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ABSTRACT
        A growing research interest in the area of women in
academic administration and the problem of the low number of women in
administrative roles, particularly the underrepresentation of
minority women, continues to be reported in studies of educational
administration at all levels. In this study, women of color in
administrative positions at public and private colleges and
universities throughout the United States (N=106) were surveyed in
order to investigate their career advancement patterns and their
level of comfort within the university administrative environment.
The career advancement patterns were measured by the Career Paths In
Higher Education Administration Survey. The Environmental Comfort
Scale was used to determine an individual's level of comfort in
different personal and professional situations. Results indicate that
the first position in which the women of color were hired is a
significant factor for future environmental comfort. The overall
findings are discussed along with suggestions for implementing and
maintaining a high level of comfort for women of color in student
affairs. One table presents data and statistical analysis. Contains
38 references. (TS)

Running head: ASSESSING THE ENVIRONMENT FOR WOMEN

Assessing the Environment for Women of Color in Student Affairs

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Abstract

The career advancement patterns and level of comfort within the university administrative environment for women of color were the issues investigated in this study. The career advancement patterns were measured by the Career Paths In Higher Education Administration Survey (Warner, Brazzell, Allen, Bostick, & Marin, 1988). The Environmental Comfort Scale (Ray, 1993) was used to determine an individual's level of comfort in different personal and professionals situations. The results indicate that the first position in which the women of color were hired is a significant factor for future environmental comfort. The overall findings are discussed along with suggestions for implementing and maintaining a high level of comfort for women of color in student affairs.

Assessing the Environment for Women of Color in Student Affairs

A growing research interest in the area of women in academic administration and the problem of the low number of women in administrative roles, particularly the underrepresentation of minority women, continues to be reported in studies of educational administration (Randall, Daugherty, & Globetti, 1995; Sandler, Silverberg, & Hall, 1996; Touchton & Davis, 1991). This underrepresentation of women can be seen among the professional associations, college and university boards and committees as well as major educational governing agencies at all levels (Pearson, Shavlik, & Touchton, 1989; Sandler, 1993). This underrepresentation of women at various levels in higher education is magnified when women of color are counted resulting in numbers that are shockingly low.

There are some very dismal statistics for people of color in higher education administration. In 1987, men and women of color combined held only 8% of all positions in higher education administration (Touchton & Davis, 1991). This percentage reflects a critical decrease from 1985 in which the reported figure was 12% (Green, 1989). Minority women represented 10% of all female administrators in 1987, whereas minority men represented 7% of all male administrators. Moreover, they held only 2% of all administrative deans positions in 1987. Women of color are most likely to be found in positions such as director of affirmative action/equal opportunity employment (they held 24% of all such positions in 1987), and next most

likely to be found as directors of financial aid and student counseling (they held 7% in each of these positions).

In the years between 1981 and 1991, there was little change in the relative status of minority faculty or administrators, with the single exception of women, with most of the change being among White women (Touchton & Davis, 1991). The proportion of faculty of color increased slightly from 9% to 12% during these years, against a greater increase in the overall minority population and somewhat larger participation of minority students on campuses (Touchton & Davis, 1991). Colleges and universities seemed to be granting people of color access to a higher education, however the degrees did not allow them opportunities to be part of the teaching or administrative teams.

Work Environment

While a substantial body of literature exists regarding women academics, there is little about the perceptions women administrators and faculty have of their work environment. From a review of the research on women faculty and their work environment, Sandler et al. (1996) identifies three factors associated with job satisfaction attitudes of women academics and they are (1) the communication climate in the work environment (2) support dimensions in the work environment and (3) workplace issues that create stress. In addition, research on women faculty's perceptions of the work environment notes that their overall satisfaction with it tends to decrease if they perceive that men faculty have more opportunity to succeed as a result

of performing job activities similar to theirs (Ayer, 1984), that job performance and evaluation in academe are based in favor of men faculty (Mayfield & Nash, 1976; Witt, 1990), and that, in contrast to men faculty, they are burdened with time-consuming tasks that conflict with their work performance (Chamberlain, 1988).

It is not surprising, then to find that women faculty receive the academic community as a cold and uninviting environment (Aguirre, Hernandez, & Martinez, 1994; Blum, 1991; Sandler et al., 1996); consider themselves as outsiders (Aguirre et al., 1994); tokens (Sandler et al, 1996), and express uncertainty about their ability to meet tenure and promotion requirements (Gibbons, 1986). Women faculty of color were the focus in a study conducted by Aguirre et al. (1994). They found that women faculty of color are overloaded with tasks that are racially based. Additionally, these women felt excluded and marginalized in their environments.

