

## **Narrated Voices of African American Women in Academe**

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### **Introduction and Purpose**

The literature is becoming replete with studies that address the issue of sexism in the lives of women seeking full participation in the academy (Aguirre, 2000; Finkel, Olswang, & She, 1994; LeBlanc, 1993; Sandler, 1993). Volumes upon volumes record the injustices and frustration women have faced in higher education. There have been numerous reports of wage inequities, vague publishing expectations, ambiguous tenure requirements, limited access to certain academic disciplines, lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, and exclusion from strategic decision-making positions (Burgess, 1997; Finkel, et al., 1994; Warner & DeFleur, 1993). In much of this research, women are classified as a singular group not taking into consideration the impact that race may contribute to any one of these variables if the whole group were broken down into separate ethnic groups and investigated. For instance, based upon the long and turbulent history of race relations in the United States, a person would be remiss to assume historical ideologies (inferior vs. superior) created by a White male patriarchal system have no bearing on the experiences of African American and other women of color in higher education today (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). However, this is not to imply that White female academicians have not suffered because of the system in existence; rather, it simply infers that because of their ethnicity, their academic experiences have not been shaped by the intersections of race and gender as have those

of women of color. It is precisely these overlapping socio-cultural factors (e.g., race, gender) that require an examination of the experiences of African American women to be placed within the proper social and political contexts in which their realities are constructed (Collins, 1990; Hurtado, Milen, Clayton-Peterson, & Allen, 1999).

A number of studies have attempted to explain the status of African American women in higher education. However, what generally occurs in many of these studies is that the experiences of Black women are compared to those of other women, usually White women, to verify whether or not they are meeting some arbitrary standard of normalcy in the academy (Miller & Vaughn, 1997). Naturally, these findings will explain the experiences of some African American women in higher education. However, they are limited in their analysis because they do not take into account the legacy of race and gender relations in shaping the lives of African American women in society in general and in higher education more specifically (Collins, 1990; Gregory, 1995). Furthermore, these studies do not reveal how African American women interpret their experiences in predominantly White institutions, nor do they allow the women to discuss how socio-cultural issues affect their overall academic citizenship. These studies are also limited in their representation because they fail to consider the variation in responses that will be obtained from any two Black women as a result of their individual differences and personal experiences (Collins, 1990; Hurtado et al., 1999), which will ultimately influence how the women respond to interactions in their academic roles (Holmes, 1999).

The purpose of this article is to present findings of a qualitative study conducted to investigate the academic experiences of selected African American women faculty employed by four-year predominantly White institutions. I started this line of inquiry as a graduate student attending a large predominantly White institution. As an African American woman, I was concerned with the small number of African American women faculty I encountered during my graduate program. Of equal concern was the lack of literature regarding Black women in the academy, as well as the substance of the available literature. I was particularly interested in examining the women's experiences within the context of race and gender because extant literature suggests that these constructs shape the academic roles of African American people in higher education (Collins, 1990; Thompson & Dey, 1998; Turner, Myers, Creswell, 1999; Miller, & Vaughn, 1997). The overall goal of the study was to place the women's experiences at the center of analysis and allow them to assist me in interpreting their experiences in predominantly White institutions (Collins, 1990; Etter-Lewis, 1993).

### **Overview of African American Women Compared to Other Members of the Academy**

Historically, only a select number of African American women were permitted on the campuses of White colleges and universities as faculty and administrative staff (Fleming, Gill, & Swinton, 1978). Today, while the numbers have increased in all areas and levels of the academy, there is still a low representation of African American women faculty and administrators when compared to other groups in higher education (McKay, 1997; Turner, et al., 1999).

The U. S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is considered one of the leading sources of available data examining current trends in faculty participation in higher education. According to the NCES records, African American (non-Hispanic) women represented only 2.8% (16,867) of the total 631, 5961 full-time teaching faculty employed by institutions of higher education as of fall 2003, as opposed to 31.6% (199,362) for White women, and 48.6% (307,104) for White men. What does this figure mean when compared to the total U.S. population of 293, 655,404 people? Currently, African Americans represent 12.8% (37,587,892) of the total U.S. population. This means colleges and universities would have to increase the number of full-time African American female teaching faculty by a factor of almost 3 to have equal representation in the total U.S. population. Thus, these comparisons indicate that African American women are underrepresented in full-time faculty teaching positions. The data also indicate at academic ranks such as professor, associate professor, and assistant professor, African American women hold a mere 2.3% (10,445) of the total 452,440 full-time teaching positions, when compared to White men who hold 52.7% (238,224) and White women 28.5% (128,933).

At specific academic ranks, African American women still fare no better. Full professors constitute 166,415 (26.3%) of the total 631,596 regular full-time faculty in academe as of fall 2003. African American women number only 1,916 (1.2%) of the total tenured full-time professors (166, 415) as of this time period. White men account for 110,561 (66.4%) and White women 34,363 (20.6%). If you compare the percentage of Black and White women full professors with White men, gender inequities could explain why there is such a significant difference at the full professor rank. However, when the two groups are separated (i.e., Black and White women), other factors may contribute to the disparity in the number of African American women regular, full-time full professors when compared to White women at the same rank.

