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Women of Color in Academe

Living with Multiple Marginality

Introduction

I recall a personal example of how multiple social identities may shape one's opportunities in higher education. As a woman of color from a "no collar" class (I come from a farm labor background), when first exploring graduate school options I was discouraged from applying to a master's level program in business by an admissions officer. The admissions officer stated that I would not fit. I was a woman, a minority, a single parent, I had a background in the public sector, and I had some but not enough math background. This would make it nearly impossible for me to succeed as others in the program fit another and opposite profile. Although all of this may be true, it did not occur to the admissions officer that this might not be an appropriate state of affairs for student enrollment in the program. It was merely accepted as the way things are and should remain. I remember being struck by the many ways I could be defined as not "fitting" and, therefore, not encouraged and, more than likely, not admitted. I was so easily "defined out" rather than "defined in."

I am now a faculty member at a major research university. My current work focuses on the experiences of faculty of color in higher education. While pursuing this work, I have had many opportunities to interview, converse with, and read about the lives of other faculty women of color. Many continue to speak, although in different ways, about the experi-

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ence of multiple marginality and being defined out. The following quotations from the literature give insight into the lives of faculty women of color, including my own.

Lived Contradiction

I am struck by my lived contradiction: To be a professor is to be an *anglo*; to be a *latina* is not to be an *anglo*. So how can I be both a Latina and a professor? To be a Latina professor, I conclude, means to be unlike *and* like me. Que locura! What madness! . . . As Latina professors, we are newcomers to a world defined and controlled by discourses that do not address our realities, that do not affirm our intellectual contributions, that do not seriously examine our worlds. Can I be both Latina and professor without compromise? (Ana M. Martinez Aleman in Padilla & Chavez, 1995, pp. 74–75)

Ambiguous Empowerment

Readers who have listened to any group of professional women talk about their work experiences will likely find these stories familiar. Like other successful women who work in male and white-dominated professions, women superintendents have much to say about the way they managed to get into such positions despite the anomaly of their gender or race, how they developed confidence in their competence and authority, and what they have accomplished by exercising their professional power. They also talk about various forms of gender and race inequality that structure the profession and how they respond to discriminatory treatment. . . . I study these familiar stories in order to understand how professional women make sense of their—their ambiguous empowerment—in the context of contemporary American culture. (Chase, 1995, p. x)

The narrative data presented here portray the lives of faculty women of color as filled with lived contradictions and ambiguous empowerment. Chase's (1995) "ambiguous empowerment" based on the lives of women school superintendents also applies to the experiences of faculty women of color. Although faculty women of color have obtained academic positions, even when tenured they often confront situations that limit their authority and, as they address these situations, drain their energy. For example, in an interview¹ a woman of color who is a full professor and chair of her department observes:

I'm the department chair, . . . and I meet with a lot of people who don't know me—you know, prospective students and their parents. And I know that their first reaction to me is that I'm an Asian American woman, not that I'm a scientist or that I'm competent.

Statements by faculty women of color typically relay such observations. Unfortunately, the lives of faculty women of color are often invis-

ible, hidden within studies that look at the experiences of women faculty and within studies that examine the lives of faculty of color. Women of color fit both categories, experience multiple marginality, and their stories are often masked within these contexts.² This article seeks to redress such shortcomings by presenting experiences expressed by faculty women of color in interviews conducted by the author and in statements published in the higher education literature. At times I include personal observations. I conclude with a set of recommendations to increase the positive experiences for faculty women of color.

How Do Proportions Count?

To begin, it is informative to discuss the importance and implications of representation or lack of representation within organizations. Kanter's theory of proportions (1977) first made me aware of the potential effects of marginality on social interactions and mobility in a corporate setting. Briefly, Kanter describes the effect of being a "token." She states that the numerical distribution of men and women in the upper reaches of the corporation provide different interaction contexts for those in the majority versus those in the minority (p. 206). For example, women in the minority (in very small proportion) inhabit a context characterized by the following:

- Being more visible and on display
- Feeling more pressure to conform, to make fewer mistakes
- Becoming socially invisible, not to stand out
- Finding it harder to gain credibility
- Being more isolated and peripheral
- Being more likely to be excluded from informal peer networks, having limited sources of power through alliances
- Having fewer opportunities to be sponsored
- Facing misperceptions of their identity and role in the organization
- Being stereotyped
- Facing more personal stress

Those in the majority (in very high proportion) face the opposite social context. They are seen as one of the group, preferred for sponsorship by others inhabiting higher level positions (pp. 248–249).

