Experiences of Faculty Women of Color: A Literature Review

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the experiences and representation of minority women in United States higher education faculty positions. There are a multitude of issues that derive from the lack of diversification in the workforce: unequal representation, a lack of cultural-social understanding and insufficient relationship building. Exploring literature to determine the divergences and parallels between minority female experiences as faculty through qualitative and quantitative research identified their marginalization and underrepresentation in higher education. The literature examines that the experiences of women and people of color are at a disadvantage in faculty positions. It also suggests that women of color undergo further discriminatory treatment as faculty members and they are underrepresented. Recommendations are made for the restructure of institutional policies, the need for support groups and streamlining gender/race-inclusive curriculum.

Keywords: women of color, higher education, faculty, race, feminist, white hegemony

Experiences of Women of Color Faculty in Higher Education

Women of color in United States face a double jeopardy due to gender bias and racism. There is a disproportionate difference in minorities serving in faculty positions at higher education (Ware, 2000). Within that minority population, there is an even graver lack of women in leadership positions. Twenty-one percent of all executive, administrative or managerial positions are held by minority groups (De Welde, 2017). While women of color are more likely to hold similar positions at two-year institutes, most women in such leadership positions are white. Women of color who propel to positions in faculty are usually retained at the associate level within their positions (De Welde, 2017). In order to better comprehend the disadvantages of women of color in faculty positions, it is essential to review relatable literature adding richer perspectives to my research. Investigating gender and race in the academy allows me to look at their exclusive roles in regards to individuals within the profession, as well as draw on their intersectionality's. As a woman of color, I continue to recognize the shortage of women of color in faculty positions throughout my educational career.

It is also important to recognize that while women of color are grouped together in this review, they may not have the same experiences in relations to the stereotypes and discriminatory treatment they are exposed to. Social status in terms of American ethnic groups provide that Whites are at the top of the hierarchy while Blacks are at the very bottom, and other minorities rest in-between the two (Sidanius, Pratto & Rabinowitz, 1994). Ghavami and Peplau (2013) study several groups of minority women as well as Caucasian women and concluded that the stereotypes they are subjected to differ in regards to how their gender and race is perceived. Critical Race Scholars recognize there is a social disadvantage for all people of color who can be discriminated against for their race as well as accent, language, gender and immigration status

(Baynes, 1997), to name a few. Social hierarchies are created and maintained by validating myths that include stereotypes, attitudes, and values, which provide justification for current social inequalities (Sidanius, et al., 1994).

There are a multitude of ways to approach the problem of inequity and underrepresentation in minority women in faculty positions. It is important to explore the different reasons as to why there is such a lack of women in top positions within the academy's hierarchy. In doing so, one cannot ignore the treatment of female minority in junior and leadership positions. It is essential to address whether or not universities are taking action to resolve this issue. While studying universities and colleges as a whole, it is also beneficial to shift attention to different departments in order to distinguish patterns. Additionally, feminist and race-centered frameworks help organize and condense my research.

The research is prominently based on faculty within the United States and aims to explore the representation and treatment of women of color in this cohort. The literature review will first examine the roles of gender bias and racism in the academy in regards to faculty. The review will identify the elements of gender and race exclusively as well as their intersectionality and the prominence of race between the two. Next, the review will explore the challenges that women of color face in the academy: retention, mentorship and questionable validity. The review will also examine their expansion of representation in leadership positions through policy, support groups and inclusive curriculum. The incorporation of peer-reviewed articles through ERIC, Scholar OneSearch, Gale Cengage and JSTOR found on the Northeastern University Libraries website were used for this review.

Gender and Race in the Academy

In the discussion pertaining to the underrepresentation of minority women in the academy, the two intrinsic characteristics that compose their identities must be examined. The double jeopardy of being female and a minority results in subjugation and marginalization (Berdahl, Moore, & Zedeck, 2006). It is essential to observe gender and racism as two separate problems in order to comprehend the unified adversities of women of color. This section will address the perplexing qualities of gender and race in regards to positions in the academy. The race related implications between minority women and white women will also be discussed in this review. Unequal discriminatory treatment prevents women of color from excelling in leadership roles within the academy. Rather, women of color reach success at much lower rates than males in higher education positions (Jayakumar, Howard, Allen and Han, 2009). Literature pertaining to gender and racial biases in higher education will help to understand how to mitigate discrimination and advance women of color in their roles.