Further, because African American women rank lowest as regular,

full-time faculty when compared to White faculty, it stands to reason that the rate at which they become tenured faculty would lag behind as well. As of fall, 2003 there were 299,376 tenured faculty (i.e., professor and associate professors) of the total 631,596 regular full-time faculty in academe. African American women represented 5,257 (1.8%) of the total tenured full and associate professors (299,376). White men represented 178,058 (59.4%) and White women 76,179 (25.4%) of the total tenured faculty (190,031) for the same period. While the numbers start to improve slightly for African American women at the tenure-track level, they are still dismal when compared to White faculty at the same rank. African American women represent 3.4% (5,188) of the total 153,064 faculty on line for tenure as of fall 2003 versus 39.35% (60,166) for White men, and 34.5% (52,754) for White women.

Over the years, several theories have been advanced to explain why such disparities exist in the participation rates of African American women compared to other groups in higher education. Chief among the reasons given is that due to the tumultuous legacy of race and gender relations in America, African American women suffer the “double whammy” of being both Black and female in academic environments that place little value on either trait. As a result of the negativity imposed upon them based on their ethnic and gender identification, some women have encountered acts of race and sex discrimination in hiring practices as well as how they are treated by members of the academic community (Burgess, 1997; Holmes, 2003). Yet, there are those who contend that issues related to race and sex discrimination have disappeared (Wilson, 1989) and who consequently believe that equal opportunity initiatives and affirmative action mandates are no longer needed because the problems they addressed have been resolved. Reinforcing this view, the federal government has removed its backing from many of the civil rights laws passed in the 1960s and 1970s that gave women and other minority groups a chance for full participation in American society in general, and higher education specifically (Washington & Harvey, 1989). Even still, Adams (1983) contended that “such legal reforms did not guarantee change in discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. Both women and blacks [sic] continue to be underemployed and underpaid” (p. 69). For example, one far-reaching belief held by many people during the period of these early nondiscrimination mandates was that large numbers of African American women were hired by White colleges and universities because they helped institutions fulfill the federal government’s affirmative action requirements. Anderson & Sullivan (1997) contended that many people believed that because “African American women [belonged] to two protective classes, i.e. race and gender, ...it was advantageous for

institutions to hire these women to push up their affirmative action numbers” (p. 2). If this assumption were true, current data would verify that there are substantial numbers of African American women in higher education today who entered during this so-called period of “two-for-the price-of-one.” But it is as Anderson and Sullivan (1997) surmised, “a look at the data dispels that notion” (p. 2).

### **Theoretical Considerations**

There was a period in history when educators and scholars alike advanced the notion that women lived similar experiences because of their gendered natures (Bing & Reid, 1996; Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982). Conceptual and theoretical frameworks used to interpret the female experience posited an all-inclusive norm, regardless of the individual women’s ethnicity or culture heritage (Collins, 1990). As a result, the experiences of African American and other women of color in higher education specifically, and society in general, were often misunderstood because most of these frameworks were formulated using White middle-class females as research subjects. Scholars (Collins, 1990; Hurtado et al., 1999) have now concluded that these frameworks are inadequate because they fail to provide an analysis of both socio-cultural factors (e.g., race, class, gender) and environmental influences that shape the experiences of women and people of color in higher education. These considerations must be taken into account because African American women occupy a unique location in society, which means that at times they are confronted by social issues and political concerns that are not shared by White women and men, or Black men. Therefore, Black feminist thought and its evolving epistemology (Collins, 1990; Dill, 1994; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 1984; Ilhe, 1992; Lerner, 1981; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Mulqueen, 1992) was selected as the framework for the study because it takes into consideration the complexities that comprise the everyday experiences of Black females.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990), one of the chief proponents of Black feminist thought, developed a five-part dimensional framework that takes into consideration the overlapping social and political oppressions that African American women encounter as a result of socio-cultural factors that construct a Black woman’s life. Characteristics of Black feminist thought include (1) the core themes of a Black woman’s standpoint, (2) variation of responses to core themes, (3) the interdependence of experience and consciousness, (4) consciousness and the struggle for self-defined standpoint, and (5) the interdependence of thought and action. In this study, the first three dimensions are used as the theoretical lens to view the women’s experiences.