Although Kanter's work articulates the social situation for "tokens" quite well, she primarily speaks to the situation of White women in an organizational setting. Kanter's argument suggests that those who differ from the norm within the corporate hierarchy encounter a cycle of cumu-

lative disadvantage, whereas those who fit the norm experience a cycle of cumulative advantage. Her theories imply that the more ways in which one differs from the “norm,” the more social interactions will be affected within multiple contexts. Situations in which a woman of color might experience marginality are multiplied depending on her marginal status within various contexts. Often it is difficult to tell whether race or gender stereotyping is operating. When asked if she experienced any barriers, one woman of color in academe, quoted in Hune (1998), responded: “The answer is yes. I think for me personally, it’s hard to know if it’s because I am a woman or because I am Asian, or both” (p. 11). In a conversation with me, another faculty member stated: “Dealing with the senior, [mostly white] males in my department has been a huge challenge. . . . I don’t know if they tend to discount my contributions because I’m new, female, Latina, young, or what. Perhaps a combination of all of the above.” Rains (1999) calls attention to the complexities that daily pervade the experiences of many women of color in the academy (p. 152).

Cho (1996) sheds light on the complexities of defining parity. Her work describes bias suffered by Asian Pacific Americans in the academic workplace even though the perception is that they are well represented and, therefore, successful. She contends the following: (1) numbers showing over-parity in some fields or disciplines mask related under-parity in other fields; (2) over-parity status at the entry level does not mean over-parity status higher up on the promotion ladder; and (3) inferences drawn from an aggregated over-parity status serve to make invisible the varied needs of a heterogeneous population (p. 34). Cho’s work made me realize that drawing a statistical picture of numerical “inclusion” without reflecting on the context of that inclusion and “quality of life” factors paints an incomplete portrait.

Representation and the Creation of Campus Climate

Studies by Harvey (1991) and Spann (1990) further illuminate the importance and complexity of representation in the development of the campus climates within which faculty women of color work. According to Harvey, “campus climate” is a “term used to describe the culture, habits, decisions, practices, and policies that make up campus life. The degree to which the climate is hospitable determines the ‘comfort factor’ for African Americans and other nonwhite persons on campus” (p. 128). In defining the chilly climate within an academic setting, Spann gives voice to discussions by her study respondents (referred to as panelists):

Panelists defined climate as the quality of respect and support accorded to women and minorities on individual campuses and in individual depart-

ments. They believed that climates were created by institutions and could be measured in specific ways, . . . by the number of women and minority faculty members at junior and senior levels, . . . by the social distance between majority and minority group faculty and administrators, . . . by the equitability of work assignments. (p. 1)

Spann's study implies that nontraditional faculty representation within different locations (i.e. junior and senior faculty status as well as administrative positions) in the organization determines, in large part, what her respondents describe as campus climate. Providing support for the impact of social distance argument, Etzkowitz, Kemelgor, and Uzzi (2000) stress that the existence of a "critical mass" (i.e., at least 15% of women in an organization) to address tokenism will not fully address the situation of the minority in an organization. They state that "the precise number is less important than the nature of the response the new minority receives from the majority" (p.107).

Representation and Distribution: Demographic Data

The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (2001) reports that the total of full-time faculty members, including instructor and lecturer, is 568,719, of which 204,794 (36%) are women. Of the total women, 29,546 (14%) are women of color. Table 1 shows the underrepresentation of women of color in the professoriate by rank and racial/ethnic breakdown.

