

Smiling Faces and Colored Spaces: The Experiences of Faculty of Color Pursing tenure in the Academy

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Abstract Through a comprehensive literature review, this article identifies and discusses barriers to recruitment and retention of faculty of color. Marginalization, racism and sexism manifested as unintended barriers are presented as a few of the barriers faculty of color face in successfully navigating the tenure process. Informed by this literature review, we conducted a self-study that presents the experiences of four faculty of color navigating the tenure process in a predominately white Research Institution. The purpose of this study was to share the experiences of three junior faculty of color as they navigate the tenure process, and one tenured faculty of color who is informally mentoring them through the process. This article highlights the findings of one component of a broader study: focus group discussions about how diversity efforts and activities are subsequently evidenced in teaching, research agendas and service. Four themes are presented: Academic Identity; Confronting Diversity, Mentoring, and Safe Spaces. A discussion of the consequences of these findings on faculty of color retention and recruitment is included. Recommendations are made to other predominately white institutions on how to address issues facing faculty of color.

Keywords Faculty of color · Academic identity · Faculty mentoring · Cultural dissonance · Critical race theory

“Smiling faces, smiling faces, sometimes (they don’t tell the truth)...”
The O’Jays

Attending to issues related to diversity has become increasingly important in higher education because larger proportions of American workers attend colleges

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and universities at some point in their career. In addition, Schools of Education prepare teachers, administrators, school counselors and a broad array of professionals in human service fields to work with increasingly diverse populations of students and clients. Recruiting and retaining faculty of color are critical processes in order to achieve these efforts.

Recruiting and retaining faculty of color has been and continues to be a challenge for many institutions. As recently as the year 2000, 5.1% of full time faculty members in the United States were Asian-American; 5% were African-American; 2.4% were Hispanic and 0.4% were American Indian (Turner 2000). Despite the articulated importance of diversity in higher education, the numbers of faculty of color, particularly when compared to the proportion of white faculty in higher education are low (Cross 1991; Snyder and Hoffman 2001; Stanley 2007).

In the extant education literature, barriers to recruitment and retention of minority faculty have been identified. In addition to the traditional emphases on teaching and research, faculty of color are often expected to address minority concerns (Turner 1998) and support graduate students who come from diverse backgrounds. Participation in these efforts is often undervalued in the tenure process. Stanley (2007) described other challenges including marginality, otherness, living/navigating between two worlds and silenced voices.

If institutions of higher learning are serious about recruiting and retaining faculty of color, it seems imperative that more research be conducted in order to learn from the first person perspectives and experiences of minorities who participate in the tenure process. Perhaps we should not wait to learn only from the few faculty of color who have attained tenure; important insights might be gained from those who are currently engaged in the process.

Literature Review: Barriers to Navigating the Tenure Process

While enjoying a general reputation of being open, progressive and democratic, the academy often fails to acknowledge an inability to recognize the injustice (Jones 2004) and subtle acts of racism or micro-aggressions (Solorazano 1998; Solorazano et al. 2000) that are visited upon people of color within the ivory tower. These issues are of particular importance to people of color who enter the tenure track at majority institutions of higher learning. Our review of the literature highlights the work of scholars who have focused upon faculty of color navigating the tenure process and faculty mentoring. The literature provides significant documentation about the ways in which issues of *marginalization, racism and sexism* can be manifested as unintended barriers to navigating the tenure process successfully. Further, faculty of color often struggle with issues of developing personal and professional identity within the academy. Mentoring, opportunities for leadership, participation in program planning and the establishment of a supportive community have been proposed as important supports for faculty of color (Piercy et al. 2005).

Marginalization

Social marginalization (Wirth 1945) occurs when groups of people, by virtue of physical or cultural characteristics, are identified by members of the dominant culture as different from desired or mainstream expectations. This designation of difference can result in unequal treatment including discrimination, exclusion, invisibility and silenced voices for the subordinated groups. When differences are not equally valued, individuals and groups are marginalized.

Minority faculty members bring unique perspectives from their personal and social histories to the academy (McCombs 1989). Yet it is difficult for them to contribute to institutional change as they face tokenism and isolationism which threaten their personal and collective identities. Unlike the privileged experience that white males can generally expect in the workplace, many of the conditions faculty of color can take for granted include low numbers of students of color (Wilson 2002), few role models (Valadez 1998) and less support for their research interests (Turner and Thompson 1993). In addition, professors of color cannot assume that they will have many colleagues of color in their departments, if any at all. What they can look forward to is challenges from students, administrators and other faculty, questions about their credentials or qualifications, and doubts about their ability to teach; accordingly, faculty of color do not always feel safe in the academic setting (Cleveland 2004).

According to King and Watts (2004), African American faculty members face a myriad of challenges within the predominately European American setting. Within the departmental/ institutional culture, the message, “Go along to get along,” is conveyed, yet this behavior “requires such a degree of assimilation that African American faculty may find it intolerable. The alternate options are to assimilate or struggle to transform the culture so that it is less hostile for oneself and for future faculty of color” (King and Watts 2004, p. 118).

Alienation and marginalization are part of the African American experience in majority institutions (Alfred 2001). Verugo (2003, cited in Delgado-Romero et al. 2007) reported similar challenges related to recruiting and retaining Latino/a faculty including: discrimination, low numbers of faculty, marginalization and a lack of status or power.