The first dimension recognizes the commonality of experiences that all African American women share as a result of living in a society that devalues Black female identity. A core theme of this dimension is a legacy of struggle that Black women are subjected to as we attempt to maneuver in a racist and male-dominated society. Struggles in the academy may include combating racism, sexism, and negative imagines that are binding and oppressive, in addition to fighting to gain respect as scholars and intellectuals. The second dimension illustrates the variation in responses to core themes that Black women will have based on individual, environmental and social perspectives. It refutes the notion that a collected Black female experience exists, and recognizes that reactions (e.g., responses to struggle) are predicated on a variety of individualized factors. The third dimension posits that as a group all African American women may share common experiences as a result of living in a racist and patriarchal society, however, it should not be assumed that a collective consciousness exists among all women or is articulated as such by group members. This is largely because while all may be Black and female, each woman will have a predisposition predicated on her own level of consciousness and experience.

### ***Participants***

The sample selection was purposeful due to the nature of the study (Patton, 1990). Fifteen women were invited to participate in the study, of the 10 that agreed they represented six academic disciplines from two predominantly White Research I institutions. Eight of the women were tenure-track assistant professors, one was an associate professor, one was a full professor, and all of the women had been at their institution for at least three years prior to participating in the study. To safeguard their identity, program affiliations and institutions are not designated and each woman selected a pseudonym to be used when describing her experiences in the narratives.

### ***Data Collection***

Each participant was interviewed on four separate occasions. The first interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and there were three subsequent interviews of 60 minutes each. An open-ended interview guide was used to elicit responses to primary questions regarding what it was like being female and Black at their institutions, but deviations were allowed to explore questions and others issues raised by the participants that I felt were useful to the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In the first interview we discussed the nature of the study again, and the participants' family background. In subsequent interviews we explored



the participants' growing-up experiences, educational backgrounds, employment experiences, and emergent themes in her data set. At the beginning of each interview the respondent was given an opportunity to read and comment on her personal profile that was forming. In some cases I was asked to delete text that they felt to be too revealing, or they helped clarify incidents for me. The fourth interview was used for member checking. All of the interviews were tape-recorded, then transcribed verbatim for use in the data analysis process. During the course of interviewing I kept a journal to record my thoughts and feelings, and observations of the participants. I incorporated these notes into the interpretation of the data.

### ***Data Analysis and Coding***

Data analysis followed the standard inductive coding procedures articulated by Lincoln and Guba (1985). I used the constant comparative method to generate theory in the study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I started the analysis by reading over each of the participant's interview transcripts just to familiarize myself with the data. The second time I read the transcripts I started the coding. Data analysis and coding occurred in a circular motion, and I used the four-stage method suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990): (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category; (2) integrating categories and their properties; (3) delimiting the theory; and (4) writing the theory.

Furthermore, Guba and Lincoln (1982) have suggested several procedures to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative research design: (1) creditability; (2) dependability, (3) triangulation; (4) confirmability; and (5) transferability. To ensure the creditability of the findings, I consulted with the participants throughout the interview process to verify that my understanding of their experiences was actually how they perceived the experience to be, or that it captured what they had told me. One expert in qualitative research methodology read the transcripts along with me and offered suggestions to help me re-think how I had categorized and/or coded themes. Professional colleagues who were knowledgeable of the subject matter were enlisted to read and comment on sections of the coded transcripts (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). I also used a variety of data sources in an attempt to understand the women's experiences (Janesick, 1994). In this study, I conducted one-on-one interviews, reviewed relevant literature, and solicited documents from the women regarding their institutions' policies and procedures and promotion and tenure requirements. To address the issue of dependability and confirmability, I established an audit trail inclusive of field-notes, interview tapes, coding procedures, an explanation of how themes were developed and

assigned, a journal of my personal thoughts about the research process, the research proposal, and a written case study of my findings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability is contingent upon the degree to which the researcher supplies the reader and/or subsequent researcher(s) with enough contextual data (i.e., thick description [see Geertz, 1973]) whereby it would allow someone else to replicate the study in a similar environment. Adhering to this, I have attempted to provide as much information as possible about the participants and their institutions without comprising their confidentiality that would allow someone to further this research.

### **Findings**

The experiences of each of the women in the study were different, yet there were several themes that emerged during data analysis that provide an understanding of how race and gender impacted the women's academic roles. The categories will not reflect the experiences of each woman who participated in the study. Strauss and Corbin (1990) contend that "occasionally one comes across a prototypical case, one that fits the pattern exactly. However, usually there isn't a perfect fit. One tries to place cases in the most appropriate context, using criteria of best rather exact fit" (p. 139). As such, in the categories presented below, where appropriate, narrative text is used to illustrate how socio-cultural factors influenced the women's academic experiences.

#### ***Race Matters***

A number of African American women who were hired through affirmative action mandates were often considered "token Blacks" in their institutions and did not gain full acceptance and participation rights similar to members of the broader White academy community (Fleming, et al., 1978; Moses, 1997; Washington & Harvey, 1989). When I asked Annette if she knew at the beginning of her employment that she was a targeted hire, she indicated that she did not. She said she did not understand the implications of her employment until much later. The words capitalized are used to capture the emphasis Annette placed on certain words when she described her understanding of her employment status at her university.