Similar patterns are reported for the Instructor and Lecturer categories, with women of color represented in small numbers in each academic rank. Contrary to the "model minority" myth, women in the Asian category are not the most represented of the faculty women of color. Hune and Chan (1997) note that Asian Pacific American (APA) men rep-

TABLE 1
Full-Time Women in the Professoriate by Rank, Race/Ethnicity 1997

Women Faculty by Race/Ethnicity	Rank		
	Full Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor
Total Women	32,353	43,522	57,354
American Indian	92	145	285
Asian	1,243	1,633	3,113
Black	1,924	2,674	4,288
Hispanic	767	1,088	1,753
White	28,107	37,586	46,385

SOURCE: *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac*, 2001.

resent three-quarters of all APA faculty, and that APAs have the largest gender gap of any racial/ethnic group (p. 57). In the main, faculty women of color primarily occupy the junior, untenured ranks whereas men of color occupy the more senior, tenured ranks. For more information on within group patterns, see Carter and Wilson (1997). The American Council on Education (ACE) data also report lower tenure rates for women of color in tenure-track positions (Wilds, 2000, p. 101).³

Interviews with Faculty Women of Color

In this section I draw from and elaborate on interviews with 64 faculty members of color to analyze the consequences of underrepresentation for women faculty of color.⁴ Four Asian Pacific American females, fifteen African American females, four Native American females, and eight Latinas were interviewed. Most of these women occupy tenured positions; some are high-level academic administrators.⁵ They spoke about the interlocking effects of race and gender bias in the academic workplace.

Manifestation of Interlocking Race and Gender Bias

In general, faculty of color describe racial and ethnic bias in ways that overlap with the concerns raised by women.⁶ Yet the interlocking effects of gender and race compound the pressures of the workplace environment for faculty women of color. They perceive that being both minority and female hampers their success as faculty members.⁷ This respondent talks about being defined out of consideration for an administrative position because she is an Asian female.

A [university administrative] position opened up and there were a lot of names mentioned—it was clear that an active [internal] person would be named. I would hear on the grapevine ‘so-and-so’s’ name. . . . I felt that if I were a white male, my name would have been out there. I mean I am sure of that. But it never was and, you know, . . . there is no question in my mind that race and gender influenced that.⁸

Challenges from Academic Old Boy Networks

Although noted in the literature, I uncovered only indirect mention of challenges from academic old boy networks in the interviews. One American Indian woman alludes to this situation in her comment: “This is hard to believe—for a long time I was the only woman of color on this faculty—for years. . . . This campus is very, very white. Almost all of the Indian faculty have been men.” Montero-Sieburth (1996) similarly states that Latina professors must overcome more obstacles

to gain support for academic advancement, because they are farther removed from the academic old-boy network than Latino or White female counterparts. Although instances of mentorship across and within racial/ethnic and gender groups exists, scarce resources such as tenured faculty positions and chairs of Chicano studies programs can pit Latinas against Latinos. In a similar vein, hooks (1991) states that scholars writing about Black intellectual life focus solely on the lives and works of Black men, ignoring and devaluing the scholarship of Black women intellectuals.

Themes that emerge from the study interviews include: (1) feeling isolated and underrespected; (2) salience of race over gender; (3) being underemployed and overused by departments and/or institutions; (4) being torn between family, community, and career; and (5) being challenged by students. I describe these themes below.

Feeling Isolated and Underrespected

One professor expresses the isolation and the added pressure to perform as a woman of color:

I have to think about the fact that black females or any female in the field of [name] that has been predominantly a white male profession, has a problem. Many [white] females in the college complain about the fact that up until recently . . . we had never had a full professor in [department name]. It's changing, but it's not changing fast. And then you add to that being the black female who has to be superwoman.

Focusing more on slots filled rather than on expertise or potential programmatic contributions are reported by this newly hired faculty member:

This one dean . . . was writing down all the federal slots that I would fit in as far as hiring. . . . And he says, "Okay, you're a woman, you're over fifty-five, you're an American Indian," and then he looks at me and grins. He said, "Do you have a handicap?" . . . These schools have to fulfill these guidelines and in getting me they can check a lot of boxes.

Salience of Race over Gender

Despite shared gender discrimination, women faculty of color cannot always expect support from their white female colleagues. A sense that white women have fared and are faring better than are women or men of color exists. This perception speaks to the salience of race over gender. An American Indian woman notes: "Even the white females they've hired still have a problem with minority students and minority perspectives. This is particularly true in [discipline]. It is really dominated by Western European notions."