The Double Bind: Racism and Sexism

Faculty of color have reported that race and ethnicity influence their reception in the academy (Bower 2002). This is particularly manifested when faculty of color teach courses with multicultural content and when the validity or need for such instruction is challenged by majority students, as is evidenced in the student evaluations of courses and teachers (McGowan 2000; Delgado-Romero et al. 2007). Thus, the interests, values and knowledge of minority faculty can work against them as they pursue tenure and promotion. Women faculty of color are often marginalized by what Stanley (2007) has called the Double-Bind Syndrome: “being a woman *and* being a woman of color” (p. 16). Gregory (2001) found that

African American faculty reported more teaching, advising and committee work for African American female faculty than their White male and female counterparts. African American women sometimes find that they have to choose between family/community commitments and their academic careers (Turner 2002). Thomas and Hollenshead (2001) reported that African American female faculty are not only expected to subordinate their social and cultural identities, but to serve as exemplary role models as well. Alfred (2001) argues that African American women find it challenging when their values and ethnic group orientations are not recognized as significant in the academy. While male faculty of color experience alienation and marginalization based upon their racial or ethnic identities, women of color often encounter the additional burden of gendered marginalization in the academy.

Identity

Stanley (2006) suggests that faculty of color can bring multiple identities to the academic table and apply them situationally. She implies that minority faculty can cope with identity issues by being true to oneself, expecting to be the token or spokesperson, anticipating misunderstandings, creating opportunities to educate others about the value of diversity and believing in oneself while finding others who believe in you.

Laden and Hagedorn (2000) suggest that the experience of faculty of color can be understood as two faced, like the Greek God, Janus. The first face presents a smile; faculty of color are content and satisfied with the work and conditions necessary to successfully navigate the tenure track. The second face presents a frown; faculty of color struggle within and against a workplace that values the dominant culture that devalues and marginalizes minority identity and needs. As previously noted, a variety of stress factors have been faced by faculty of color for several decades. Beginning faculty must often juggle demanding workloads such as research, teaching and committee assignments, competition, isolation and lack of recognition (Taylor 1975; Johnson and Harvey 2002). Many of these challenges are similar to the challenges that all faculty face as they pursue tenure in the academy. For minority faculty, however, possessing culture, values and identities that are different than those taken for granted by the dominant culture places additional burdens that are not experienced by the majority. Adaptive responses to these stressors can lead to a sense of alienation (Elkins 1985).

In response to these issues and conditions, the cultural identities that minority faculty bring to the academy can be very important. Some faculty of color may work within two (or more) cultural frameworks that include their home culture and the professional culture of the academy (Sadao 2003, p. 397). Faculty of color are sometimes skilled in “code switching”, which is applying portions of their compartmentalized ways of being and knowing to different situations where appropriate. (Sadao 2003). Unfortunately, navigating two (or more) cultural frames of reference involves time and effort that can tax the psyche and lead to occupational stress (Stanley 2006, p. 7).

Mentoring

Mentoring makes a difference for faculty of color and may be particularly important for minority faculty members working in predominantly White institutions. Faculty of color have reported that mentoring facilitates their emotional, cultural, and social adjustment to institutions in which they often face alienation and isolation (Tillman 2001).

Hansman (2002) suggests that mentoring relationships should not be reduced simply to a single mentor-protégé relationship. Further, mentoring relationships should not merely be considered to be a panacea for the many challenges faced by marginalized groups who enter the academy. Neither politically neutral nor free from power issues, mentoring programs and relationships may actually reflect the power and interests of the organization rather than the interests of the mentors and their protégés. If used correctly, however, mentoring can be very successful.

Singh and Stoloff (2003) argue that cultivation of mentoring relationships between senior members of faculty and faculty of color can lead to the increased retention of minority professors. When Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004), an African American female associate professor and a white male professor entered into a mentoring relationship, they found that both parties benefited from the experience. Not only were they exposed to another culture, but they also challenged themselves to step outside of their comfort zones by engaging in a mentoring relationship outside of their race and gender. They identified six common issues facing academicians involved in mentoring relationships: (1) trust between mentor and protégé; (2) acknowledged and unacknowledged racism; (3) visibility and risks pertinent to minority faculty; (4) power and paternalism; (5) benefits to mentor and protégé; and (6) the double-edged sword of ‘otherness’ in the academy.

The present study was informed by the research literature described in this article. Issues related to academic identity, confronting diversity and faculty mentoring faculty of color were prominent themes. The purpose of this study is to share the experiences of a small group (three) junior faculty of color as they navigate the tenure process and one tenured faculty of color who mentored them through the process.

Perspectives/Theoretical Framework

It has been more than 20 years since critical race theory (CRT) was introduced into education literature. CRT has its roots in the work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman who were concerned that the legal momentum that the civil rights movement had enjoyed in the 1960s, had slowed significantly by the mid-1970s. The foundation of CRT is built upon particular arguments (Delgado 1995) including:

1. Racism is normal, not an exception in American society. It is so institutionalized that it looks “normal” in the mainstream. The regulatory ideal of rules

and laws are constructed as colorblind and thus are best suited only to handle racism that appears to be extreme.

