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# **Sensitizing Student Teachers on Majority White Campuses to the Experiences of Minority Students**

**Faye Hicks Townes**

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**Interviews of twelve low-income and working class Black females attending a majority White high school are used to discuss implications for teacher education in predominantly white institutions of higher learning.**

Schools are influential in American society. They reflect the values and traditions of our society. They also reflect injustices in a social system stratified by class, ethnicity and gender.

The findings of a study of the experiences of working class and poor Black females in a majority White working class school will be used as the basis for discussion. Qualitative research methods were used in the form of in-depth interviews with twelve high school students. Three major themes emerged from the data: (1) marginalization, (2) harassment, and (3) determination. Marginalization, social and academic, were limited to Black females' full participation in the school community. Additionally, the extent and types of harassment experienced were related to the social class of the participant. Finally, the determination shown by participants as they sought to succeed demonstrated the value they placed on education.

The theme of marginalization will be used to explore how the policy and programs of colleges of education in majority White institutions address the issue of inclusion as it relates to preparing future teachers. Specifically, are we training future teachers to be sensitive to marginalized students? The young women in this study felt excluded academically and socially. As America's teaching force becomes more and more White and female, our students are becoming more and more ethnically diverse. Experiences within teacher preparation that help to prepare future teachers for work with diverse groups should be informed by the experiences of diverse groups. While it may not be feasible for future teachers and administrators to have experiences with students from varying backgrounds, research done from the perspective of the students provides a wider audience and opportunity to examine and understand the concerns and views of the students we serve.

The theme of harassment will be used to explore how majority White colleges of education prepare student teachers to deal with the issues of racism and sexism in schools. The young women in this study experienced both. Despite the enactment of Title IX over twenty years ago, there is still evidence of gender inequity in the educational system. Although progress has been made in some areas, the 1992 AAUW Report "How Girls are Shortchanged in Education" affirms the fact that "there is clear evidence that the educational system is not meeting girls' needs." The follow up to the 1992 AAUW Report, "Gender Gaps: Where Schools Still Fail Our Children" (1998), calls for equity in education as the new approach to gender and education research. Equity in education recognizes the importance of social variables such as ethnicity and social class in educational experiences. As schools are more and more re-segregated, many minority

students in predominantly White schools find themselves on the fringes of school culture.

The third theme of determination will be used to explore what student teachers on majority White campuses are taught on the issue of expectations. The students in this study all had positive attitudes about education and a strong belief that they could succeed. We need to look at how this positive outlook can be nurtured by teachers and administrators.

Suggestions and strategies generated from the discussion will be compiled and shared with session participants.

**PRESENTER:**

**Faye Hicks Townes** is presently assistant professor in Secondary Education at Stephen F. Austin State University. She received her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville in 1996. Before that she taught in the public education system as at high school English teacher. Her particular research interest is in the experiences of minority women in predominantly White educational institutions.