Montero-Sieburth (1996) points out that “being female does not necessarily guarantee the sympathy of mainstream women toward them nor does it offer entry into mainstream academic domains” (p. 84). She quotes one Latina professor commenting on an experience with White female researchers: “I was always singled out when we needed to present research about underserved communities or make statements about the Latino population; otherwise, my research was ignored” (p. 84).

Gains made by white women resulting from affirmative action are not reflected for women of color. A report by the Women’s Environment and Development Organization entitled *Women’s Equality: An Unfinished Agenda* (2000) supports this perception:

Although all women benefit from affirmative action, white women have been the major beneficiaries in the areas of education, contracting and employment. Indeed, white women have progressed to such a significant degree in the area of education that the challenge of affirmative action is no longer in college admissions but in graduate schools and in such areas as engineering and science for which the numbers of women are woefully small. . . . However, affirmative action is still a vital necessity in higher education for women of color, particularly African American and Latino women, whose numbers still lag in undergraduate admissions and in all levels of graduate and professional schools. (www.wedo.org/book.txt)

However, as stated previously, statistical representation is not entirely revealing of the quality of inclusion or equitable distribution in higher education even for white women in the academy. Within the higher education literature (i.e., Glazer-Raymo, 1999), exclusion and the “glass ceiling” phenomenon are well documented as affecting all women. Nonetheless, such statistics fuel the perception that white women, not women of color, have been the primary benefactors of affirmative action.

*Being Underemployed and Overused by
Departments and/or Institutions*

Unlike White male faculty members, women of color say they are expected to handle minority and gender affairs, representing two constituencies. An American Indian female faculty member states:

Issues of pedagogy and cultural diversity and gender are not the province of just women or just faculty of color. I think that happens too often and that puts the faculty of color person or woman on the spot, to kind of convince or persuade—be this change agent. . . . The faculty members feel the added pressure, but are caught in a ‘Catch-22’ because minority issues are also important to them.

Mitchell (1994) notes that the small numbers of faculty women of color

compels them to serve simultaneously as a role model for their profession, race, and gender: "The accountability and time demands that the female ethnic professor encounters are especially pressing, given the fact that minority women occupy even fewer positions than minority men"⁹ (p. 387). In retrospect, this African American woman, who did not attain tenure in her first university states: "I am a female and African American. . . . I was doing a lot of things in terms of serving on this board, serving on that board, being faculty adviser for one of the professional fraternities." A Latina notes: "When you are one of three or four Latinos and being a woman, almost every committee wants you to be on it. It gives you opportunities, at the same time, I think, you are expected to do a lot of things not expected of other faculty."

These quotes bring attention to the apparent contradiction and "double whammy" faced by women of color. On the one hand, there is too little opportunity and support for the work that is valued (research) (Fairweather, 1996); on the other hand, there is too much demand for work that is not rewarded (committee work, student club advisor, etc.). In most instances, service does not lead to tenure or to prestigious positions related to committee service, such as administration. Junior faculty members are particularly at risk. Institutional reward systems can deny tenure and security of employment to those who spend more time on service than on research and scholarship, even when the service is assigned to meet institutional needs.

Being Torn Between Family, Community, and Career

Many faculty women of color speak about being "psychologically divided between home and career" or between community and career. They seemingly have two choices: sacrifice family and community commitments for several years to focus almost exclusively on their careers, or honor nonwork commitments, an essential part of their identity, at the risk of not earning tenure. Although policies to accommodate faculty needs for maternity and family leave and childcare are becoming common, little attention has been paid in the academy to minority faculty's desire to contribute actively to their racial or ethnic community (for further discussion see Townsend & Turner, 2000). For example, for many Native Americans, including faculty members (Stein, 1996), "the social value and preeminent goal in life . . . is the survival of the Indian people" (Cross, 1996, p. 335). Similarly, some Chicano faculty "maintain a strong affiliation with their community and feel a strong sense of responsibility to improve the status of other Chicanos in the larger community" (de la Luz Reyes & Halcon, 1988/1996, p. 145; see also Rendon, 1992/1996). For most African American faculty, ties with the Black

community are extremely important partly because of “the African heritage of communalism” (Gregory, 1995, p. 7).

