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Advancing Women In Leadership

## **Black Women in Academe: Progress But No Parity**

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Many women who have been mentored by male scholars that are intellectually demanding, have been told to cut back on some of the time they devote to teaching and service in order to concentrate on research. While well meaning and possibly appropriate, this masculine perspective mirrors sexist attitudes that are prevalent both within and outside the academy.

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When Black women enter the academy they often have a host of potentially rewarding experiences available. What limits those opportunities internal and external barriers? Internal barriers are based on a combination of personal style and perceptions of one's capability to work within the department and college. One woman might hold a well-founded belief that this "parochial, chauvinistic, traditional system has worked hard to keep her out or to limit her involvement and advancement" (Barnes, 1986). Another woman might enter without these preconceived notions and learn to maneuver around obstacles that are placed in her path. Both have the potential to become successful scholars and academics, but the first would be most likely to not succeed because of her preconceived notions, regardless of validity.

External barriers are often described as those that an individual can only exercise minimal, if any, control over (Biklen & Brannigan, 1980). Research on Black faculty women have cited several external barriers which often stifle their success as scholars, such as: 1) undue burdens of non-research activities; 2) ambiguous, inappropriate and unfairly weighed tenure and promotion requirements; 3) lack of access to necessary resources and support teaching and research; and 4) racism and discrimination.

The first possible barrier to promotion and tenure for many Black faculty women are the conflicting and extraordinary time demands placed on them due to their relatively small numbers (Banks, 1984; Gregory, 1995). Astin (1969) argued that "highly educated women often find themselves unhappy and frustrated because of the barriers they encounter in their career development." According to Graham (1973), "when there are but a few women on a faculty, excessive demands are made upon them; not only must each fulfill the usual academic requirement, but she must serve as a token woman on all kinds of committees" (p. 733). For example, Merton (1957) argued that the demands of a particular role may often be in

complete contradiction to other roles. One such example is the requirements of tenure. In many cases, some Black faculty are torn between working to meet the requirements of tenure and advising and counseling disproportionately larger numbers of nontraditional students, as well as other duties, such as committee work (Aquirre, 1992). These activities are often encouraged by departments, but are rarely taken into consideration during tenure review. Furthermore, it often serves to penalize the faculty member for interfering with scholarly productivity (Valverde, 1981).

Walker (1973) described a "double-consciousness among black university professors as they struggle to reconcile the demands of the academic and black communities. Incompatibilities between action-research oriented towards the Black community and the academic research oriented demand by promotion and tenure committees. The double consciousness is reflected in the goals black faculty pursue in their teaching and involvement in counseling black students, serving on disproportionately high numbers of committees, attending black events on and off campus, and maintaining strong relationships with the black community" (p. 69).

Moses (1989) claimed that "because there are so few Black faculty women members...there is a tendency for the majority to see these women as spokespersons for all Blacks rather than as individuals with other qualifications. Black women are often asked to sit on committees as experts on Blacks, and they are asked to solve problems or handle situations having to do with racial difficulties that should be dealt with by others. There is often no reward for this work; in fact, Black women may often be at a disadvantage when they are eligible for promotion or tenure because so much of their time has been taken up with administrative assignments" (p. 15).

For Caribbean faculty, teaching is still a primary work activity for most although research is also required. In this study, Caribbean faculty did not experience as much external barriers as they did internal barriers. None of the 44 Caribbean women mentioned being over burdened by student advising, although 25% mentioned having more committee work than they would have liked. This can, in part, be explained by the following: Caribbean faculty in this study reported greater autonomy in the university; had more dependents living at home which required their attentions; had more opportunities for international travel which precluded them from spending as much time on campus; and had more centralized academic departments which handled many administrative and advising functions faculty women in the states often must deal with themselves.