2. An important challenge to racial oppression is sometimes well expressed in the form of storytelling, giving voice to the knowledge and experiences that are often unrepresented in society. The cultural perspectives of subordinated minorities can serve as a counter to the social constructions of the dominant society.
3. Liberal and conservative perspectives on race and civil rights do not serve the interests of subordinated minorities. In particular, white elites allow or promote racial advances for minorities only when they also promote the interests of whites.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) introduced it as a way to begin to theorize on race and to utilize such theory to examine inequality in schools. Specifically, they leveraged CRT concepts to offer three additional arguments that are particularly related to education (p. 48):

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States.
2. The U.S. Society is based upon property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can examine social and school inequity.

In legal circles the tenets of civil rights are rooted in human rights, but that appeal has little traction when one considers that US laws are often about property rights. In education, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggested a similar paradigm: multicultural education that is based in human rights cannot provide redress for a system that is based upon property rights. Critical Race Theory in education was proposed to critique both the status quo (which subordinates minorities) and the so-called social reforms (including multiculturalism). The authors of this article have used CRT as a lens when conceptualizing the study, analyzing the data and reporting the results.

Even as many colleges and universities attempt to be more inclusive (i.e., try to diversify the faculty), the goals, values and structure of the tenure track process do not always fit with the goals and values of people of color. Faculty of color are sometimes confronted with the personal and community “costs” associated with becoming an academic; systemic notions of “inclusion” may place additional pressures on faculty that go beyond the standard requirements associated with teaching, research and service.

Research Context

Four faculty of color at a predominately white university in the western United States engaged in an investigation of their own growth and professional development as university faculty with a special emphasis on the role of diversity issues. The research project explored diversity issues as they contributed to

academic and social activities in the areas of research, teaching, and service en route to obtaining tenure within the Department of Education at Pinnacle University (PU). Pseudonyms have been used in this article to represent participating researchers and the academic setting. Two aspects of this research are important to note: (1) the idea of the self-study grew out of a notion of leveraging our experiences to actually support the tenure track process: if we were going to talk about and deal with these issues anyway it would be helpful to publish; (2) the research was supported by the PU Department of Education in terms of professional, academic and financial resources including a small faculty development grant.

The study included three components: (1) self-study or individual faculty reflections upon how diversity activities inform the pursuit of tenure; (2) individual interviews to document the personal and professional history of participating faculty; and (3) focus group discussions about how diversity efforts and activities are subsequently evidenced in teaching, research agendas and service. The findings reported here were derived from the focus group activities.

The research questions for this study included: (1) What do participants identify as supports for and barriers to them during the tenure process? (2) How do faculty of color process and experience the diversity and equity activities of PU and the Department of Education? (3) How do diversity and equity activities contribute to the professional growth and development of participating faculty of color? The results reported in this article focus on answers to the first research question.

Methodology

Participants

Two female and two male faculty of color participated in this study. Each participant participated in a variety of activities within the Department of Education (DOE) aimed at increasing and supporting diversity within DOE and PU at large.

The four faculty of color who participated in this project included professors representing a range of experience in the academy: Dr. Jordan Mfume [first year]; Dr. Yolanda Abernathy [second year]; Dr. Antonia Escalante [third year] and Dr. Emilio Sosa [Associate Professor]. Two of the participating faculty were African American; two of the participating faculty were Latino/a.

Procedures and Data Collection

Three focus groups with the participants were held during the spring of 2006. A focus group can be defined as a purposeful, planned discussion with a small group of people in order to obtain detailed descriptions of opinions, perspectives and experiences around defined topics of interest (Kreuger 2000). While guiding questions are employed to facilitate the discussion, the dynamic group interaction is a key feature of the focus group methodology. Using focus groups as a research method allowed faculty of color to capture perspectives and experiences at times that were proximate to when they actually occurred. In addition, focus groups provided

suitable opportunities for self-study and reflection, particularly as the participants were focused upon first-person perspectives of the tenure track experience. Focus group proceedings were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcripts served as the primary source of data for the project. Transcripts were analyzed using two qualitative methods: review of transcripts and code-theme generation.

Guiding questions were developed for the focus groups that were related to the general research questions for this study. Dr. Sosa facilitated each group and was careful to use the focus group opportunities to solicit feedback from participants about a variety of diversity and equity events that were happening throughout the academic year, specifically during the spring semester. One focus group was held in each of the following three months: February, March and April of 2006. Focus groups were 60–90 min long and were always held on campus during regularly scheduled group meetings. Participants were reminded about the purpose and focus of the study before each meeting. Confidentiality was discussed and informed consent was obtained before the start of the study.

A graduate research assistant produced transcripts of the focus group meetings. Each individual participant was provided with a copy to review. The transcripts were then discussed briefly by the group in order to verify content and reach consensus that the documents were an accurate representation of the discussion.

Data Analyses

The data collected were coded line-by-line using the constant comparative analysis process (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The process involved reviewing data to compare information among the focus group sessions. The initial coding step involved open coding of words that appeared over and over in the transcripts. Next, open codes were grouped into axial codes. Axial coding involved linking the open codes together. In the final step, selective coding, explicated themes were developed and compared.