Being Challenged by Students

Faculty women of color perceive that they are more likely to have their authority challenged by students than are White male professors.¹⁰ As examples, consider the following:

If a white male professor says something that’s wrong in class, my observation is that even if the students perceive that it’s wrong, they may say something outside of class, but they hesitate to challenge a 50+ white male professor. They feel quite comfortable challenging an African American woman in class.

Regarding interaction with students, there’s a different expectation for us when we walk in as a minority, they automatically assume that we know less than our colleagues in the same department. . . . It doesn’t matter whether it’s undergraduate level or graduate level. . . . They challenge females more. . . . So, I wear dark, tailored suits and I am very well prepared. They don’t hire us unless we’re prepared anyway, but students think we are here because of our color.

Many women faculty of color are called on to advise students of color and others studying in similar fields. Because of their scarcity, faculty women of color can face great out-of-class instructional loads. One junior faculty member of color describes her experience as teacher/mentor:

As teacher/mentor, the main issue has been balancing. When I first arrived, I was overwhelmed by the amounts of students who came to me to ask for guidance (not always in so many words)—mostly women of color, feeling like most other faculty did not acknowledge their existence. It is difficult to balance this with the research and publication pressures, and course preparation.

Another female faculty member states:

It is hard to say no, especially on minority issues, when there are so few people. . . . I realize how few people are available [to address these issues]. . . . I sit on 53 doctoral committees. Doctoral students take a lot of time for the dissertation process. I turned down being chair of one doctoral student’s committee and she nearly cried. She was a good student studying multicultural issues, but I can’t chair these committees. I’ll wind up spending all my time correcting dissertations and not doing my own writing.

Andrews (1993) describes this situation as an “emotional drain:”

The Black woman professor is often called upon to serve as mentor, mother, and counselor in addition to educator in these settings. The consequences of these multifaceted role expectations by students are compounded by the existence of similar demands placed upon Black women by colleagues and

administrators. . . . If we consider the fact that Black women often also have these same expectations to meet at home, it is abundantly clear that in many cases something has to give. (p. 190)

Cruz (1995) summarizes her reaction to such experiences: "It was not simply that my colleagues and students made me feel different; it was that my difference was equated with inferiority" (In Padilla & Chavez, 1995, p. 93).

Increasing Positive Experiences for Faculty Women of Color

In this section I make recommendations to assure the affirmation, validation, and valuation of contributions faculty women of color bring to the academy.

Validate Service and Teaching

Gregory (1995) recommends the transformation of tenure and promotion criteria by exploring ways to expand the definition of scholarly activity and to place more importance on teaching, service, and curriculum development activities. Baez (2000) stresses that scholars must condemn higher education practices and norms that produce such conflicting situations with differential rewards for faculty of color, especially for minority scholars dedicated to race-based service. Baez contends that "service, though significantly presenting obstacles to the promotion and retention of faculty of color, actually may set the stage for a critical agency that resists and redefines academic structures that hinder faculty success" (p. 363). If service is seen as addressing social justice issues, it can be a source of pride and validation for many minority faculty. It gives them much needed connection with communities of color within and outside of the academy as a whole, which can translate into supportive networks for the individual providing the service. Baez reminds us of the importance and relevance of such service. The key is finding ways to validate it, not to discourage faculty women of color from engaging in it.

Promote Networking and Mentoring

Networking and mentoring are mentioned many times by faculty women of color as key components of individual and group success and progress. Aleman (2000) and Cuadraz and Pierce (1994) identify participation in formal and informal networks as critical to their persistence in academe. Ladson-Billings (1997) speaks about the importance of finding intellectual peers "interested in the issues of race and racism in the same way I was" (p. 57). This Asian American faculty member describes one of her networking/mentoring activities:

I know a woman who's Chinese. She's in the [name of department] so we have no overlap in the field, but I and another woman in my college who's in computer science have sort of taken it upon ourselves to keep her from getting isolated. We're not even in her college, but we have lunch with her—I like her a lot, so she's become my friend, but we started this by just trying to keep her from being so isolated over there in the [name of department]. I feel so strongly about trying to combat isolation. . . . It's sort of hard because we have families but [it is important to our persistence].