I really was not aware that there were hidden agendas when I first went to my institution. I had a true love for my university every since I was a child, and I thought they meant me well. But I truly believe they took advantage of me. I HAD TO BE AN AFRICAN AMERICAN. I HAD TO BE AN ETHNIC MINORITY. I WAS A FEDERAL DOCU-



MENTATION, AND ONCE I SATISFIED THAT, I JUST BECAME A QUOTA FOR THEM. I don't want to give you the impression that my institution doesn't appreciate and utilize ethnic minorities because they have been good to me and for me. But, I think my minority status was misused as well as abused.

Gail also was not aware that she was brought into the department to fill a minority quota when she was hired. She said:

It took me a while to figure out that my being hired was not really on the up-and-up. They [White males] needed me to make them look good. There was a Black guy in the department, a couple of White women, and I guess with me, they could finally say that they had achieved diversity. I didn't realize what was going on until I had been there for about a year, and realized that my being there really didn't mean that they valued my work or contributions to the department. They expected me to shut up and go along with their program.

Annette and Gail's experiences are consistent with other Black women who were hired by predominantly White colleges and universities to satisfy affirmative action mandates (Moses, 1997). Black women were often considered the ultimate hire because they satisfied the institution's need to hire members of targeted minority populations, and their race and gender fulfilled the requirements for two categories.

Iman and Tara, unlike Gail and Annette, knew during the interview process that they were being hired because of their minority status. Iman said,

I started at my institution fall 1993. The first year I was a temporary person, and fall 1994, I became a tenure track assistant professor. I knew that I'd been hired as a diversity appointment to expand the number of minorities in the department. As a result, I didn't go through the whole interview process. The reason they said was, "We know your record, and we need you to diversify the department."

I asked Iman if anyone had come right out in the open and said this to her, or was it simply implied. She looked at me with an incredible expression on her face, and said, "Yes they did. And it's hard because I know the department needs to be more diverse but it's like, can we use some tact here."

The administrators of Iman's department were correct in their assessment of her ability to succeed as a faculty member. She told me, "I knew I was qualified to be a faculty member regardless to how I may have been hired." As far back as high school, she described herself as "a serious intellectual." However, by the administrators superseding the normal hiring procedures, the message is transmitted that her

intellectual contribution is secondary to her racial identity, which is sometimes the perception held by White faculty about faculty of color in White institutions (Anderson & Sullivan, 1997; Fleming, et al., 1978). Turner et al. (1999) contended that White colleagues of faculty of color often “expect them to be less qualified or less likely to make significant contributions in research” (p. 31) because of the hiring procedures used to bring them into the institution (i.e., their departments).

As a result of Iman being a targeted hire to satisfy the departments’ diversity requirements, no consideration was given to the cultural perspective or intellectual thought that she would bring to her new academic department. She said:

While they technically expanded to have me in the department, I don’t think there was a lot of consideration given for my personality. Nor do I think that there is a lot of expansion given for viewpoints that fall outside of the majority—the majority being White male in their early 50s. I’m glad to have been hired because I think it makes a difference for the students in the department. But the fact that I am the first non-White hire in my department since its existence says a lot about the department. And they don’t seem to be aware of the implications of having been all White and mainly male.

Iman was hired for the purpose of filling a minority presence in the department. Therefore to the White male group in power she was a token Black woman, and as such, Iman was considered a “silent partner” in the department. The White males who inevitably would have had to approve her faculty appointment are the same men who would silence her if she attempted to interfere in how they planned to run the academic unit. As a token hire, Iman was expected to go along with the status quo.

Tara, on the other hand, didn’t see being brought into her department because of minority status as a negative. She believed in some respects it was an honor that an institution “would take the time to investigate your work then go after you to recruit you for their department.”

Diversity hiring places Black women in a paradoxical position. On the one hand, it is a significant accomplishment to be employed by a major Research I institution. People outside of the university would have no idea that the woman is a targeted hire; therefore she would be recognized and respected by peers and colleagues outside of the institution as an up-and-coming tenure-track assistant professor. But like Iman, she may be viewed negatively by her department peers who would undoubtedly know how she was brought into the department.

The experiences of Patrice illustrate how resentment sometimes develops between Black and White colleagues as a result of departments

using selected hiring procedures to identify and hire qualified minority candidates for position openings. Patrice said:

I didn't know what it was at first, but I knew something was going on. It was pretty obvious that a couple of them [White colleagues] did not like me because they gave me the cold shoulder. But I thought what else is new. Then one evening I came in late and overheard this guy and girl talking about me. The woman was upset because she felt the department had lowered their standards to bring me in. To his credit, the guy did tell her that that was not true because he had been on the search committee. But you could tell that she didn't believe him and that her impression of me was set. She whispered to him that she knew I was hired because I am Black because she had heard that there was another applicant who had more experience that should have gotten the job. You can't imagine how angry and hurt I felt knowing that she and maybe some of the others felt that way about me; when in fact, I was probably more qualified for the position than the other full professors in the department. We have to be.

