The Trials of Being
Faculty and Staff of Color in Historically/Predominantly White Academic Institutions

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People of color have historically been locked out of academia through means such as segregation, the effects of which can still be seen within the ranks of faculty and staff, today. Often, they are passed over on positions for which they are qualified, and even if they make it into employment, they are still treated as outsiders unless they agree with the dominant group's racial-ethnic discourse, ideologies, and practices. Therefore, this literature review tackles the issue of how faculty and staff of color perceive and experience their employment realities at historically White colleges and universities (PWIs) in Atlanta. The main foci of the review are: diversity hiring practices, the relationship between faculty of color and their colleagues and students, the tenure-track experience for professors of color, and methods to increase diversity in hiring and retention. Significantly, this research reveals ways to open more opportunities for people of color to work in higher education, to create a welcoming environment for students of color who will be able to see people like themselves among the faculty, and to build more diverse institutions overall.

Introduction

As PWIs have attempted to diversify their student body in recent years, the underrepresentation of faculty and staff of color has remained a constant. Numerous studies have been conducted to discover the many ways in which faculty and staff of color go unhired by search committees, despite their qualifications for the positions that they apply for. Other studies focus on what areas faculty and staff of color are concentrated in and why they are more likely to be hired for those positions than others. Most of the bodies of literature discussed focus on the struggles faced by faculty members of color in dealing with both disrespect from students who are unused to seeing minorities in positions of power and colleagues who do little to help the situation by either aiding in student rebellion or participating in their own acts to undermine their marginalized colleagues. At the same time, some of these marginalized professors are attempting to gain tenure at their institution of employment. Therefore, this literature review argues that the aforementioned factors interlock with one another to make both the hiring and retention of faculty and staff of color very unlikely in the current climate of higher education, and that they will continue to do so unless solutions can be found.

Diversity in Hiring Practices

In many ways, attempts to diversify faculty and staff are stopped during the search process. In "New Paradigms for Diversifying Faculty and Staff in Higher Education: Uncovering Cultural Biases in the Search and Hiring Process," Kayes (2006) found that a combination of resistance and lack of race consciousness among White faculty and staff created an environment that was detrimental to hiring marginalized faculty and staff, as the White faculty and staff felt anywhere from bemused about the need to diversify their ranks to outright threatened, which sometimes provoked hostile actions. She goes on to say that "aversive racism" can

obstruct hiring by providing justification in the eyes of the search committee for why a marginalized candidate is not perceived to be as strong as a White candidate, leading personnel at many institutions to make comments about the "lack of competent candidates" from which to choose. This view was supported by Eckes (2005), who conducted a study on the many Supreme Court cases dealing with diversity in higher education. Eckes found that almost none of the cases that were taken on by the Supreme Court had to do directly with the diversity of faculty and staff. Instead, most cases focused on diversity within the student body, and the terms of the court's decisions were left broad enough to allow institutions to use affirmative action under specific circumstances and as one way to alleviate this problem. However, affirmative action was and still is a controversial policy and practice. Mohamed (2010) found that the excuse of not wanting to hire "unqualified" faculty and staff of color led to resentment against affirmative action while the hiring of unqualified White faculty and staff was never raised or addressed. In agreement with Kayes, Mohamed (2010) also discussed how, during her time on search committees, she witnessed marginalized faculty and staff being passed up for positions for either equally or less qualified White competitors, where each time an excuse was made for why the White candidate would be a stronger choice. In all actuality, the White candidate would simply be presumed to be qualified whereas a candidate of color would not be. However, even if a candidate from a marginalized group is hired, issues persist that affect the retention of such faculty and staff.

Student and Co-Faculty Discrimination

Many faculty and staff of color are hired into positions dealing specifically with diversity or minority issues, such as the position of Chief Diversity Officer (Gasman,

Abiola, and Travers, 2015). When hired as professors, many faculty of color begin to face unwarranted hostility from colleagues and students alike. Vargas (1999) examined how the perceived behaviors and attitudes of students toward faculty of color, and especially women, affected the professors' experiences at the college or university. Because they did not fit the "normal" professor mold of being a White male, many female professors of color had a larger gap to bridge in earning the respect from their students. Several of the professors in this study noted that the most negative responses that they received were from White male students but that they also received just as strong rejection from White female students. At the same time, many of these faculty members could not gain support from their White colleagues, whether this lack of support resulted from hostile students' resistance or from the faculty of color being of a different race than their White students. In cases like these, an environment meant for learning becomes a battleground between professor and student based on the professor's race.

Misawa (2015) goes deeper by putting a name—bullying—to this issue reported by faculty of color who work at PWIs. He described three types of bullying: positional bullying by a person in higher power, counter-positional bullying by a person with less institutional power but who is, nonetheless, empowered through social factors, and unintentional, conspirative positional bullying. Misawa's study focused specifically on how these kinds of bullying affected the work of the gay faculty members of color who were interviewed. Among other problems, gay faculty of color reported feeling like their peers see them as incompetent and feeling that their work is being sabotaged by fellow White and heterosexual colleagues. This type of bullying not only led many professors to feel

disrespected by their students, but also to feel unsupported by their colleagues and supervisors. Moreover, if the faculty members happen to be tenure-track, research has found that the resistance they face is likely to be more potent.