Colleges and universities can facilitate opportunities for faculty women of color to get together. For example, colleges can host social gatherings and academic activities targeted at promoting networking among its faculty women of color. Such activities could include: providing seed money for collaborative research of interest to women of color across disciplines, hold national or local conferences with the intent of bringing together faculty women of color, and host open forums that showcase research conducted by faculty women of color.

*Provide Professional Development Sensitive
to Campus Political Dynamics*

Colleges and universities can provide professional development experiences that assist a new faculty woman of color to overcome challenges of multiple marginality. One example from my own experience is the participation in a teaching development program provided at the University of Minnesota. Participants in this program worked in small groups guided by senior faculty members who were recipients of university teaching awards. In my view, the best mentor teachers grasped the need for faculty members to understand the technical side of teaching as well as the classroom dynamics that can take place when a person of color or a woman steps in front of students who expect a White male teacher. Such mentor teachers can help newer faculty to see and address power relationships that may develop in a classroom that challenge the authority and credibility of a woman of color. Mentor teachers can also encourage new faculty members to accept their leadership role as the professor. Participating in such a program can foster understanding of group dynamics in the classroom. It can affirm different styles of teaching, such as fostering collaborative and small-group work. These programs can be used to inform not only faculty women of color but the rest of the campus community as well.

Break the Conspiracy of Silence

Programs like the one described above can help to uncover the challenges faculty women of color may face in the classroom and on campus

generally. Ng (1997) stresses that whether we belong to minority groups or not, educators must “break the conspiracy of silence that has ensured the perpetuation of racism, sexism, and other forms of marginalization and exclusion in the university” (p. 367). In order to address the conflicting and anxiety provoking situations as described in this article, academic administrators and policymakers must acknowledge and come to understand the racial and gender composition of their departments and the effects such composition has on the success or failure of faculty women of color.

Promote a Welcoming Environment

Most faculty women of color contend that a healthy, supportive, rewarding, inclusive environment is good for everyone. Kanter (1977) and others reveal that one crucial component in producing such an environment *is to increase the representation of women of color across the campus*—as students, administrators, and faculty. This representation must also be reflected across student (undergraduate, graduate) and professional ranks (for example, across the faculty ranks of assistant, associate, and full professor). However, Harvey (1991) and others remind us of the critical importance of *developing a campus culture that values and welcomes the contributions made by faculty women of color* to the academic enterprise; that is, acknowledging that the inclusion of faculty women of color contributes to the academy as a whole. Cole (2000) emphasizes this point by stating that diversity—in the people, the ideas, the theories and the perspectives, and experiences and the pedagogy in American higher education—is crucial to a quality education (p. 2). Such support promotes a comfort level that can increase productivity at work and persistence on campus.

Accommodate Conflicts of Commitments

Townsend and Turner (2000) state that institutional leaders must address the challenges and better accommodate conflicts of commitments described by faculty women of color to ensure that these faculty members will stay at their institutions. Specific steps include the following:

1. Identify and acknowledge institutional norms and policies that place women faculty of color at a disadvantage resulting from their family and community commitments.
2. Once these norms and policies are identified, promote the development of new ones that will support rather than punish community and family involvement. Such changes will benefit all faculty who take on a nurturing and supportive role in their communities and families.
3. Include women of color in the identification of problems and solutions.

4. Examine initiatives used by private corporations rated as “family friendly” and evaluate them in light of their appropriateness for a higher education setting.

Internal Rewards and Satisfaction: Contributing to the Reshaping of the Academy

Although confronted by unique pressures, interviews and conversations with faculty women of color reveal the many satisfactions that attract them to and keep them in academia. Foremost among their reasons for becoming faculty members are the intellectual challenge, freedom to pursue research interests, and the opportunity to promote racial/ethnic understanding. The most commonly articulated personal rewards include: satisfaction with teaching, supportive working relationships, and sense of accomplishment. Contributions to scholarship and new knowledge are also important. I will focus here on the desire of faculty women of color to contribute to the reshaping of the academy as described by faculty women of color themselves.