Two researchers of the self-study coded the transcripts and developed themes. The first researcher conducted a comprehensive review of the three transcripts, identified codes and suggested themes that would represent the data. Themes were presented in tabular form, including text from the transcripts that represented the themes. The second researcher coded the transcripts independently. The second researcher was used to verify the original coding and to confirm (or disconfirm) themes and patterns that emerged from the data. Once the preliminary codes and themes were established by the two researchers, the remaining participants reviewed and discussed them.

Findings

The Department of Education at Pinnacle University prepares educators and counselors to serve a diverse, urban population. To support this mission, the School has established a diversity plan that includes recruiting students and faculty of color, retaining students and faculty of color, professional development around issues of diversity, a faculty mentoring program and the infusion of diversity issues in the syllabi and curriculum. It is important to note that within the university, the Department has demonstrated the greatest success in these areas; DOE faculty are

the most diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and research emphasis. Though small in number, four junior (non-tenured) faculty of color at PU were well integrated in all aspects of program activities, including: faculty search committees, graduate student admissions and advising; and departmental committees. In addition to formal activities, faculty of color gathered informally at least once a month for coffee or lunch.

This study took place as DOE was in transition from being an environment where there were few faculty of color to one where minority faculty increased by more than 50%. Thus, the findings capture a part of the process of this transitioning to a more diverse workplace.

For the first time, formal discussions about diversity were taking place among faculty in the Department of Education. A professional development committee facilitated focused topics addressing diversity during monthly meetings in the fall. Book talks highlighting issues of power and privilege were organized for 3 monthly meetings in the spring. Although the Dean officially invited and encouraged all faculty to attend these meetings, about 40% (approximately 15–20 faculty members) of faculty routinely participated.

The issues that emerged turned out to be complex and dynamic as minority faculty found themselves working within a system that was supportive, but at the same time distancing. Through our perspectives and experiences we found that attempts to create a diverse environment should include more than events, activities and professional development for faculty and staff.

Eight themes emerged from the analyses of the focus group transcripts including: Academic Identity, Opportunity Costs, Mentoring, Safe Spaces, Frustrations, Confronting Diversity, Coping Strategies, and Systems Change (see Table 1). This article focuses on the first four themes to answer to the research question: what do participants identify as supports for and barriers to them during the tenure process? The findings related to the remaining themes will be presented in a separate article.

Developing an Academic Identity

Participants in the study talked often about their individual identity and culture, comparing and contrasting to the institutional structure and culture. A particular

Table 1 Identified themes from three faculty of color focus groups

Themes	Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3
Academic identity	X	X	X
Confronting diversity	X	X	X
Mentoring		X	X
Safe space	X	X	X
Frustrations	X	X	X
Opportunity costs	X	X	X
Coping strategies	X	X	
Systems change?	X	X	

challenge for members of the group involved locating self and developing their academic identity within and against the existing institutional structure.

The tenure process at PU values teaching (40%), research (40%) and service (20%). Faculty of color shared the PU commitment to increasing faculty and student diversity. They participated in an array of service activities both in support of the DOE and students (particularly students of color). This work included service on several diversity-related committees that planned and facilitated professional development on topics related to diversity. Most of the respondents found the service work to be important and satisfying. Yet, one of the important challenges that emerged from the discussions was trying to balance program needs, service needs and the expectation of research production. This is evidenced by Dr. Antonia Escalente's statement below.

Dr. Escalente: There is a fine line between being responsive to the program needs but at the same time being able to say that research is important. Because (the majority researcher) can say that they are a researcher, but then they leave us (faculty of color) the (diversity) work. If we all say we are researchers, who is going to do that work? "Why do you get to say you are a researcher and not me?" That is a difficult part of the conversation. Because you wind up getting pulled in a hundred different directions and then at the end of the day, you're still accountable to be a researcher, for the products.

The existing University structure and culture established conditions that influenced how faculty of color viewed themselves as Professors:

Dr. Abernathy: But if you don't sit down here and reflect upon your identity, then you will miss out on where you want to go with your writing. And everything should be connected to your identity; so the committees that you serve on, the service that you do, all that should go into the identity you are trying to establish for yourself or how you see yourself. Right now, my identity is changing. All of the assimilation just takes away from who I am, my identity. So I need to sit down and reflect. "Who Am I? What is my identity in this field?"

The development of an academic identity was important to faculty of color. Faculty often spoke of being deliberate and intentional about trying to balance their personal, cultural and professional lives. Faculty expressed tensions between trying to be the same but also different from white faculty. In particular, faculty discussed a desire to represent change in the academy within a professional system that is traditionally resistant to challenge and change. These issues of challenge and change were important, because at the time there was only one tenured person of color on the faculty. This group represented a first generation of faculty of color who were breaking new ground in the Department of Education.

One faculty member spoke of this in terms of being very intentional and public about including cultural background and perspective in work and products. This faculty member wanted people who evaluated the application for tenure to be able to compare and contrast her experience (including her cultural perspectives) and productivity with white faculty who seek tenure. A second faculty member reported

a struggle with finding the proper voice as an academic. As an African American, this person was not sure that the academic writing adequately represented a critical theoretical framework necessary to work for change. Yet another faculty member reported tension between a desire to teach to transgress and still to meet the expectations for tenure.