Patrice indicated that she was a targeted hire only in the sense that the chair of the department who had been introduced to her at a conference the year before had contacted her and asked her to apply for the position. Moses (1997) contends that because of special hiring considerations some African American women may be "stereotyped, resented, [and] even treated with disrespect because they are perceived as less qualified" (p. 25) than their White colleagues.

The narrative also alludes to the added psychological stress some African American women may experience as they work alongside White colleagues who think they are not qualified for their positions. Patrice indicated that she is angry and hurt that the woman held such a low perception of her; angry because she has worked hard to excel academically. She graduated with honors, had a number of publications when she completed her doctorate program, and had been a professional for a number of years before becoming a member of the professorial. Patrice said, "By the time I interviewed for this position I had one published book and one in press. How dare she say that I got this position because I am Black." Furthermore, she is hurt because she realizes that her accomplishments, no matter how significant, are not enough to change the woman's mindset even when she is told that what she is thinking is not true. In that person's eyes, her Blackness is what has opened the door of opportunity not her credentials. This characterizes the struggle that Collins (1990) contends Black women encounter as a result of issues related to race privilege.

***Split Academic Appointments  
and Dual Roles of African American Women***

When I first started meeting with Annette I noticed that she sometimes appeared to be rushed and in a hurry. I finally asked her what was going on and why it appeared that she was often very busy. She explained,

It's very overwhelming because my time is split in three pieces. I'm 50% in one place teaching, 40% in an administrative role working with college-bound minority students and their parents, and 10% on another special project. And it's tough because I have activities and assignments for all three of them. I also do research and that keeps me very busy; so you see, that's a full load. The good part about it is, part of my research comes from those areas, too.

Rather than spread the responsibilities for minority students across a broad number of people, including White faculty, the minority students have been channeled to the lone minority faculty member. Additionally, a number of the minority students Annette worked with were first-generation college students, which means that the level of assistance she will have to provide to them and their parents could be substantial because of their limited knowledge of entrance requirements.

Margaret and Angela also performed an unusual amount of service for their institutions, which they believed jeopardized their publishing record. Margaret said,

I knew that I was expected to perform some level of service in addition to my teaching and research activities, but the service component became overwhelming. I must have been asked to advise every single minority group on campus my first year. I was also put on a number of department committees, search committees, and university-wide committees. But what disturbed me most was that none of my White colleagues performed as much service as I did. They were smart. They said no and concentrated on their research and writing, which are the things that earn you tenure. But how do you say no when the suggestions come from the dean or your chair. Or, when you know the minority students need your help.

Angela said in all honesty some of the stress she experienced from being visible on campus was because she did not want to disappoint the students of color on campus.

I have a split academic appointment but most of time, I just can't seem to say no when students of color ask me to sponsor them or serve as their faculty advisor. It's only a handful of us [Black faculty] here so I feel like we have an obligation to these students to participate in their activities and serve as a role model. Don't get me wrong, I realize this might kill me in the end.

Annette, Margaret, and Angela are in a catch-22. Their institutions needed the high level of service they provided (Moses, 1997). But they also expected the women to maintain the same level of research and writing as their majority colleagues who probably did not provide the same level of assistance they provided to ethnic minority students on campus. Their high involvement in committee work and service activities are consistent with reports by other researchers who have noted that African American women at predominantly White institutions are often encouraged to participate in a number of campus-wide service-type activities (Turner et al., 1999). The high visibility would have been beneficial to them in some respects, but high visibility often leads to high levels of stress, as well as burnout and low levels of research productivity, which is precisely what happened to Annette in her tenure review.

It is ironic that in times past, the women's racial ethnicity would have been the very thing that kept them out of the academy; now it is the very reason some of the women were hired in their respective institutions (Fleming et al., 1978).

### ***Gender Politics***

Tanya and Iman are tenure-track assistant professors in virtually all-male departments. Iman indicated that there are two other women who have close associations with the unit, but White men dominate the faculty. Her relationship with her department colleagues is distant and she does not feel as though she has any department allies. Tanya also feels as though she does not have department allies and that her being a Black female prevents her from developing mentoring relationships with the White men in the department. Tanya said,

There's this White guy in the department who started the same time as me, and another White guy who was hired the year before us. I may be over-reacting because it is sensitive issue for me, but the support that both of them have received, especially the guy who started with me is a shame. Two of our senior colleagues asked him to be on projects with them, and from what I hear, one even put him on as four author on a piece he was working on. He and the guy that started last year are also working on something as well. How many people do you think have asked me to collaborate with them? Zero! How many senior colleagues do you think have shared any information with me or assisted me in transiting in academe? Zilch!

When I asked Tanya what she attributed her lack of relationship with male colleagues to she indicated that she felt it was because she was female and Black.