Gender

While the US is becoming more and more aware of gender-focused inequalities, there is still much work to be done, especially in terms of higher education. There is a steady increase of women in academic positions yet there remains a great deal of inequity (Lapan, Hodge, Peroff & Anderson, 2013) as well as underrepresentation (Hargens & Long, 2002). Women are more likely to be in entry and junior positions within higher education and are underrepresentation in more prestigious positions; they are more likely than their male peers to be represented in non-tenure faculty positions, lacking job security as well as efficient salary (August & Waltman, 2004). Women of color are undervalued, in a multitude of ways including but not limited to lower wages, lack of status and work/life balance (Lapan et al., 2013), especially in

predominantly white institutes (Harley, 2008). However, institutes where the wage gap was substantially lower between male and female faculty, women reported better treatment (Robst, VanGilder & Polachek, 2003).

There is a clear divide in the representation of male professionals as oppose to female professionals at the academy. The Master of Public Administration across minority institutes for example, has 58% more male full time faculty than females (Majumdar & Adams, 2015). There are several implications as to why and how women are disproportionately represented, one of the most prevalent is the challenge women are faced with in balancing family life and career aspirations. Doctorate holding women in the academy who become mothers are less likely to attain tenure than males who become fathers at the same time in their educational and career quests (Bingham and Nix, 2010).

Race

In determining the prototypical American, White Americans are the closes group to American, while Asian Americans and Blacks substantially differed and Arab Americans were the furthest from being American (Dovidio, Gluszek, Ditlmann, and Lagunes, 2010). In ranking the social status of American ethnic groups, Whites are at the top, Blacks at the bottom and Asians, Latinos and Arabs are in between (Sidanius, Pratto, and Rabinowitz 1994). Minorities have not reached an equilibrium of the same rate as their white counterparts. While African-Americans may hold political office, there has been an increase in race related hostility (Brooks-Immel and Murray, 2017). While some minorities might land prestigious positions this does not mitigate the prominence of historical institutional racism in higher education – as Brooks-Immel and Murray (2017) provide that some white administrative and faculty members claimed

minorities may make cases for exclusion due to race because of the lack of inclusive excellence in their identifying group, thus deeming them incompetent.

Dancy and Brown (2011) reported that in 2007, among 703,463 full time faculty, only 17% were people of color. Correspondingly, Majumdar and Adams (2015) revealed that Caucasians hold the most faculty positions in Public Administrations departments across minority institutions. Furthermore, while faculty of color devote more time to conducting research and strongly associate it to their profession, more so than white faculty – still, white faculty yield more scholarly publications (Dancy & Brown, 2011). Brooks-Immel and Murray (2017) explored a study in which some white administrators and faculty members were unable to recognize that race was relevant to them in the workplace, which further whether knowingly or unknowingly promotes marginalization of minorities in leadership positions.

The Prominence of Race

In studying the experiences of women of color in high-ranking positions in the academy, it is essential to understand the roles of gender bias and the prominence of racism. Women within higher education personnel are categorized in two components 1) being competent, meaning they possess masculinity, or 2) too feminine, thus the opposite of competent creates a larger need to reevaluate the oppressed structure within higher education (De Welde, 2017). Critical Race Scholars also argue that the darker an individual's skin is, the more likely they are to be discriminated against – similarly, Critical Race Feminists explain that due to their darker complexion, they are discriminated against differently than White women (Baynes, 1997).

Minority women cannot be voided from the history of racist and sexist oppression as it institutionalizes the devaluation of minority women (especially African Americans) while praising their white counterparts (Harley, 2008). While women of color are able to identify with

white women in terms of gender biases in the institute, they are seen as outsiders as they do not

fit the prototypical norm (White) of the racialized institutional hierarchy (Turner, 2002). Duncan

(2014) links the marginalization of women of color in the university environment to the severe

systemic prejudice in terms of gender and race to her own lived experiences as a woman of color.