Dr. Mfume: I'm role playing because my cultural orientation is back home or back at college. So, I don't even accept things that people say. I hear it and I can meet the expectations, but I don't accept that as necessarily representing me or what I need to be or what I need to do.

Dr. Escalante: I want to be a different voice and how do I honor that in the midst of tenure and upsetting folks because most of the journal editors are part of a system that do not want you to rock the boat, don't make people feel uncomfortable. But, if I really do my job and my identity is truly of a professor, being an educator, and making people think, then, that is exactly what I'm supposed to be doing. It becomes a very difficult balance of what to do.

The participating professors saw themselves not only as faculty of the University with traditional duties and expectations, but also as agents of change who would help PU reach its diversity goals. As faculty of color, participants sometimes felt challenged to do important (diversity-related) service work, while attending to the traditional work expectations of the tenure track. This diversity work represented an additional load or cultural tax that faculty were paying in order to pursue tenure. Attending to this additional burden was challenging, particularly because there were few, if any successful models for doing that work. Establishing an academic identity while working for change became an ongoing struggle for the faculty of color.

Maintaining their unique cultural identities and perspectives while conforming to the existing culture they brought to the academy was a challenge for participants in this study. This *cultural dissonance* was also manifest as faculty of color found themselves confronting diversity in the workplace.

Confronting Diversity

The challenge of experiencing cultural differences was thematic in the focus groups. Participants revealed that it was difficult to discuss issues of diversity with white faculty. Faculty-wide meetings and activities (e.g., professional development, book talks) were designed to provide opportunities for all faculty to examine diversity and equity topics tended to be intellectualized and “safe”. Participants spoke of how racial and ethnic diversity were important parts of their identity and experience. Two focus group participants spoke of living and experiencing diversity all of their lives without having an option to pick it up or put it down; they could not choose when or where it would not be an issue; it was ever present. For these reasons, it could be difficult or frustrating for faculty of color to work with majority faculty on diversity topics because the issues were very personal. All faculty of color discussed these and other issues related to confronting diversity in the university setting, including:

1. Preaching to the Choir: White faculty allies were frequently present and involved. Other white faculty who could benefit from diversity training did not attend the sessions.
2. Intellectualizing Racism: Department discussions were organized to be brief and “safe” with little opportunity to get beyond the surface of important issues.
3. Inclusion of Other Disadvantaged Groups (i.e., sexual orientation, different ability groups, etc.).
4. Institutional Response to Racism mostly involves “talk” and cultural sensitivity training.

The discussions about institutional responses and commitment to addressing race and racism were important to faculty of color. Questions were raised about what the goals of diversity and cultural sensitivity were, who the stated goals were meant to serve, where the commitment to diversity was manifested in the Department curriculum, and when the department would move beyond “talks” to systems change. While all students who matriculate in DOE programs were required to take at least one course that addressed multiculturalism in education or counseling, these introductory courses did not satisfy the participating faculty of color. For example, the DOE curriculum does not currently include instruction for students on important topics such as Urban Education, African American Education, Chicano/Latino Education, and Psychology of Racism. How can there be a commitment to “Urban Education” without infusion of these types of courses in the graduate school curriculum?

Dr. Sosa: At times, our institutional response to diversity...it is very easy to talk about cultural sensitivity training or all of this type of training but, the thing is, what is the intended outcome?

Dr. Mfume: Somehow we need to make the connection that the climate issues are directly connected to the history and practices of the institution so that we are not just doing this because all things being equal we should. But, it is because all things are not equal and they have not been equal and we need to say that.

Dr. Sosa: See, one of the things we are talking about is that we never happened to have taken African American studies or Chicano studies. And, the point is, in this department of education, it is clear that there is a need for courses that are more specific, more clearly directed to how everybody learns that History and that knowledge and to really have a better clue or sense of the experience and struggles of people of color and the implications toward education.

Dr. Escalante: What is going to attract minority students? What is going to keep minority students? Relevant curriculum, role models, people they can identify with. So, I think the time is right. So, the way to do it is through the program areas and the time is right.

As they reflected upon their own role and involvement in the DOE diversity efforts, faculty of color were supportive of the DOE, but were also eager to move beyond the “talk” of diversity. These faculty wanted to see more evidence of a commitment to diversity, particularly in the form of infusing awareness and more meaningful multicultural content into the curriculum.

Mentoring

The thing is we have to create our space (Dr. Yolanda Abernathy).

Issues related to developing academic identities and confronting diversity contributed to the relationships that were established between faculty of color in the study. Participants believed that who they would become as faculty in the DOE would be specifically shaped by who they were as faculty of color. This development was particularly important to the senior faculty member who pointed out that in the past there were no groups of faculty of color; the few faculty of color present tended to be isolated. Mentoring and discussions outside of the school environment were important to study participants.

Different aspects of mentoring were discussed by the group. There was some discussion about how a cultural match between mentor and mentored could be nice, but that this was not absolutely necessary. In addition, having more than one mentor was suggested because different people can bring different types of experience, resources and support to the relationship. Mentors who have knowledge of the institution or success in research productivity and other skills that would support the tenure process were valued regardless of racial background. It was noted that unofficial mentors...especially if they are faculty of color themselves...should be officially recognized as mentors in order that they get some credit for the contribution that they make to supporting diversity and equity at the institution. During the time of this study, this small group of faculty of color functioned as a peer-mentoring group.