Many women who have been mentored by male scholars that are intellectually demanding, have been told to cut back on some of the time they devote to teaching and service in order to concentrate on research. While well meaning and possibly appropriate, this masculine perspective mirrors sexist attitudes that are prevalent both within and outside the academy. The advice assumes that teaching, advising, mentoring, service and volunteer activities are not important or challenging, yet no argument is given as to why these activities are not important or even less important than individual research. If institutions are to survive someone must teach classes, advise students, and build community relations. As long as these tasks are devalued and maintained as "women's work," few faculty men will carry their fair share of these activities. One way to change the system into one that truly values women and fairly evaluated their contributions is Boyer's (1990) suggestion to redefine scholarship to encompass discovery, integration, application, and teaching. By doing this we can begin to deconstruct this gendered hierarchy and focus on new criteria for promotion and tenure.

Although many Black faculty women find teaching personally rewarding, as opposed to the politics of administration, unclear expectations of scholarly research, and ambiguous requirements of promotion and tenure are tremendous barriers towards advancement. For example, Black faculty women typically engage in more teaching, advising greater numbers of students, and participating in more committee work than white faculty men (Menges & Exum, 1983). As a result, they may conduct less research and publish

fewer articles than their white men or women counterparts (Moses, 1989). Numerous studies have mentioned that Black faculty often indicate having research trivialized and devalued if it focuses on black issues or issues of a social concern (Exum, 1983; Gregory, 1995; Mitchell, 1983).

Several studies indicate that minority faculty often find promotion and tenure to be inappropriate, unrealistic, or unfairly weighed (Banks, 1984; Gregory, 1995; Ladd, 1979; Lincoln & Guba, 1980; Outcalt, 1980). Some minority and women faculty never reach tenure because they were often caught in the "revolving door" syndrome. This often occurs when faculty members are appointed on tenure track, kept for four to six years, evaluated unfavorably for tenure, and required to leave. This "up and out" process may be repeated at numerous institutions until the individual eventually chooses to leave the academy altogether (Aquirre, 1981; Banks, 1984; Gregory, 1995; Valverde, 1981). For Caribbean scholars who are able to apply for tenure more than once at the same institution, they are less likely to leave after being denied the first time but are at a tremendous disadvantage. In this study, 25% of the Caribbean faculty women had been denied tenure at least once and chose to remain at the institution and try again.

Some minority faculty have reported that majority faculty sometimes fail to recognize the actual quality of their research, and instead focus on their publishing sources (Fikes, 1978). Some minority faculty do not choose to publish in predominantly white journals often considered "scholarly." As a result, many Black faculty have reported that the quality of their research is rarely considered (Sudarkasa, 1987). Furthermore, other reports indicate that research by minority faculty on minority populations are rarely considered 'relevant in the field' or are 'significant contributions to the academy,' and therefore not recognized as a scholarly piece of work (Epps, 1989; Wilson, 1987). For Caribbean faculty women, this was less of a concern because there was a common understanding of which journals were more competitive and rigorous. However, a few women who published pieces on gender development did report experiencing difficulty in gaining the respect of their male counterparts.

In support of this contention, Astin and Bayer found in a 1979 study of active male and female scientific scholars that women perceive to have less control over how work is judged by peers. This can often block tenure for Black and Caribbean scholars, thus leading to greater numbers of Black faculty leaving the academy. Rafky's 1972 research on Black scholars revealed that over one-quarter of Black respondents perceived they were required to have better credentials than Whites to be appointed and granted tenure at most institutions, particularly predominantly white institutions. Blacks at historically Black institutions were more likely to be tenured than those employed at predominantly white institutions (Logan, 1990).

The third external barrier is the lack of access to resources needed for teaching and research and the absence of support groups or formal mentoring. Although, there has been much debate about the impact mentoring has had on career success for both faculty and students, many studies confirm that mentorship and sponsorship type programs can provide greater access to resources for research, advice, and collegial networks, which can often lead to greater academic productivity (Clark & Corcoran, 1986). White faculty men have traditionally benefited from this type of sponsorship, but it has been absent for most women and minorities (Merriam, 1983). Dodgson (1986) has contended that mentoring has often been a vehicle for upward mobility in the careers of women.