While just having earned tenure, Duncan an Asian American woman, quit after three years due

to the harassment and discrimination she endured from the program (Women's Studies) director,

a white woman who was not tenured (Duncan, 2014). In a similar situation, American Indian

women were viewed as combative anytime they attempted to express viewpoints and had to

work harder than their colleagues to prove themselves (Brayboy, Solyon & Catagno, 2015). In

these cases, the minority woman is either defeated or perceived to be violent (in taking action) by

Whites. This conveys how Eurocentric systemic norms are exercised at the university level.

      Only 2.4% of minority female faculty serve as instructors in elite law schools in

comparison to 10.3% of white women – additionally, white women secured 27.9% of entry-level

positions at top elite law schools in comparison to only 1.6% of women of color (Merritt &

Reskin, 2007). Thus, it is not surprising that 60% of white women believe their professional

opportunities have progressed over the past five years, only 47% of colored women believe the

same to be true (Thomas and Landau, 2004). Marginalization is not only caused by the white

male faculty personnel or students; thus expanding the role of racialization as a liability in the

lack of women of color in faculty. The reality by which female minority staff members in the

academy are disproportionately overrepresented in the least prestigious academic departments,

ranks and institutions (Jayakumar, et al. 2009) devalues their own potential as well as influences

the way that students view women of color in the academy.

Conclusion

The exploration of gender and race nuances are pivotal in understanding the issues surrounding women of color faculty. While White women are subjected to discrimination, minorities are further marginalized, specifically women of color whose intersection of race and gender negatively impact their experiences (Taylor & Antony, 2000). It is also essential to conclude that the stereotypic gender, ethnicity, and group attributes are not simply a result of combining ethnicity and gender stereotypes, rather unique attributes can exist for both gender and ethnicity stereotypes among different demographic groups (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). There is a clear and alarming underrepresentation of minority women in leadership positions within the hierarchy of the academic institute (Cole & Arias, 2004).

Challenges in the Academy

Women of color face challenges in their roles as leaders at higher education institutions. Due to negative experiences caused by gender-racial impartialities in university settings, there is a lack of retention amongst minority females in leadership positions. Additionally, finding efficient mentors can be difficult, as women of color are often othered by their majority-white colleagues. It is also essential to explore student and colleague questionable validity of women of color in leadership positions. This section of the review evaluates the many challenges bestowed upon women of color and their lack of representation at the academy.

Retention

A study conducted by Hodo (2017) addresses the multitude of race politics in institutes including the flawed hiring and recruitment system. Even when minorities are hired, the other issue becomes retaining the position, which is challenging for minorities – especially those in predominantly white institutions because they are repeatedly treated as the other, they do not

have a support system and they are so small in numbers and often feel marginalized (Hodo, 2017). The isolation and absence of effective mentoring result in having negative impacts on the rates of promotion and tenure within African American women, as well as their low retention rates (Fries-Britt and Kelly, 2005). Women color often find themselves redirected to administrators who are white women or males of color in regards to obtaining career opportunities and resources to help them excel (Turner, Gonzalez, & Lau, 2011) thus disabling them from a larger pool of resources (i.e. White men). Negative racial climates hinder job satisfaction for faculty of color and is linked with greater retention rates for White faculty which signifies the perpetuation of racial hierarchy and privilege (Jayakumar, et al., 2009).

Mentoring

While mentoring programs exist, they do not benefit minority faculty members as they do for white faculties (Zambrana, Ray, Espino, Castro, Cohen, & Eliason. 2015). While three STEM minority-female faculty members were able to benefit from mentoring (by White faculty members), they still felt marginalized and undermined (Buzzanell, Long, Anderson, Kokini, & Batra, 2015). In the field of Sociology, White men and women took the lead as mentors followed by Black men, Black women and other minorities (Latino, Asian and Native American individuals of both genders), with an extreme underrepresentation of other minorities in this field (Dixon-Reeves, 2003).