In addition to the mentoring, faculty of color identified the establishment of a community of scholars of color as an important support for their work. Professional and social supports were discussed. On the professional level, coming together provided opportunities for research collaboration and exchanges of ideas that supported research productivity for participants. On the social level, having a place to meet outside of the school was helpful. Faculty reported that they appreciated being able to have coffee, lunch or just a *safe place* to meet where people could debrief and discuss issues without having to negotiate with white faculty who do not share in the same types of experiences. One faculty member encouraged the group to expand upon the new community of color by thinking about collaboration across program areas.

Dr. Montoya: And, we are doing multicultural work. We've talked about how to create humanitarian moments by just going out to lunch, being people. I come from union people and it is like "Don't meet in the beast!"

Dr. Abernathy: I found this group very, very crucial and supportive this year. Being able to have our coffees and just come here, it has really helped me this year. My experience may have been really bad if I didn't have that this year.

Dr. Mfume: I think of this time as the after party. I'm going to tell you that this process is very helpful to me because what also helps me is I know the after party is coming. Even if [department activities] don't meet what I expected, I know we are going to get to debrief and have another kind of conversation, another time and place to relate to each other.

Discussion

Recruiting and retaining faculty of color has been a goal of institutions of higher education for many years now. Nevertheless, there continue to be few professors of color in the academy. While some research has explored barriers to retaining faculty of color, few studies have focused upon what professors of color experience as they pursue tenure, particularly at predominately white institutions. This study provides some insight as faculty of color reflect upon their experiences.

Several of the themes emerging from the faculty of color focus groups were similar to issues that have been documented in the literature review. Establishing academic identity has been challenging, particularly as we try to operate within the existing professional culture. Confronting diversity in the department has been rewarding, but also challenging as we have encountered barriers to moving beyond talk of diversity. Even as our workplace has implemented a variety of programs, events and activities that support diversity, we believe that the real diversity work must represent more than events and activities; we have been eager for systems change. For example, establishing program content that would help all students learn more about diversity in ways that would inform their teaching and counseling practices would help to change the system. We must go beyond the provision of generic courses in multiculturalism. Finally, informal and peer mentoring were important supports for us as *space* that was created for faculty of color to discuss our feelings and challenges while we made plans to continue their contribution to the diversity efforts of the department. This space is akin to the *third space* of Gutiérrez et al. (1999), in which alternative and critical discourses can transform conflict and differences within a rich environment of collaboration and learning.

Academic Identity

Balancing the academic program and service needs with the expectation of being productive researchers was a challenge for us. While most faculty, regardless of race, probably face similar struggles, the “diversity work” of the department added a dimension of labor for faculty of color. As faculty of color, we supported the diversity efforts in the department but this work sometimes threatened to take valuable time away from other important academic expectations. Several discussions among participating faculty identified this added task and the emotional toll associated with doing the diversity work of the DOE. Similar to what has been noted in the literature, there was tension between becoming successful tenure-track professors and working to help transform the existing school culture (King and Watts 2004). As professors of color, we have constructed our academic identities with this tension in mind. Unfortunately, cultural dissonance between the school culture and our existing cultural backgrounds helps to create issues that are difficult to navigate.

Cultural dissonance can be understood as the discomfort and discord that result from cultural differences. We are aware that we are breaking new ground at an institution that has no prior history of an established group of color. In order to resist full assimilation, we remind and support each other to be very intentional about

creating our academic identities. Not satisfied with only being representative of the traditional academic culture, we try to be thoughtful and deliberate about including our culture and values in our work and practice. The productive faculty of color want their work to be representative of superlative scholarship, and yet still reflect their cultural lens and values. Because there are so few faculty of color who have been successful, there are few viable road maps or models for these types of negotiations. What does it mean to become a “successful” part of a system when you want to be an agent that changes the system? What if a professor wants to teach to transform? Or transgress? We find that we must establish our academic identities both within and against the existing departmental culture.

Confronting Diversity

In the DOE at the Pinnacle University, much of the recommended supports for inclusion and retention have been in place for some time. The Dean’s commitment to diversity was evidenced by an assertive campaign not only to recruit and retain faculty of color, but to provide professional development so that the environment might support that diversity. This kind of support has been previously recommended to support minority recruitment efforts (Adams and Bargerhugg 2005; Turner 2002). In contrast to what has been found in other studies, some of the known barriers to minority faculty retention were not identified in the three focus groups, including:

- Scheduling overload due to new courses and excessive committee work (Garza 1988; Cuadraz 1998).
- Disparagement of scholarly work due to a focus on racial and ethnic issues (de la Luz Reyes and Halcon 1991; Garza 1988; Cuadraz 1998).
- Minimal guidance and mentoring toward reappointment, tenure, and promotion (Padilla and Chavez 1995; Garza 1988; Turner and Myers 1999).