Many Black faculty have reported a feeling of isolation. Mentors can often nurture a sense of belonging for minorities in the profession (DeFour, 1990). The shortage of Black faculty women appear to support the need for some type of mentoring and support networks (Swoboda, 1990).

African American women also tend not to be included in collaborative research projects with their peers. Furthermore, they often lack sponsorship and rarely have access to resources for research (Gregory, 1995; Moore, 1981) which can lead to greater prestige, higher future economic gains, and enhanced job

mobility. Women have typically been found to teach more hours on average than men (Austin & Gamson, 1983; Finkel, Olswang, & She, 1994). They also teach mostly undergraduates and have less contact with graduate students and are therefore less likely to be awarded teaching assistants (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Freeman, 1977).

Harvey and Scott-Jones (1985) have argued that often "in the absence of a support group... black faculty members are subjected to the aggravating aspects of the academic milieu without enjoying some of its compensating benefits: contemplation, independence, and social and intellectual stimulation from colleagues sharing the same interests and outlook "(p. 70). ([Author's Commentary](#))

Caribbean faculty women reported receiving greater resources for teaching and research but experienced similar events with regard to the existence of supportive colleagues. As one woman in the study stated, "Being very ethnic, I was often alone. I never had anyone to talk to the way that you would with other colleagues. Being Indian I rarely had anyone that I could share ideas with and whom I had similar experiences with as a woman."

A fourth external barrier is what many consider discriminatory and/or racist practices against women, Black and Caribbean scholars. In 1974, for example, Moore and Wagstaff surveyed over 3,000 Black women scholars working with or in predominantly white institutions. Moore and Wagstaff (1974) found that 95% of all Black respondents reported some discriminatory activity by persons within their institutions. Black professionals from two-year colleges have reported similar experiences. A 1995 study (Singh, Robinson, & Williams-Green, 1995) of Black academics examined gender differences as perceived by Black faculty and found that women faced additional challenges such as racism and discrimination. The study focused on tenure, institutional climate, professional life and promotion and revealed that women were less satisfied with their careers, were subjected to negative treatment and often felt isolated.

According to Clark and Corcoran (1986) many female academics suffer from the "accumulated disadvantage," and whereas others term it "on sex discrimination" in the workplace. Regardless of its name, it is apparent that there must be some type of ongoing social control that maintains differences in performance, opportunities and rewards. Clark and Corcoran (1986) describe a "Salieri effect," whereby women were assessed by a dominant core group of men and often failed to "measure up" because of their social status in the department. The result is less overtly discriminatory as it is insidious because while it allows women to enter the academy, it also severely limits opportunities for development and advancement.

Theodore (1971) defined discrimination against women professionals as "when women of equivalent qualifications, experience, and performance do not share equally in the decision-making process or receive equal rewards, such as salary, promotions, prestige, professional recognition, and honors" (p. 27).

In the academic workplace, Black faculty often encounter prejudice and discrimination which can often create major obstacles to the academic success of faculty (Frierson, 1990).

According to Tack and Patitu (1992), "Black women who have gained access to higher education and higher-paying positions, often find themselves in less than optimal work environments." In addition "the racist and sexist attitudes of colleagues can often result in less than satisfactory work conditions and increased stress in the life of a Black female professional" (Steward, 1987, p. 3). Epstein (1970) contended that Black professional women are caught in what she terms a "double bind" between discriminatory racism and sexism, which can cause tremendous stress for Black women scholars. For example, some women who choose to concentrate on scholarship to further the research of Blacks, often report that the majority of faculty peers and superiors do not consider such work relevant or worthwhile.

In contrast, Leggon (1975) argued that ascribed status (race and gender) is more important and powerful in determining professional identity than achieved status (doctor, professor). This has been the case in my recent experience. ([Author's Commentary](#))

A study from Mayfield and Nash (1976) found that roughly one-third of faculty women perceive themselves to be victims of discrimination in salary and one-fourth discrimination in rank. Also, one-fourth indicated that performance standards were higher for them than their male counterparts. When gender and ethnicity were combined, Black women professors were less satisfied than both White women and Black men colleagues. Caribbean scholars reported virtually no racist practices and only a few discriminatory practices that were believed to be based more on gender and age.