It is essential for structurally inclusive programs to be available for all minorities, as it will encourage students to see minority personnel as having equal status to their white counterparts (Zambrana, et al., 2015). Professional development, mentoring and introduction of faculty of color is significant to preparing educational leaders (Dancy & Brown, 2011). Mentoring is also a crucial factor in the success of minority faculty in developing appropriate

and equal guides and strategies for faculty to utilize in supporting students (Zambrana, et al., 2015). Tran (2014) characterizes experiences of four women of color serving in leaderships positions in higher educational institutes at a Hispanic Serving Institute. From this, it is evident that mentoring is pivotal not only in being a recipient of mentorship but also in mentoring others, as it provides women of color with the firm ability to influence and in turn gain validity, which may result in positive institutional changes (Tran, 2014).

Questionable Validity

There is an assertion that women of color faculty spend disproportionate time teaching as well as emphasize gendered racism deriving from white male students in the classroom at predominantly white institutions (Pittman, 2010). Women of color are more likely to face incivility and bullying from their students (Lampman, 2012). Ten Black female and Latina faculty indicate that they have come across resistance (from) as well as degrading and depreciating conduct from peers and students (Sule, 2011). An African American female professor revealed that white male students told her that she did not have a right to make decisions regarding a program; a white female had also told her she did not have the right to judge her regarding her participation grade. This professor concluded that her PhD, scholarly work, knowledge of foreign languages and work across the globe did not matter solely because she was a woman of color (Marbley, Wong, Santos-Harchett, Pratt, & Jaddo, 2011). Similarly, a study of seventeen women of color at a predominantly white institute have entirely at some point viewed their classrooms as oppressive pertaining to their white male students who challenged their authority, questioned their teaching competency, and disrespected their scholarly expertise (Pittman, 2010).

These experiences ensued in negative experiences for female students as well as well since they are subjected to the oppressive behavior due to their gender (and for some, their race in addition), thus while the faculty minority-female may have value in her status as a professor, she still lacks the safety and authority that is expected (Sule, 2011). It would be sensible to discuss this study in further detail as it takes into consideration the harmful effects white male students have on their faculty and female students when they are under a minority-female authority in the classroom. Cultural hegemony is institutionalized when White students privileged is enabled to evaluate female professors without academic departments and universities critically assessing the role that racism and sexism plays in student feedback. (Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011)

Conclusion

To discuss the underrepresentation of women of color in leadership roles in the academy, including the experiences of minority women is pivotal. There is an overt sense of isolation among people of color as well as a lack of services and inadequate representation – additionally, their contributions and work interactions are ignored (Mena & Vacaro, 2017). The literature signifies that women of color faculty are victims of harassment and discrimination, and that the absence of support group negatively impacts them (Duncan, 2014). The processes for the recruitment, promotion and retention of women of color must be streamlined towards creating equal representation. Mentorship is an important element for scholars, especially for women of color when they are so underrepresented. Additionally, faculty have dealt with students questioning their validity, damaging their perception of self-worth and value. A conversation on the discriminatory treatment of women in higher education leadership roles must be guided by their experiences.

Improving Experiences and Representation

The incorporation of literature on successful routes to the representation of women of color in leadership roles is pivotal to this review. The way in which policy is mandated at the institutional level is necessary to comprehend in order to move towards change. One of the most overarching findings which are addressed separately under the second theme of the review is the need for support groups. The inclusion of support groups and related programs are essential to the growth of women of color at the institute. Additionally, restructuring curriculum through the inclusion of female and minority will also be beneficial in improving the experiences of women of color faculty. The representation of women of color in higher education leadership positions can be enhanced through the understanding of the roles or race and gender, the experiences of minority women in the academy and the inclusion of support groups and policies. To successfully investigate the problem of inadequate representation of women of color in the academy, the examination of relatable literature is crucial to structure the review and provide knowledge to the research.

Policy

The most prevalent discussion is that of the lack of institutional support (Brayboy, et al., 2015). In turn, there is an emphasis on the need for policy to address the realities of economic inequities as well as incorporates legal influences in terms of underrepresentation in higher educational institutes (Waldron-Moore & Jacobs, 2010). Reevaluating the way in which individuals are retained and promoted will be essential (Jayakumar, et al., 2009) in reshaping the agents of leadership (Mena & Vacaro 2017). It is important that faculty of color evaluate institutional processes of recruitment, promotion and retention by enabling value and autonomy in the research process (Jayakumar et al. 2009). Hodo (2017) suggests the development for more

diverse communities especially within predominantly white universities, such as funding to host young minority scholars with post-doctoral fellowships as well as changing over the entire administration and appointing more multicultural committed personnel. It becomes clear that in order for there to be successful changes in the underrepresentation of women, an equilibrium between male and female academics as well as minority and white academics must be established at the institutional level.