Women of color in academe and higher education administration experience various degrees of a chilly climate (Moore & Wagstaff, 1974) often due to consistent and prevalent gender discrimination and sexual harassment (Blum, 1991). Opportunities for promotion, tenure, salary equity, and networking for women of color in higher education possess greater challenges in the work environment and they may face "double discrimination" (Graves, 1990) or double devaluation. Exclusion from mainstream decision-making and being used by the institution as buffers with the minority community are often common factors of how women of

color feel dissatisfied with their work environment. Sandler & Hall (1986) warned us a decade ago that a chilly climate may affect practices as they relate to hiring and promoting someone who is not part of the dominant culture. Female faculty and administrators have lower salaries then men who hold positions of equal rank, are more likely to hold lower level positions, and are offered fewer promotions (Blum, 1991).

<div style="text-align:center">Career Progression</div>

Several researchers have studied the career progression of female administrators through the university environment over the past decade (Acker, 1993; Glazer, Bensimon, & Townsend, 1993; Sagaria, 1993; Touchton & Davis, 1991). It has been found that although more women are aspiring to greater leadership positions within the university administrative ranks, there still remains a "glass ceiling". Women of color in particular feel the effects of the glass ceiling and oftentimes cannot find the mentors or support systems to help them navigate the bureaucratic process which could insure their success.

Studies of employment patterns in higher education reveal that the largest number of women professionals are employed in student services rather than academic or support divisions. A few inquiries that have focused exclusively on female student affairs officers (Earwood-Smith, Jordan-Cox, Hudson, & Smith, 1990; Evans & Kuh, 1983; Randall, Daugherty, & Globetti, 1995; Tinsley, 1985; Tinsley, Secor, & Kaplan, 1984) have noted a steady increase in the numbers of women entering student affairs graduate

programs (Chamberlain, 1991). Yet there remains an ongoing proportional imbalance between men and women in senior student affairs positions, especially at large public institutions (Pearson, Shavlik, & Touchton, 1989; Sandeen, 1991).

Less than half of the administrators in recent study (Warner, Brazzell, Allen, Bostick, & Marin, 1988) viewed the level of professional involvement , sponsorship, and ethnicity as general barriers to advancement; and a desire for particular geographical location was also considered as a barrier. Women were more likely to view sex discrimination and family responsibilities as barriers, while men viewed lack of an advanced degree as a significant barrier. Men also perceived their first administrative position held as significant to career patterns (Warner et al. 1988).

Organizational connectedness and fit is a major problem encountered by African American female administrators (Wright, 1981). This environmental fit means that "administrators work best with other administrators or managers with whom they feel comfortable, and people are most comfortable in homogeneous settings" (Wright, 1981, p. 217). Personal stress coping with the multiple and varied roles women of color juggle in our society places additional pressure on their professional activities as well (Wright, 1981).

How then do women of color move up through the administrative career ladder and permeate the "glass ceiling"? One must assess the environment where the women work and determine what type of support

systems, if any, are in effect for these women. Also, what led to the success of these upper level women of color and how can they assist others? If answers can be found to the aforementioned questions, universities may be able to recruit, attract, and retain administrators of color to their institutions.

In many studies, there is no distinction when addressing problems related to women of color and White women in higher education administration. Therefore, this study explored the issue of how women of color in student affairs mid-management positions perceive their work environment. Furthermore, how is her career progression affected by environmental comfort?

Methodology

Participants

The population for this study consisted of mid- career level women of color. Mailing labels or lists were requested from the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), National Association of Women in Education (NAWE), and the Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA) who self-identified themselves as women of color and worked at public or private colleges or universities. The mailing lists and labels were cross-referenced to avoid duplication of materials sent. The women of color were sent a packet containing a letter explaining the purpose of the study, the instruments, and a self-addressed stamped envelope to expedite the return of the material.

There were 245 women selected to receive two protocols, 106 (43%) returned the instruments. After reviewing all of the protocols, 90 women completed the entire assessment packet providing usable data for analysis. The mean age of the participants was 43, with a range of 23 to 89 years. Overall, 76% (n= 68) of the sample was African American, 12% (n=11) was Hispanic, 1% (n=1) was Native American, 5% (n= 5) was Asian American, and 5% (n=5) was other due to a variation of responses such as Hispanic and White (biracial).

Instruments

Two instruments, The Career Paths in Higher Education Administration (Warner et al., 1988) and the Environmental Comfort Scale (Ray, 1993) were used in this study.

