University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Sixth Annual National Conference, POCPWI

People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions

10-31-2001

The Unique Challenges and Experiences of African¬-American Women Academicians at Predominantly White Institutions

Gary K. Perry
Doctoral Student, Department of Sociology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi6

Part of the Race, Ethnicity and post-Colonial Studies Commons

Perry, Gary K., "The Unique Challenges and Experiences of African¬-American Women Academicians at Predominantly White Institutions" (2001). *Sixth Annual National Conference, POCPWI* . Paper 7.
http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpwi6/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the People of Color in Predominantly White Institutions at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sixth Annual National Conference, POCPWI by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

The Unique Challenges and Experiences of African-American Women Academicians at Predominantly White Institutions

Abstract

This session addresses the unique challenges of African-American women academicians at predominantly white institutions. After assessing scholarly literature in this area, most research has and continues, to ignore the interrelationship between race, class and gender. This paper builds on existing literature by offering a discourse that addresses various challenges facing these women.

Gary K. Perry

Doctoral Student, Department of Sociology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Extensive research has sought to address the presence of African-American faculty in predominately white institutions (Feagin 1996; Smith 1992; Wyche and Frierson 1990; Sutherland 1990; Dorsey 1990; Carter et al. 1988). Collectively, such research has uncovered that the work experiences of most African-American faculty are affected by a number of structural issues, such as racism, stress and marginality. For the most part, a vast majority of this literature does not fully contribute to building a comprehensive account of the experiences of minorities in majority institutions. Although these studies provide significant insight regarding the experiences of African-American faculty at predominately white institutions, most were performed or discussed without respect to gender.

This scholarly paper aims at addressing the unique challenges and experiences of African-American women academics at predominately white institutions. For many African-American women faculty, "they can experience pressure to choose between their racial identity and their womanhood," according to the writings of Carter et al. (1998:460). Further, in addition to assessing the experiences of African-American women in the work environment, this paper also aims at illustrating how their unique experiences in the family and community can also be imposing on their overall reality at predominately white institutions.

Given the fact that current research marginalizes the intersection of race and gender, I propose that the challenges facing African-American faculty at predominately white institutions are more imposing than current literature indicates. Moreover, with regard to African-American women faculty, these challenges and role responsibilities can emanate from those three major domains work, family and community. In conceptualizing these specific domains, the *workplace* is limited to the academic environment, the *family*is a social institution in which these women are generally the primary caregivers and the *church* represents community.

Because of African-American women's subjugated roles in society, they often encounter experiences in all three domains that are unique from white and male academicians. For many African-American women faculty, their dismal presence at most predominately white institutions often results in their having to take on work demands, such as excessive

committee work and exclusive mentoring of primary African-American students that most white and male academics do not. Also, African-American women are also faced with oppressive conditions and gendered role expectations in the family institution. Black women academics may be forced to negotiate success in a work culture that is not consistent with or respecting of various cultural expectations. Finally, African-American women faculties are also subjected to secondary status and traditional roles in the church. Although the church is a viable and important entity in the African-American community, the church is a traditional institution in the African-American community, however it has limited their autonomy and flexibility in the church.

By building on existing literature, this paper aims at offering a discourse that addresses the specific or unique challenges facing African-American women academics from an intersectional approach. More specifically, this paper explores those three domains and discusses how structural and cultural expectations and norms force African-American women academicians to negotiate their personal identities and role responsibilities in their quest for survival and achievement.

Presenter

Gary K. Perry began his academic career in sociology at Southern University and A&M College at Baton Rouge, where he received his Bachelor of Science in Sociology in 1999. Later, he went on to attend the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville where he received his Master of Arts in Sociology in 2001. Currently, he is a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Over the past six years, Mr. Perry has grown both as a sociologist and an individual. His studies, research and even professional presentations have allowed him to address issues that are quite passionate to him. In short, Mr. Perry has been able to conduct research in the area of race/racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism and other forms of social discrimination. His Master's Thesis, entitled "Exploring the Relationship between a White Professors Level of Race Awareness and Teaching Practices at a Predominately White College," allowed him to address these issues. He anticipates that his doctoral studies will also afford him these same opportunities to be a voice for the voiceless.