Support Groups

The value of support groups should not be underestimated. It enables minority women to share and evaluate their experiences in terms of the intersections of gender and race as well as allows them more opportunity to network and connect with others in higher education (Baez, 2000). Support groups can be truly empowering for minority female faculty. These women are able to identify with one another due to their marginalization, isolation and struggles with professional/self-identities in a PWI. The exploration of natural support groups for female minority faculty members are pivotal in understanding the advantages that may stem from them (Medina, Negroni, & Thomas 2016). In the case that support groups are absent, women of color faculty members are isolated and may thus lack support (Baez, 2000). Thus, in order to create an increasingly inclusive environment for women of color support groups and mentoring opportunities must be created, and conduct future research (Mena & Vacaro 2017). It is essential to build support systems for all minorities as a stepping-stone towards inclusiveness and diversity.

Inclusive Curriculum

Despite a student's race, the lack of diverse presence in the faculty body across US institutes negatively affects the student's quality of education (Brooks-Immel and Murray, 2017).

Faculty influence students through provided content and concluded through a study that students in the gender inclusive curriculum had a more positive identification with women than the group exposed to the traditional (hegemonic white male) handbook (Rios, 2007). Improvements need to be made to present curriculum, which indirectly assimilates pupil to patriarchal underpinnings and in turn censor female identity (Thomas & Landau, 2004). Similarly, the diversification of curriculum with the inclusion of race can improve student interaction with, and acknowledgement of people of color (Garhame, 2004). The vast majority envision the ideal professor to be a white masculine man (De Welde, 2017). A problem that derives from this is the innate expectations it creates for students in terms of institutional culture. Curriculum is an important part of advancing female (leadership) (Thomas & Landau, 2004) as well as minority leadership in the academy (Jayakumar, et al. 2009).

Conclusion

When minorities are able to identify with their faculty and other academic leaders, they are better able to freely express themselves. The staff in an institution are an important part of what can make or break student success (Griffin, Bennett, & Harris, 2011). Thus, the fact that female minority staff members in the academy are disproportionately overrepresented in the least prestigious academic departments, ranks and institutions (Jayakumar, et al. 2009) is destructive to students' perceptions of women of color in prestigious positions. While institutional transformation is a slow and difficult process, the alternatives of failing to retain faculty of color and preserving a hostile racial climate are far more detrimental. Understanding the factors involved in presenting such change is the first step in the process of achieving greater equity in our society. (Jayakumar, et al., 2009). While minority women in higher education leadership roles are underrepresented, there are recommendations made in the literature regarding the path

towards increasing the retention, employment and promotion of women of color. Support groups and programs as well as curriculum are essential towards attaining this goal. Additionally, to truly make an impact there needs to be change in the legalities of institutional culture. If academies reevaluate and reproduce the ways in which they employ women of color in leadership roles to ensure full impartiality and an increase of their presence.

Summation

In studying this topic, I will be able to add research to this field as there are few empirical studies on findings in academy, and even less regarding women and people of color (Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008). While there is research pertaining to the lived experiences of faculty, it was particularly challenging to find adequate peer reviewed articles pertaining specifically to women of color in faculty positions across the United States.

It is essential to comprehend the lived experiences of minorities, and females in faculty positions in order to gain a better understanding of their separate and shared experiences, as well as understand their (lack of) representation in academia. Additionally, the retention of minority females, mentoring and questionably validity strengthen the understanding of the experiences of women of color in faculty. For developmental growth towards an inclusive working/learning environment, administration must break the barriers of historically institutionalized racism. The promotion of support groups for women of color may enable access to resources such as mentoring and professional development as well as emotional support. The restructure of curriculum to be more inclusive of minorities and females – especially women of color is necessary to enable diversification in classrooms and across campus.

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