The debate over the tenure system has existed for quite some time, yet little has been done because few viable alternatives have been proposed. In the early 1960s, over 20 states proposed legislation for the first time to reform or abolish tenure for new prospective faculty. The community colleges of Virginia was the only bill which passed of the 20 submitted for legislation. In his book, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), Boyer examined the movement from teaching, to service, to research, and its implications on the roles of faculty. He began by illustrating the renewed concern for undergraduate education, teaching, service, and the core curriculum. He stated: "at no time in our history has the need been greater for connecting the work of the academy to the social and environmental challenges beyond the campus.... We need a renewed commitment to service" (p. xii). Since scholarship is most often the primary requirement for tenure, it is important to explore ways to redefine scholarly activity.

In summary, these four external barriers to promotion and tenure need to be addressed by: 1) revisiting the policies and practices surrounding tenure to ensure that requirements are equitably decided and policies are clear, appropriate, realistic, and fairly weighed; 2) providing rewards structures to encourage faculty success and offer support systems to reduce isolation; 3) ensuring Black faculty women have the necessary tools required to succeed in the academy; 4) providing a conducive research environment by minimizing the number of undue burdens placed on many women scholars which tend to detract from scholarship, and eliminating racist and discriminatory practices.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study began in the winter of 1994 and was based on a 100% sample of the 384 members and associates of the Association of Black Women in Higher Education (ABWHE). The purpose was to survey career mobility patterns of African American women professors from two-year and four-year American colleges and universities. Of the 384 women surveyed, 336 (or 79%) returned the survey instrument, of which 180 were eligible to participate. Of the 180 member sample, 96 (or 53.33%) of the women had remained exclusively in academic employment since completion of graduate training.

Fifty-nine (or 32.77%) of the women had worked outside of the academy since completion of graduate training but had returned and were currently working at a two-year or four-year American college or university. The third group of women totaling 25 in number (or 13.88%) were those who voluntarily left the academy and had not returned. In the winter of 1995, I received a grant to expand my study to include those experiences of faculty women from the University of the West Indies System-Mona in Jamaica, St. Augustine in Trinidad-Tobago, and Cave Hill in Barbados campuses. The study I conducted in the Caribbean differed from the original study because I was able to interview all 44 women face-to-face as opposed to distributing the surveys by mail with the 384 African American women.

## **Framework and Procedure for African American Faculty Women**

The conceptual framework for both groups was based upon a combination of economic, psychosocial,

and job satisfaction theories to determine the effects of race, gender, and ethnicity. The inferential statistical technique employed for African American faculty women in the study was a discriminant analysis applied to the data to determine to what degree each of the designated independent variables would prove significant in predicting the factors which affect the decisions (dependent variable) of African American women professors to remain in, return to, or voluntarily leave the academy. The descriptive analysis included each of the three groups in the inferential analysis, however all respondents tended to fall into two distinct groups; those who were currently working in the academy (remainers and returners) and those who were not (voluntary leavers).

A stepwise discriminant analysis was first applied to the data to identify and select from 21 possible independent variables (salary, tenure status, institutional type, intention to leave, marital status, number of dependents, support systems, external barriers, age, never married, when marriage occurred, education of spouse, employment of spouse, current employment status, job satisfaction, academic faculty rank, recent academic and nonacademic employment offers, type of community, discretionary activities, hours of domestic activities, and hours at work) those with greatest statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) in the decision to remain in, return to, or voluntarily leave the academy. Of the 21 possible independent variables, 5 were selected in the discriminant stepwise procedure and were presented in order of significance ([Table 1](#)).

