 58 in one faculty's case.) One faculty stated that she has a stuttering problem that became a barrier in her ability to speak up in meetings. However, she worked hard to overcome her stuttering challenge. The average service year of these female professors was 20 years. They reported that through careful observation, trials and errors, they overcame the language and culture barriers and became more outspoken in committee meetings. Twenty years later, they all feel confident, competent and believe they are credible in representing their department in university committees. Many of these faculty presently chair department, college and university committees.

Recommendations for Further Research

The authors will follow up and study a larger scale of sample pool. In addition, we could explore impeding female faculty of color's progress in higher education, and to identify some best practices for recruiting and retention, thus helping maximize their success and career satisfaction.

Another recommendation is to recognize the reality, supported by an emerging body of literature that suggest that some faculty of color face an unwelcoming and potentially hostile classroom environment especially in predominately white student body. According to Cathy Trower (2003) from Harvard Graduate School of Education, faculty of color:

- Experience overt and/or overt racism including being stereotyped and pigeon-holed;
- Are marginalized and find that their research is discredited, especially if it concerns minority issues;
- Bear a tremendous burden of tokenism, including feeling like they must be the spoke person of their entire race and work twice as hard to get half as far;
- Feel obligated to represent one's race or ethnicity on multiple committees that help the institution, but not necessarily the individual, and to mentor advise many same race students which is a huge hidden workload that is mostly unrewarded in the traditional tenure and promotion process; and
- Suffer from mostly negative, unintended consequences of being perceived as an affirmative action hire.

Stanley (2006) found that faculty of color face problematic student attitudes and behaviors, including students inappropriately questioning both their authority and credibility in the classroom. In a study by Juanita McGowan at Kansas State University found that faculty of color indicated that some White students were more ready to: critique their classroom effectiveness; challenge their authority and have a lower level of respect (2000).

Conclusions

This was a small scale descriptive study intended to explore issues of women faculty of color in governance positions. The findings corroborated those of previous studies conducted in a variety

of universities. Women faculty of color face similar challenges in universities across the country. It is our hope that universities—or the women themselves—will take up the charge to make things better for those young scholars moving into governance roles in higher education. They should not have to wait 20 years to feel competent, confident and credible!

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