I just think that they don't know how to deal with me. You know all

of this stuff that's been perpetuated in the media about Black women being these loud bossy brass things has scared a lot of them. So, on the one hand, they're afraid of me because they don't know if what they've heard or read about Black women is true. And on the other hand, their being White and male gets in the way because all their lives they've been told that they are superior to everyone else, especially women, so I believe at this point many of them don't know how to be just plain old human beings.

Tanya's narrative provides an interesting analysis of why some White men and Black females have difficulties forming relationships in the workplace. The legacy of race relations in the United States compounded by the existence of pressures to maintain sexual dominance precludes some men and women from interacting and developing casual social relationships.

Iman had difficulty adjusting to the expectations of some of her senior-level male colleagues in the department regarding the roles female graduate students and junior female professors were supposed to play in the department. She believed that they were expected to "play suck-up games to get ahead in the department."

I think my experience in the department would be different if I played the little cupie-doll role, or if I sucked-up to people. There's another young woman I know who volunteered with her mentor's kids softball team. I like kids, but I'm not going to hang around a senior-level professor's kids to get close to them. My mind won't even allow me to go there. That's not how I want to be seen. I'd like to have friends in my department, but I'm not going to do any of that stuff to be someone's friend, or to get ahead.

Iman indicated that playing "the demur female" for the sake of getting along with her male colleagues would contradict who she is. She said, "it would almost be as though I were a traitor to myself." I thought it was interesting that she indicated that her mind would not allow her to entertain the possibility of playing gender games to get ahead in the department, and I asked her to elaborate.

I think the legacy of what it means to be Black in America makes it difficult to play suck-up games with White Americans. I know people in my family who had to do it for the sake of their children, to keep their jobs. It's like a sacrifice you make for something explicit, but inside you still have your pride. I feel like I need to maintain my self-respect because that is the one thing that keeps me going. I just can't see myself doing the baby-sitting or things like that [for my White senior-level male colleagues] because there are some things that echo so strongly within me that say, I will not play the Mammy role, or I

will not play the Jezebel role to get ahead. I know what [some White] people think about Black women, and I will not allow myself to feed into their stereotypical images.

These narratives illustrate how the legacies of race and gender relations have impacted the relationships between some Black women and White men in higher education. Regardless of the implications for not participating in the department's politics, Iman in particular, will not participate in perpetuating negative cultural images that demean Black womanhood. The Jezebel and Mammy images were created to de-value Black women (hooks, 1981). The former represented a Black woman who was implied to be unable to control her sexual appetite, and the latter was designed to represent a Black woman who cared more for the needs of White families she worked for than she did her own. The latter also represented a supposedly asexual woman who nobody, particularly White men, wanted to couple with. Both images were created during slavery, and Black women have been trying to live above them in every sphere of our lives since (Collins, 1990; Lerner, 1981). In terms of conceding to gender politics, it may be easier for some White women to play these types of games and still retain their self-respect, partially because the labels and images that were attached to their personification were much less denigrating than those for Black women (hooks, 1981).

For Iman, the primary issues are of self-valuation and self-respect. What you think of yourself is what will be portrayed to others, and it subsequently gives them license to treat you accordingly. The image Iman has of herself is that of a serious scholar, and that is how she desires to be perceived by her male colleagues. Furthermore, Iman indicated that she is conscious of what she does because, above all, she needs to maintain her self-respect. She indicated that it is the one thing that keeps her going. Collins (1990) indicated that in a society that regularly disrespects women, and Black women particularly, it would behoove all women to value and respect ourselves, and demand respect from others, men in particular. Iman believed that her academic contribution should be enough to earn the recognition of her colleagues in the department.

### ***Promotion and Tenure Reviews***

At our third interview session, I noticed that Terah looked slightly upset, so I asked her if there was something wrong. She indicated that she had just had her third-year review.

I just finished my review and it was very stressful. My teaching is considered fine, but I'm not getting the academic publishing done. I'm supposed to get a book published. That means I'll have to go further



underground and just come up to teach my class, and do a couple of other things. Right now I really feel angry that there are not more Black faculty because if there were, not just at the assistant professor level, but people with tenure, then if somebody like me wanted to just sit in their lab and work, they could.

Terah is upset because she feels that if she distances herself from the students in the department, there will be no other faculty of color available to assist them. This is a concern that has been stressed by other women of color in predominantly white institutions (Burgess, 1997). They feel a real or imagined sense of responsibility to assist minority students at predominantly White colleges and universities. Moses (1997) indicated that African American women often find it difficult to balance these competing obligations. She stated that because Black women tend to engage in more teaching and counseling of minority students on White college campuses than their White counterparts, they sometimes do less research and write fewer publications than their White counterparts as well, which hurts them in the long run.