The Career Paths in Higher Education Administration Questionnaire (Warner et al., 1988) is an 18-item instrument which measures what the variables are that impact, promote, or inhibit advancement to administrative positions in higher education. The instrument also evaluates how certain factors may impact the administrator personally and professionally. The three major categories are: (1) career development, in which respondents answer several questions in reference to their current position and future career aspirations; (2) educational and professional experiences, questions related to educational training and development as well as professional organizational involvement are presented; and (3) demographics, which range from personal data to information of the make-up of the institution the

administrator is employed. Overall, the instrument assesses how administrators make a choice to enter the profession, the details of their career and professional experiences, and future career aspirations.

The Career Paths in Higher Education Administration survey was pre-tested on a random judgment sample of 800 academic and nonacademic administrators who held the rank of dean or higher. Slack (1992) used the instrument in her dissertation research on senior level student affairs administrators and found that it measured the career paths of the 367 respondents.

The Environmental Comfort Scale (Ray, 1993) describes various social and professional racial confrontations in a situational context and are presented to respondents in order to measure their level of comfort in cross-cultural activities. Their responses correspond to a Likert scale measuring behaviors extremely uncomfortable to extremely comfortable. The respondent's scores which reflect a high level of comfort are regarded as having progressed to a stage of integrated awareness (Sue & Sue, 1990) or autonomy (Helms, 1995). The instrument is designed to be scored using a comfort quotient (CQ). The CQ is the sum of the Likert scale responses multiplied by the number of predetermined statements which would theoretically result in an extremely comfortable response from a theoretically autonomous individual. A total of forty situations are presented for the respondent in which the reaction would be either 1 - extremely comfortable or 5 - extremely comfortable. Using this rationale, the highest level/score of

comfort or autonomy is 45. There are thirty items in which a high autonomous person would indicate being extremely comfortable. Ten items are designed for this same person to indicate feeling extremely uncomfortable. A statement which represents theoretical autonomy of the extremely comfortable nature is: " While at a friend's house, I joined in a game of cards and realize that the other players are of a different color". Conversely, an example of a statement which would generate extreme discomfort is: "while dining at the head table of a formal banquet, the keynote speaker tells a racist joke which receives a round of applause".

The Environmental Comfort Scale was administered to professionals, graduate students, undergraduate students, and community college students for a total sample of 100 respondents (Ray, 1993). The White Racial Consciousness Scale (Helms, 1984) was also administered to establish consistency between the ECS scores and the autonomy stage scores. It was found that the ECS does represent a close relationship between CQ and autonomy which lends promise to the creation of a non-racially/culturally specific instrument to measure individual's level of comfort in both under-represented and majority groups. Further research is being conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the ECS for making predictions concerning a group's racial consciousness level.

Results

Participants identified their comfort level in various situations including harassment of people of color, their reactions to racial jokes, being

asked their opinion on affirmative actions, and participating in a racial awareness retreat. The mean comfort quotient was 27.07, a relatively high level of comfort in these types of situations.

To determine whether the environmental comfort scale differed with respect to demographic variables and the career inventory, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) at the .05 significance level was conducted on all but one response. A sign rank test was done on this response to clarify the participant's answers. Demographic variables included entry into student affairs, career goals, factors of importance in the career, and factors involved in the administrative career pattern. The results of the ANOVA showed that none of the responses were statistically significant with regards to the environment comfort scale. The results of the sign rank test revealed that the career for women of color was a statistically significant variable. The participants ranked the importance of career at the beginning of their careers and at the time of the survey. The sign rank value showed a .048 level of significance.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

These results show that career is a significant factor for the environmental comfort of women of color in student affairs. The importance of their career at the start of their involvement in student affairs and at the

time of the survey reveals that it has a positive correlation to the comfort level in the environment in which they work and live.

Discussion

Based upon the findings, the results support the study by Aguirre et al. (1994) and Sagaria (1993) in which the researcher found that overall the women of color are comfortable with certain factors in their work environment and have found ways to balance career with parenting, family relationships, leisure, ad community/political involvement. However, it was found that the first position or career acquired in their professional history significantly impacted their present and future career patterns.

The administrative or faculty positions a person chooses in her career are the primary means of advancement in the profession (Sagaria, 1993). Furthermore, these career shifts are the primary mechanism for increased earnings, status, and leadership. Many women of color will need to change job positions numerous times throughout their careers in order to progress successfully upward in higher education administration. Over the course of the past two decades, position changes have become the critical factor for advancing women into key leadership positions in addition to increasing their numbers in administrative roles (Sagaria, 1993). Therefore, a persons career is a byproduct of a higher education labor market.