Indeed, the department had both formal and informal mentoring programs that were designed to engage junior faculty in the tenure process, develop collaborations with senior faculty, and otherwise support activity and productivity that would support the achievement of receiving tenure. The literature tells us that mentoring is very important for faculty of color (Tillman 2001) and that the establishment of mentoring relationships between senior faculty and junior faculty of color can increase retention (Singh and Stoloff 2003). Along with the other programs, activities and events, the PU Department of Education appears to have everything it needs to support minority faculty.

Yet as faculty of color, we found ourselves “confronting” diversity. We enjoyed support and guidance from White, senior faculty who had both interest in and experience with diversity and multicultural settings. Yet the faculty who were missing in action during activities and events including professional development around diversity raised concerns. Even with those who were present for the activities, the brief time allotted for explorations (1–1½ h), the intellectual nature of the discussions and the desire to maintain the safety or comfort level of all faculty was frustrating. It was often difficult to meaningfully grapple with important

diversity issues such as the school climate or what it would take to transform the curriculum. Although it was clear that there was some commitment to diversity beyond just “talk” of diversity, we often wondered why the Department was so interested in this topic. What was the intended outcome? If the entire faculty could not move beyond its’ comfort zone to make substantial changes (e.g., classes about Urban Education, African American or Chicano studies, Psychology of Racism), how could the Department make good on the stated intentions? The required classes introducing multiculturalism are necessary, but not sufficient if teachers and counselors are to be prepared for working with the diversity present in urban environments.

Within this context, we are continually challenged to find and use our voices. The conversations we have about these issues when we, as faculty of color, come together are different than the ones that we have in mixed company and in public space. As faculty of color, how can we constructively critique the status quo from our minority perspectives in a way that allows majority faculty to be comfortable? How much do we even care that majority faculty maintain their comfort zone? If we want to represent voices that are in concert with our cultural perspectives, how do we do this safely without offending our majority peers?

We have not yet found answers to the types of questions that were raised in our reflections, but we continue to negotiate these issues. What we have concluded is that the administrative commitment (Turner 2002), provision of programs and activities around diversity and even professional mentoring (Tillman 2001) are necessary but are not sufficient supports for faculty of color. For us, confronting diversity means working for change.

As a result of this struggle, this “balancing” act, the description of a two-faced existence (Laden and Hagedorn 2000) resonates with us. In public, we smile and work with enthusiasm in order to get the diversity work done and help majority faculty feel comfortable as we tackle the important (sometimes conflicting) issues and interests. But the public, smiling faces do not usually represent the breadth and depth of our experiences. Because this work is important, we often put on our game face as we confront issues of diversity in the university setting.

These issues related to establishing an academic identity and confronting issues of diversity in the academic workplace create additional burdens on faculty of color that majority faculty may be unfamiliar with. These can result in tension, because some faculty of color may be taking significant amounts of time to negotiate them, while still having to meet the traditional expectations of the academy: excellence in teaching, production of published research and service to a community of scholars. If responsibility for helping to prepare the academic environment for “diversity” is added, the combination should be considered as a barrier to success in the tenure process. This is of particular concern when there are few tenured faculty of color and few models for successful faculty integration. This dynamic of taxation without representation should be considered when institutions and administrators endeavor to recruit and retain faculty of color. One useful support that can help faculty of color cope with additional burden is mentoring and networking, especially among the available faculty of color.

Mentoring (A Colored Space)

While we found that a variety of mentoring programs and activities were vital to our professional and social development as scholars, this finding is not particularly new. What was striking for us was that the informal mentoring, which was organized by a senior faculty member, turned out to be one of the most frequently identified sources of support. The group relationship evolved from a social support, to one that encouraged us to use our experiences to inform our practice, to that of a study group that was organized to document the process of becoming tenured faculty of color. The mentoring also evolved from an informal group to one that is now formally recognized by ourselves, our peers and the DOE.

Most importantly, however, the mentoring activities helped to establish a safe place where faculty of color could meet. We appreciated the support that came from sharing our perspectives related to experiences within the school; where we could share our smiles and frowns in a safe environment. Notably, the safe place was a *colored space*; a space where minority faculty could relate to one another beyond the scrutiny of the dominant culture or the shackles of mainstream expectations. This space was important because it provided an opportunity to locate ourselves within the school diversity efforts, while helping us to analyze and make sense of the diversity process. As previously noted, the conversations in the colored space were very different from the conversations in the integrated spaces. There was some consensus around the notion that the experience would be very different without having that space.

The After Party

During the 1960s–1990s as African Americans began to work and socialize with white people, they had the occasion to participate in integrated parties. Often, African Americans had to maintain their public face at the party; socializing and attending to the same mainstream expectations that were prevalent in the workspace. The after party was organized as a smaller, more intimate gathering of people with shared (non-dominant) identities or shared frames of reference, a more relaxed setting where people could let their hair down or otherwise be “real.”

The value of the colored mentoring space has been important to our personal and professional development. Because the professional, academic culture (The Party) tends to be organized in ways that privilege white, mainstream culture while marginalizing other ways of being and knowing, we could find ways to cope with The Party; we could look forward to gathering in our space for debriefing outside of the mainstream practices (The After-Party). We were fortunate to have at least one tenured faculty of color who could provide mentoring and other supports in these settings.