Terah is also frustrated because, having been a minority student on a majority campus, she realizes that minority students need to connect with minority faculty members. She indicated that she knew that she would have to make some decisions in the near future if she intends to remain in her current position. Terah explained,

One thing that I was told during my yearly review was that I should cut back on the service. Cut it out completely. But I have mixed feelings about the recommendation to stop the service activities completely. Obviously they [White Americans in the department] don't feel that service to minority students is a necessary component of my faculty role. But, I think that the service is an important component of my appointment. And unless there is a final push [from the department administration] I'm not going to stop it. I am aware that I am making a choice here, and I don't intend to let my service activity cause me to fail. And I know the greater implication here is that I must decide whether or not I want tenure at all, because if I quit, I'm going to be taking myself out of academia.

I asked Terah if anyone in the department had offered any assistance in helping her succeed in achieving promotion and tenure. She indicated that they had said, "If you ever need anything, we're here for you." Terah indicated that when they said that, "It sounded weird, almost quasi-romantic." She interpreted these comments to mean, "Now leave me alone, because I've said the right things [to you]. In other words, Terah believed that the person conducting her review was saying what was politically correct to say, but actually meant, "You're on you own."

The lack of assistance (i.e., sponsorship) with which Terah is provided by the White senior-level males in her department is consistent with the experiences of other African American tenure-track assistant professors. Burgess (1997) contended that sponsorship is crucial to untenured junior faculty because senior faculty assist them in locating and securing research funding, developing research proposals, and introducing them to members of the old boys' networks, all of which are important for successful movement through the tenure process.

Annette's concentration on the service component of her split academic appointment hindered her from satisfying the department's promotion and tenure requirements.

Doing so much service cost me when it came time for promotion. My main area of deficiency was published research. It's been interesting because when I first arrived on campus, I felt as if I was the university's private documentation for minorities. I was on every committee, council, whatever, you name it. Many times I was the only Black person on the committee and a lot of times I was the only Black at the activities. I became a pioneer, sort of like an ethnic pioneer. So the service component of my professional life far exceeded the other components. But when it was time for my review, the research component became primary. So that's what got me.

Gail was told at her third year review that her teaching was fine, but she might want to develop writing projects with other faculty in the department to broaden the scope of her research agenda.

My chair suggested that I collaborate with other faculty in the department who had established broader research and writing agendas than I had. He felt that they could assist me in developing a more focused agenda. I believe focused that was the word he used. I interpreted that to mean that I either wrote too much about Black issues, or other topics that are not on the A-list in mainstream journals, and that I should focus on appealing to a more mainstream audience.

I asked her why she interpreted his remarks that way and she said, "How else could I interpret them. The other people in my department write about topics that appeal to a White readership. Not a one has ever written anything about Black women or people of color." Gail indicated that the conversation with her chair left her angry and deeply upset because she was not interested in writing about topics that were of no interest to her to appease her chair. Yet, she could not take his "suggestion" lightly either because she recognized the role he would play in her promotion and tenure review.

The issue Gail raises is not foreign to people of color in general and

Black women specifically, who chose to write about Black female issues in the academy. Gail's chair recognizes his position of power and uses it in an attempt to influence her research agenda, which in essence denies her full academic freedom. Turner et al. (1999) contends that the research of people of color is often devalued and discounted by White colleagues particularly when the scholarship focuses on issues of racial and ethnic concern. Furthermore, Collins (1990) surmised that elite White males who are often in control of scholarship production are in a position to suppress ideas that are contrary to their own.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

The narratives of the African American women in this study indicate that issues related to race and gender played a significant role in shaping their academic experiences. It was apparent that some of the women had been hired by their institutions for reasons other than their intellectual capabilities. As a result, they were at a greater risk of not meeting their institutional expectations, as well as burdened with the responsibility of having to prove to colleagues, students, and others members of the institution that they were qualified for the positions they held. Some of the women were unable to develop mentoring relationships with senior colleagues, were often over-extended on committee assignments, experienced isolation and were often undervalued in their academic departments. Overall, their experiences indicate that the legacy of struggle does not discriminate against Black women of varying ages, nor is it predicated on institutional type.

The narratives also indicate that while all of them had experiences predicated on race and gender, how they interpreted and chose to respond to the experiences were very different for each woman. Many reasons could explain the disparity in their experiences (e.g., age, family background, personal goals, etc.), which is as Collins (1990) indicated in the second dimension of her theoretical framework. Responses to core themes may vary for each Black women based on individual, environmental, and social perspectives.

Metaphorically, race appears to be the environmental landscape, the background canvas per se that the academic experiences of the African American women in this study were etched upon. If it is true, as Collins (1990) posited, that the experiences of African American women cannot be understood separate from the historical and social contexts in which they live, then it stands to reason that the experiences of most Black women would have to be shaped and influenced by race relations in the United States; primarily because institutions of higher education are

thought to be microcosms of the larger society, made up of members of the dominant majority and minority groups. Historically, members of the dominant majority were opposed to having African American people in general and females more specifically, as members of the academy. The narratives revealed that some White Americans in higher education continue to create opposition that prevented the women in the study from engaging freely in all areas of the academy. The academic experiences of the women in the study indicated that race is the most salient factor that shapes every experience that the women in this study had.