The Tenure-track Experience for Professors of Color

The tenure track on its own is a complicated and often confusing process for both people of color and white women. In their autoenthnographies, Jones, Taylor, and Coward (2013) each described the confusion they faced in attempting to find out exactly how they could receive tenure at their institutions. Therefore, when taking into account the previous factors that lead to unwelcoming environments for marginalized faculty and staff, it is no wonder that there are fewer tenured professors of color within colleges and universities. Modica and Mamiseishvili (2010) discovered that Black faculty members were more likely to be tenure-track or in non-tenure positions than they were to be in tenured positions. At the same time, Camacho, Gaytán, and Prieto (2014) investigated the disconnect between people of color earning doctorate degrees within Sociology but failing to gain faculty appointments, despite there being an increase in faculty of color at the assistant professor level. This evidence points to the tenure track being an especially daunting process for professors of color. Diggs et al. (2009) added to this literature by depicting the problems faced by faculty and staff of color within PWIs, including the finding that many tenure-track faculty of color were expected to take on above-normal yet unacknowledged workloads and obligations as a means to thoroughly "diversify" their institutions. These same pressures are not as common among White tenure-track professors.

On top of having hidden workloads, colleagues and administrators may see certain research topics as being less valuable and unworthy of tenure and promotion. Fenelon (2003) described the struggle that faculty of color face in the tenure process by analyzing different reactions to their research topics. Research topics that detailed the lack of diversity within systems or that highlighted racial issues were routinely undervalued and rejected by institutional agents and these same impediments operated in conjunction with oppressive systems that were already in place. This limiting of what professors on the tenure track can discuss and the undervaluation of their research can make some faculty members give up on the process altogether, but there are a few programs that scholars feel may help alleviate some of these problems.

Methods to Increase Hiring and Retention

Mentorship has become a practice that many feel is necessary to increase the retention rate and job satisfaction of marginalized faculty and staff at PWIs. Jones, Taylor, and Coward (2013) all reflected that a cohesive mentorship program would have helped the tenure process by allowing them congress with another faculty member who could relate to their struggles and give them adequate advice on how to overcome them. Griffin (2013) praised the mentors she utilized both within and outside of her institution as positive influences on her tenure track progress, even as being both a Black woman and a librarian attempting to navigate the tenure track created unnecessary stress. She also detailed how isolated and marginalized she felt at the PWIs that employed her before she succeeded in finding mentors for support. Camacho, Gaytán, and Prieto (2014) stressed the need for mentorship programs while also calling for an end to the "post-racial society" ideology that currently pervades higher education and that functions

to justify White privilege. If this post-racial ideology continues to persist within higher education, the dominant White-controlled structures already in place will remain undisputed and taken as the default rather than being acknowledged as a biased, institutional arrangement that privileges whites over other groups. However, these are not the only solutions.

Schwarz and Hill (2010) advocated for a more systematic approach that includes positively influencing marginalized students and encouraging them to apply to certain schools and to follow certain career paths from which they would otherwise be discouraged. Here, a community-wide approach is best to ensure that the doors to employment within higher education are not closed before a student is even out of schooling. And while it is important to encourage potential professors at the student stage, research has also found another positive effect of a diversified student body in higher education: faculty and staff of color are more likely to be employed in institutions with more diverse student bodies, though there is speculation on whether this is due to the large presence of marginalized students or to the concentration of marginalized populations in the surrounding area (Modica & Mamiseishvili, 2010).

However, the onus should not just be on the presence of people of color to solve the current problems. To make the environment a hospitable place where faculty and staff of color are likely to stay, the damaging actions and perceptions of White students, faculty, and staff must be addressed. Kayes (2006) noted that the way diversity training is often carried out tends to involve a more aggressive tackling of the issue, which simply makes White faculty and staff defensive about their ideas and preconceptions. In contrast to this unsuccessful practice that often leads to White resentment about forced participation,

Kayes promoted a program that employs critical thinking so that White faculty and staff are able to discover for themselves what makes the current environment at their institution inhospitable to faculty and staff of color. For example, Kayes's program encouraged White faculty and staff to explore what issues need to be worked out so that search committees do in fact hire more marginalized faculty and staff and so that they can put forth their own progressive ideas on how to fix the system as a whole. Rather than creating resentment towards the very idea of diversity, Kayes's new, collaborative way of conducting diversity training would be more likely to bring White faculty and staff to accept the new programs and to adapt to the needs of faculty and staff of color.

Conclusion

In conclusion, due to the growing diversity of student bodies, the diversity of faculty and staff within higher education is an especially important issue today. Without faculty and staff of color, many students of color are left with a feeling of not belonging in their institutions. Consequently, the institutions, themselves, have to put forth a conscious effort to diversify their ranks, an effort that has not truly been deployed as of yet. Working with White faculty and staff to acclimate them to the idea of working with colleagues who are culturally, racially, and ethnically different from them; ensuring that hiring committees do not pass over qualified marginalized candidates for positions; and adding mentorship programs for tenure-track hires are some of the ways to support and increase the hiring and retention of faculty and staff of color. As for addressing the needs of already present professors in the classroom, including peer and administrative support for faculty and staff of color when students become unruly or disrespectful is key to fostering authority for the marginalized professor and raising credence

with the student body. In all, addressing, instead of ignoring, the inherent biases within the current system and among the people operating within it will work to ensure that those processes are not continued and that employment within higher education makes a steady climb towards real diversity.

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