Those who remained in or returned to the academy represented a total of over 86% of the sample and had two major characteristics. First, the members of this group were successful intellectual African American women scholars. They were most likely to hold tenure (.54 for those who remain and .37 for those who return, as compared to .20 for those who leave), and receive the greatest number of academic employment offers (2.75 for those who remain as compared to 2.39 for those who return and 1.04 for those voluntarily leave) from other four-year American colleges and universities. Because of the demand for these academic women, many tended to have a high rate of mobility as they moved from institution to institution, receiving numerous attractive career opportunities.

Second, these academic women tended to have a high rate of job satisfaction (.65 for those who remain, and 64% for those who return, as compared to 48% for those who voluntarily leave). Apparently, nearly two-thirds of these academic women were happy despite perceived barriers to career advancement, such as limited upward mobility opportunities within the current institution, unrealistic expectations of time to do the work, inability to manage role sets, and other personal factors. These barriers may have influenced some of these women to seek other opportunities. This would suggest that these women became mobile because they perceived the academy as having limited opportunities for advancement. Although they often sought more attractive career opportunities elsewhere, most often accepted alternative positions within the academy.

Those who were no longer working in the academy and had voluntarily left displayed a number of distinct characteristics. They were twice as likely to be non-tenured and have the lowest job satisfaction rate of all three groups. Tenure status for those who left was the most significant of all 5 variables identified in the stepwise discriminant analysis. Those who left the academy were: 1) most likely to hold a non-tenured position; 2) voluntarily leave exclusively from a four-year college or university as opposed to a two-year institution; 3) most likely to receive the fewest number of academic employment offers; and 4) least likely to experience other barriers which interfered with academic career success.

### **Framework and Procedure for Caribbean Faculty Women**

The conceptual framework for Caribbean faculty women was also based upon a combination of economic, psychosocial, and job satisfaction theories to determine the effects of race, gender, and ethnicity. The inferential statistical technique employed for women in the study was also a discriminant analysis applied to the data to determine to what degree each of the designated independent variables

would prove significant in predicting the factors which affect the decisions (dependent variable) of Caribbean women professors to remain in, return to, or voluntarily leave the academy. The descriptive analysis included each of the three groups in the inferential analysis, however all respondents tended to fall into the first group; those who were currently working in the academy (remainers and returners).

A stepwise discriminant analysis was first applied to the data to identify and select from 21 possible independent variables (salary, tenure status, institutional type, intention to leave, marital status, number of dependents, support systems, external barriers, age, never married, when marriage occurred, education of spouse, employment of spouse, current employment status, job satisfaction, academic faculty rank, recent academic and nonacademic employment offers, type of community, discretionary activities, hours of domestic activities, and hours at work) those with greatest statistical significance ( $p < .05$ ) in the decision to remain in, return to, or voluntarily leave the academy. Of the 21 possible independent variables, 5 were also selected in the discriminant stepwise procedure and were presented in order of significance ([Table 2](#)).

Those who remained in the academy represented a total of over 68% of the sample and had three major characteristics. First, they have the highest rate of job satisfaction (.72 for those who remain, as compared to .64 for those who return and .48 for those who leave), achieved the highest academic faculty rank (3.68 for those who remain, as compared to 3.20 for those who return and 2.84 for those who leave), and finally they were most likely to hold tenure (.62 for those who remain, as compared to .46 for those who return and .28 for those who leave). The mobility rate for Caribbean scholars was not quite as high as African American scholars, in part because they have an opportunity to go up for tenure more than once and often have little choice of academic institutions unless they choose to leave the Caribbean.

In addition, almost a quarter of these academic women perceived barriers to career advancement such as personal factors, inability to manage role sets, personal demands of family, and limited upward mobility opportunities within the current institution. These barriers may influence some of these women to seek other opportunities, especially if they are prepared to leave the Caribbean. Although they may have sought more attractive career opportunities elsewhere, most accepted alternative administrative posts or a combination of teaching and administrative positions within the current institution.

Caribbean scholars appear to have higher rates of job satisfaction and are more likely to be tenured but have greater external barriers than their African American women counterparts. Again, this may be attributed to their lack of mobility options in the Caribbean and their ability to seek tenure more than once.

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