A Sense of Accomplishment

A female American Indian faculty member enthusiastically describes one accomplishment contributing to organizational change and multiculturalism on her campus: “We initiated an endowment to establish an endowed chair for American Indian education, and we managed after years of advocacy to get well over a million dollars for that chair. So the chair was finally established. . . . It will be forever more.”

Aligning Service with Research

Consistent with Baez, I have chosen to consider myself a scholar advocate to alleviate some of the tension between service and research. I conduct research to illuminate issues of access and equity for racial/ethnic groups in higher education. As a direct result of this work, I serve racial/ethnic communities in higher education, professional organizations, and the university with which I am affiliated. I have the opportunity to address students as well as administration and faculty audiences who are interested in implementing diversity within academe. Graduate students and faculty of color, at times, come up to me and say that my work provides validation and support for the work in which they are engaged. From this experience, such service, tightly connected with research, confers needed energy, revitalization, and life meaning for my work. Closely aligning the many tasks in academe has helped to sustain my persistence in the field.

Alignment with Communities of Color and Gender

Professor bell hooks, in a 1995 interview for *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, states that “assimilation, touted as an answer to racial divisions, is dehumanizing; it requires eradication of one’s blackness so that a white self can come into being” (Griffiths, 1995, p. 20). Doing work that closely aligns oneself to communities of color and gender may provide a way to maintain a sense of self as a woman of color. Delgado-Gaitan (1997) describes this process as a kind of dance: “My life has been a ‘TINKLING’ dance in which I have hopped between two clanking bamboo sticks, skillfully avoiding getting a foot severed as I jumped in and out. I have searched to find the space that is a synthesis of my worlds, . . . the ‘borderland’ or meeting ground that synthesizes my identity, experience, feelings, beliefs, and dreams” (p. 37).

Contributions to New Knowledge

Johnetta Cole (2000) asserts that “education promotes critical reflection and stimulates efforts for social change” (p.1). Turner (2000a) and Neumann and Peterson (1997) describe faculty women of color as important contributors to new knowledge in academe. The contributions of one faculty woman of color¹¹ led to the development of research and teaching in areas such as the history of African American women. Many faculty women of color see themselves as reflecting and projecting their realities in the work that they do. As professors they bring their experience and knowledge into campus dialogues in the classroom, in the literature, and in their communities. Faculty women of color provide guidance and support for young women of color who are their students or who are their colleagues in the professoriate. They advocate for the admission of talented women of color into the student and faculty bodies. Their presence encourages others to pursue individual educational goals. Such contributions by faculty women of color are described in the following quote:

The academy is shaped by many social forces. More women of color are defining and redefining their roles within it. New ways of thinking about teaching and research have provided spaces for women scholars to challenge old assumptions about what it means to be in the academy. While both the women’s movement and black [ethnic] studies movement have helped increase the parameters of academic work, new paradigms emerging from black women’s scholarship provide me with a liberatory lens through which to view and construct my scholarly life.¹² The academy and my scholarly life need not be in conflict with the community and cultural work I do (and intend to do).” (Ladson-Billings, 1997, p. 66)

Conclusion

Over the last decade, I have interviewed many women of color who are undergraduate students, graduate students, and who are faculty members. Many of these individuals feel that to succeed in academe requires them to leave themselves, who they are, at the door of graduate education and the tenure process. This loss would be a tragedy for both current and future faculty women of color. Acknowledging who we are and how that affects our approaches to research as well as what we find of scholarly interest may result in a more viable work environment for women faculty of color now and in the future:

Each person brings a unique cultural background to their experience. Who you are shapes the types of questions you ask, the kinds of issues which interest you, and the ways in which you go about seeking solutions. . . . Although doctoral student and faculty socialization processes are very strong, we must not lose ourselves in the process of fitting in. . . . [Also, as demonstrated here,] the backgrounds [faculty women of color] bring to academia need not take a back seat. . . . They can be placed in the foreground of our work. (Turner, 2000b, p. 133)

By bringing ourselves through the door and supporting others in doing so as well, we can define ourselves in and claim unambiguous empowerment, creating discourses that address our realities, affirm our intellectual contributions, and seriously examine our worlds.