> Individual careers are defined as processes within higher education organizations that begin with entry into the workforce and end with retirement. Careers are shaped by employing institutions and are organized so that career advancement involves a sequence of position changes. Position changes are used as measures of career progress because they can be more

reliably controlled than income, which partly depends upon seniority in a position or in an organization (Sagaria, 1993, p. 451).

When women of color are hired in their first position at a college or university the goal should be to make the environment comfortable enough for them to continue up the career ladder. It has been found that leaders hire, retain, and promote those individuals they can trust (Sagaria, 1993). Usually, these leaders base characteristics or behaviors of stellar employees on unwritten standards such as their immutable characteristics (i.e. race and gender). Concomitantly, if the leadership is comprised of those fitting the traditional male model, then it would be difficult for women of color be accepted by them and to progress through the administrative ranks. Suffice it to say, when a woman of color is in her first administrative position, she must see persons like herself in the hierarchy or at least be comfortable with the person in the leadership position if she is to have a high level of self-efficacy or a belief that she can become successful in this profession.

Research Limitations

The results of this study may need to be cautiously interpreted because of the small sample size that accurately completed all of the questionnaires. It should also be noted that many of the respondents, overall, were comfortable with their environments because they were at the middle phase of their careers rather than being an entry level person. This mid-management positioning may be a point were most women are comfortable with their career choice and environment after having made several career moves to

find a suitable workplace. The majority of respondents, 58%, were 40 years of age or more and 30% were between the ages of 30-39. A suggestion for future research would be to send questionnaires with an extended qualitative component to "new" administrators who are women of color. In other words, individuals who have not been to several institutions and are new to the intense struggle involved in making it to the top of the profession. This will give institutions a better picture of how the environment is treating and responding to these women.

The Environmental Comfort Scale is a new instrument that has not been widely used and tested thoroughly for validity and reliability. It is suggested that the instrument be utilized for future studies and the information reported.

Recommendations

Written and verbal comments were received from the participants of the study regarding ways in which they have coped with their environments as well as adjustments they have made to enhance their environments and transitions to their positions or environments work with this perspective. The participants offered ways in which institutions have and can make their environments supportive as well as increasing their upward mobility.

Once an administrator is hired, that person becomes part of the future talent pool. Retention of majority and minority administrators is generally the result of a good match, good conditions of employment (including hospitable campus environment), and opportunity for growth and

advancement. Successful strategies to retain administrators of color and help them advance were detailed by Green (1989) and are useful for women and other underrepresented groups. Some of her ideas included an orientation program that introduces the administrator of color to cultural points of interest on and off campus.

Women of color who are already in mid-management positions should be mentored and supported to become upper level administrators. Women of color need the contact with people like themselves. Given the low numbers of women on most college campuses, a sense of isolation is compounded when they have so few role models. Support groups organized by women of color to discuss problems, concerns, and career dilemmas would help ease the stress these women face.

Women of color are erroneously believed to have "made it" and to encounter little difficulty in finding career success. Career advise should be provided periodically to assess the administrators growth and development. Concomitantly, challenging work opportunities outside of the contracted job responsibilities would provide the skills needed to assist women of color climb the career ladder and expose them to other administrative areas. Growth and development also involves constructive feedback through performance evaluations, financial support for travel to present at professional conferences as well as participate in leadership seminars, and conducting exit interviews to learn from departing colleagues.

18

Feelings of isolation, alienation, tokenism, and environmental discomfort among administrators of color can only be eliminated by more balanced ratios majority and underrepresented groups on campus. "The academic community, without even a rationale or intellectual defense, has permitted the educational involvement and contributions of Black females in higher education to go almost wholly unexplored" (Moore & Wagstaff, 1974). Based upon this quote, written more than 20 years ago, higher education institutions are still not aware of the environmental needs of the woman administrator of color. Sadly, the more things change, to more things remain the same. It is hoped that these findings and recommendations will provide the impetus to conduct more studies on women in higher education.

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Table 1

Relative Importance of Factors at Beginning of Career and Currently

Correlated with Environmental Comfort

Factor	M	SD	Pr>T	Pr>S
Career	-0.32	1.55	0.078*	0.048*
Parenting	0.20	2.01	0.48	0.37
Relationship with spouse	0.18	1.50	0.37	0.39
Community/ political involvement	-0.07	1.89	0.75	0.71
Leisure	-0.07	1.40	0.66	0.79
Other	0.4	1.75	0.22	0.24

*$p < .05$.

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