In this manner, mentoring and networking in a colored space adds a different flavor to the extant literature which has already touted mentoring as an important support for faculty of color. We find that traditional approaches to faculty mentoring, which emphasize academic productivity and orientation to the school culture, remain as important supports. However, the creation of space for faculty of

color to learn, think, socialize and process the academic environment among themselves may be worth considering in places where efforts to recruit and retain faculty of color are valued.

Conclusions

On Applying Critical Race Theory in Research on Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggested that CRT can be used to examine lasting inequalities that exist in schools. The use of storytelling, interviews and focus groups can introduce voices and experiences that are traditionally unrepresented in education literature. It has been argued that these subordinated voices can establish counter-narratives that can be contrasted to mainstream social constructions.

An important challenge to racial oppression is sometimes well expressed in the form of storytelling, giving voice to knowledge and experiences that are often unrepresented both in the academy and the larger society. This lack of representation is not accidental; the traditional spaces are structured in ways that limit the cultural ways of living, being and knowing of some faculty of color. With this in mind, the authors created a research protocol that was designed to capture and represent our voices as part of our journey on the tenure track.

The selected process and methodology was strategic and served at least two purposes. First, since we were involved in the service of diversity efforts as part of our professional work, why not leverage that (undervalued) time to support our research productivity? Second, the experiences and perspectives of faculty of color who have not yet achieved tenure might provide additional insights for mainstream faculty and administrators in higher education who seek to diversify their environments. Towards these goals, we hoped to develop a critical race process (including self-study and storytelling) that would support our scholarship. We found that we could not wait for these perspectives to show up in the education literature years from now.

On Commitments to Diversity

Our research supports prior work indicating that a commitment to diversity should attend to both the intellectual and emotional interests of faculty of color (Fries-Britt and Kelly 2005). We also add our voices to those who have suggested that the transition to a diverse workplace can be dynamic; the process must include more than programs, activities and policies (Delgado-Romero et al. 2007) and attend to the tension between institutional values and the values minority faculty bring to the academy. In our case, we were fortunate to be situated in an environment that was well involved in providing leadership and devoting resources to the goals of increasing diversity, providing diversity-related professional development for faculty and infusing diversity issues into the graduate school curricula. Nevertheless, the process of establishing our academic identities and confronting diversity issues was not always satisfying. We were often eager to do more or expected that

the institution and department would do more to demonstrate a deeper commitment to diversity. Beyond the intellectual challenges that we faced when participating in the diversity efforts, the emotional costs of participating were also challenging. These experiences may be important. They suggest that administrators and faculty who are interested in sustaining diversity efforts may need to debrief or more directly communicate with faculty of color about their perceptions and experiences around the local diversity efforts. Evaluations of “success” or “progress” towards diversity goals may be different for administrators, mainstream faculty and faculty of color. Administrators and Deans in Higher Education Institutions should consider debriefing faculty of color around issues related to the social climate of the environment. One should not take for granted that the public face of faculty of color tells the whole story of their experiences. Without an intentional, proactive approach to probe for existing challenges, feelings of marginalization, emotional costs and frustration may go unnoticed.

On Mentoring and “Colored Spaces”

Predominately White Institutions have not yet realized their goals of recruiting and retaining faculty of color in meaningful numbers. More exploration of colored spaces created as part of a mentoring process for minority faculty is suggested. Because there are so few senior faculty of color (tenured professors) and junior faculty of color, research on these spaces may be difficult to complete. However, these kinds of spaces may be of particular importance for faculty who feel that they have to present the smiling face in the public academy while pursuing tenure.

We valued a broad array of the formal mentoring structures and activities that were provided by the institution. Racial, gendered or cultural matches were not always available, but we did not find that to be a challenge for our work or professional relationships at the institution. The formal, institutional mentoring programs at Pinnacle University were well established and designed to help all faculty be productive and successful in their efforts to attain tenure. Indeed, PU provided a small faculty development grant that supported the research reported in this article. As a result, we were able to use our identities and experiences for our own professional and intellectual development including the study and application of Critical Race Theory (particularly the use of storytelling as scholarship), developing manuscripts for publication and the opportunities to present our findings at conferences. In this manner, we believe that we leverage our intellectual and emotional experiences for being productive in our pursuit of tenure. As noted in the extant literature, formal mentoring programs and activities are valuable supports for faculty of color.

However, the informal mentoring and collaboration that occurred was also very important to our professional development. This “colored space” was initially created by the most senior faculty of color. But it soon expanded to provide a variety of professional and social supports. We cannot suggest that the establishment of “colored spaces” is essential to all academic environments having an interest in increasing and supporting diversity. It should also be noted that not all faculty of color will need or be interested in these kinds of spaces and supports. We do

believe, however, that the potential of these spaces should be considered and supported if they emerge. The unofficial, informal space allows faculty of color to be “real”; to express themselves, share experiences and perspectives and vent and support each other in (cultural) ways that are not necessarily safe in the official, formal workplace. The existence of spaces such as these may help faculty of color cope with frustrations with the environment or school climate. This may, in turn, support both recruiting and retention efforts aimed at diversifying the academy.

In summary, minority faculty members often bring more to the academic environment than various shades and colors. If institutional commitments to recruiting and retaining diversity are to be successful, such efforts should consider what it means for faculty of color to develop their professional identities within a traditional, white environment.

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