Notes

¹Throughout this text I use quotations to exemplify issues discussed. Quotations from interviews are observations made by faculty women of color who participated in a study conducted by the author and Samuel L. Myers, Jr. (2000).

²Even though common themes are noted in this essay, it is also important to acknowledge that all women of color are not the same and that institutions should not expect them to behave as such. Furthermore, women of color have a range of interests and ways in which they choose to contribute to the academy.

³Numbers of full-time faculty in higher education are also noted in the latest American Council on Education (ACE) Status Report (Wilds, 2000, p. 98). These numbers show that women of color comprise 14% of the professoriate, the same percent as reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* for Fall, 1997. Of the total full-time faculty (538,023) in 1995, 187,267 (35%) were women; 26,247 of the women were women of color (14%). These data show that across ranks and tenure status the proportion of full-time women faculty of color is low.

⁴See Turner and Myers (2000) for a detailed description of the study design.

⁵Respondents were located in the biological and physical sciences as well as in the social sciences, humanities, and education. Interviews solicited views on reasons for pursuing an academic career, the pathways that led them to the current position, professional development experiences, experiences as faculty members, general experiences in the academic workplace, future plans and expectations with regard to leaving academia, and recommendations for improving the recruitment and retention of faculty of color.

⁶Respondents of color in the Turner and Myers study (2000) reveal that they face covert and overt forms of racial and ethnic bias. Manifestations of bias described by faculty respondents include: (1) Denial of tenure or promotion due to race/ethnicity; (2) being expected to work harder than whites; (3) having their color/ethnicity given more attention than their credentials; (4) being treated like a token; (5) lack of support or validation of research on minority issues; (6) being expected to handle minority affairs; (7) too few minorities on campus.

⁷Similar results are reflected in *Through My Lens*, a video production by Women of Color in the Academy Project at the University of Michigan (Aparicio, 1999). One featured participant speaks of the intersection of race and gender in the academy: "I think that the university is committed but oftentimes has a hard time understanding the position of women of color, certainly understanding how color, how culture and race, make an impact on one's career is a challenge. And then, understanding how being a woman impacts one's career is a challenge as well."

⁸In the literature, Ideta and Cooper (1999) note that "Asian women leaders seem to live in the confines of paradoxes. As Asian females they struggle in organizations which define leaders as primarily male and White. . . . Behaviors which are typical of leaders (displays of power, authority, and fortitude) are considered atypical for women and doubly atypical for Asian women . . . expected to be compliant and subservient in their behavior" (p. 141).

⁹Padilla (1994) refers to being expected to handle minority affairs as "cultural taxation," "the obligation to show good citizenship toward the institution by serving its needs for ethnic representation on committees, or to demonstrate knowledge and commitment to a cultural group, which may even bring accolades to the institution but which is not usually rewarded by the institution on whose behalf the service was performed" (p. 26). He goes on to state that as long as people of color are scarce, such expectations will continue to be the norm.

¹⁰One White male professor quoted in *Silences as weapons: Challenges of a Black professor teaching white students* (Ladson-Billings, 1996, p. 78) states that students will perceive him as objective, scholarly, and disinterested when teaching issues related to class, race, and gender. On the other hand, minority females teaching in these areas are often seen as self-interested, bitter, and espousing political agendas. His observations mirror comments made by women of color about their classroom experiences (see Committee on Women in Psychology and American Psychological Association Committee, *Surviving and Thriving in Academia: A Guide for Women and Ethnic Minorities*, 1998).

¹¹For the story of Darlene Clark Hine see *Shattering the Silences* (Nelson & Pillett, 1997), a highly acclaimed PBS Documentary. The video portrays the lives of eight scholars of color in the humanities and social sciences, illustrating how they transformed and were transformed by their respective disciplines and institutions. These scholars bring new research questions and fresh perspectives to the academic enterprise.

¹²One of the examples Ladson-Billings provides her reader is the influence the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1991) has had on her work. She states that Collins provides a theoretical and conceptual platform on which she rests her methodology. Collins asserts that knowledge claims must be grounded in individual character, values, and ethics. She further contends that "individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experience" (p. 209).

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