Furthermore, because of the long history of various forms of discrimination in America against African American women particularly, it is virtually impossible to conceive that traces of deep-rooted sexist ideologies do not permeate institutions of higher education. Continuing the metaphor, African American women in predominantly White institutions are often viewed as charcoal caricatures incapable of making a serious contribution—inaudible, voiceless, silent. The perceptions held by the women in this study indicated that White males in authority discounted their service contributions to minority students, took advantage of their minority status when it was convenient, and viewed them as less competent than other members in the academy. In Research I institutions, promotion and tenure are based upon research, writing, and service. For African American women in White institutions, service is a large component of their activities. Yet, it is held against them when they are reviewed for promotion (Moses, 1997). In other instances, the women were hired by their institutions because they satisfied diversity hiring needs in the department, not because of the intellectual contribution that they would make to the university (Turner et al., 1999). By being Black and female, the women in the study represented a two-for-one hire for their academic departments and administrative units. As such, the women were not recognized by White male power-brokers as having a credible role in the department, and in some cases were seen as voiceless participants (Collins, 1990). These findings suggest that the roles played by some African Americans in higher education are only figurative.

The experiences of the African American women in this study have indicated that race and gender sometimes operated independently, and at other times, collectively, to shape and influence the academic experiences of the women in the study. The manifestation of operation depended largely upon the circumstance or particular situation.

Naturally in a study such as this, it is impossible to explain the experiences of all African American women in predominantly White institutions of higher education. And while these women's narratives support extant literature, they should not be perceived to represent or

explain the experiences of all women in similar settings. Nevertheless, I believe the information provided here to be valuable because it gives voice and opportunity to a growing population of academicians who are still struggling to achieve equity in American higher education in the twenty-first century. To assist toward that endeavor, the following recommendations are provided:

- African American women must become more knowledgeable at the inception of employment regarding activities the institution considers most valuable for promotion and tenure before engaging in significant levels of service activity.
- The narratives of the women in the study included their perceptions of how their White colleagues felt about their presence in the academy. It would be helpful in future studies to interview selected White colleagues of African American women faculty to understand precisely what their actual feelings may be regarding their Black female counterparts.
- To understand more fully the process of promotion and tenure for female African American faculty, future research could examine the women's pre- and post-tenure experiences. This would be helpful because it may reveal impediments created by both the women and the institution during this often-stressful experience.
- The narratives of the women in this study indicated that their respective predominantly white institutions relied heavily upon them to mentor students of color on campus. Yet, it would appear that certain adaptive skills that may be needed to succeed in the world beyond college would be supplemented best by involvement with White professionals and administrators. However, this recommendation does not negate the significant contribution professionals of color at White institutions make to minority students; rather it suggests that both groups are equally needed to prepare students for future success in society.
- To assist African American women in becoming full participants in their academic departments and the community in general, department chairs and senior-level administrators may need to develop support programs for faculty of color. Support could be structured in the form of department and college-wide mentors, professional development opportunities, and community support groups to help the women in establishing professional as well as

personal peer relations. Once established, the initiatives should be periodically evaluated.

- African American women will need to develop strong survival skills if they are to remain psychologically and physically healthy as members of predominantly White institutions. The women in this study used various forms of therapy to manage the stress (e.g., religion, counseling, exercise, etc.) associated with being Black and female in White institutions. Ultimately, the method used is immaterial; rather having a plan in place is more important because the narratives indicated that it was easy for some of the women to become consumed by the events that transpired and the expectations involved in fulfilling their academic roles. For single women in particular, there is a significant risk of allowing the professional identity to supersede all aspects of their personal identity, primarily because there may be no one who will continuously draw their attention away from the academy. Therefore, it may be crucial to establish personal relationships with members outside of the academy who provide needed reality checks.

- African American women must have realistic expectations about employment at predominantly White institutions. The women's narratives in this study, as well as other narratives from extant literature, have indicated that in some instances Black women will need to work harder than their White counterparts to prove themselves as viable and competent professors in White institutions. If they know this prior to employment, then the impact of some of the experiences will be minimized because they will be anticipated events.

- Some African American women will need to be more aggressive than others in seeking support networks in their universities. If support is not available in the immediate department or division, it may be necessary to look for other individuals throughout the academy community who will assist them in meeting their personal and professional needs. This may mean that some African American women will need to be more open to establishing relationships with individuals outside of the Black community.

- African American women should make a practice of keeping a log and/or tenure file over the course of their employment documenting service requested by members of the academic community to be presented as a component of their professional activities in their tenure portfolio.

- Women in general may not be inclined or accustomed to publicizing their accomplishments. African American women in particular may feel uncomfortable because they perceive publicizing their talents, skills, and academic accomplishments as being boastful and arrogant. But a method is needed wherein publications and achievements are shared with the academic community because it will dispel the perception that Black women are incapable of producing creditable scholarship.

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