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"THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGISTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION"

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This session presents preliminary results from a study that attempts to examine the experiences of Black psychologists teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This knowledge can be used to improve the experiences of Black psychologists in higher education, enhance the appeal of academia, and increase the opportunity for professional success.

This study examines the experiences of Black psychologists in higher education at predominately White institutions. In spite of recent efforts to increase faculty diversity, ethnic minorities are still underrepresented in psychology and in academia in general (APA, 1997). The relatively small percentage of minority faculty is in contrast to the gradual, steady shift in the demographic composition of the United States over the past 20 years. Further, it is estimated that by 2050, more than half the U.S. population will be people of color (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994), and to date academic psychology does not seem ready to respond to this development.

Perhaps in an attempt to acknowledge this change in society, the field of psychology has begun to focus attention on issues related to diversity as it impacts on psychology. The fact that research to date has been conducted almost exclusively with Anglo American participants calls into question the generalizability of such findings to people of color (Miranda, 1996). It also neglects the study of experiences that may be unique to people of color. One consequence of overlooking ethnic minorities in research, particularly in clinical research, is that the delivery of mental health services may be compromised (Bernal & Castro, 1994). With this notion in mind, the American Psychological Association (APA) has stated that one goal of clinical training programs should be cultural competence.

Towards this end of cultural competence, it has been further suggested by the increased diversity among faculty might serve to increase students' interest (i.e., theoretical, practical) in people of color (APA, 1997). One likely possibility is that minority faculty might be more knowledgeable regarding working with people of color. Another is that minority faculty might be more interested in studying issues affecting people of color as well as teaching courses about people of color because of the intrinsic relevance to these faculty. Perhaps a more basic issue, however, relates to the raw numbers of people of color who pursue graduate education in psychology. This is of course related to the

numbers of ethnic minorities at the undergraduate level who both enter college and in turn the number who pursue graduate studies and so forth. There is some evidence that retention at the undergraduate as well as graduate level is influenced by the presence of minority faculty (APA, 1998). In addition, a minority presence on the campus also appears to influence an institution's ability to attract minority faculty (Gardner, Keller, & Piotrowski, 1996).

Another issue associated with the ability to establish a presence of minority faculty relates to the general appeal to them of academia. Many minorities who complete their doctorates choose not to pursue careers in academia (Sorcinelli, 1994). Among faculty of color who do choose academic careers, for African Americans, they may choose a historically Black college/university because they perceive the environment to be more friendly, welcoming and supportive (Anderson, 1998). Alternatively, many who do choose academic careers leave them prematurely. Many do so long before tenure decisions, and some have suggested that the explanation is not the anticipated denial of tenure, but disillusionment with the field or environment. For those who remain in academia until tenure decisions are made, evidence about the attainment of tenure indicates that people of color do not achieve tenure at rates comparable to their White male counterparts (APA, 1998).

Hopefully, it is clear that within the field of psychology, the issue of diversity is multifaceted with wide ranging effects. With these notions in mind, this study seeks to uncover possible factors and strategies that Black faculty believe are critical to their successes defined both subjectively (i.e., job satisfaction) as well as objectively (i.e., obtaining tenure). This study explores the experiences of those who have successfully maneuvered the tenure process as well as those who have not yet come up for tenure review. In the former case, the study attempts to understand factors that faculty of color believed were instrumental to their successes. A second aim is to determine what factors affect the quality of the work experience. Just as it is important to assess the objective measure of success, that is tenure, it is also important to assess the subjective experience of satisfaction. The subjective experience may be especially critical to understanding why there are many people of color who leave academia prematurely.

Our presentation will present preliminary results from a study that attempts to examine the experiences of Black psychologists teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. This knowledge will hopefully have the effect of improving the experiences of Black psychologists in higher education, increasing the appeal of academia, and improving the opportunity for professional success. Additionally, results from this study will hopefully provide institutions interested in supporting diversity with helpful commentary on present efforts as well as recommendations for new efforts.

Presenters:

Dr. Pamela Brown received her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the State University of New York at Stony Brook in 1997 and her Masters in Experimental Psychology from Howard University. She did her internship and post-doctoral training at the Philadelphia

Child Guidance Center, Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. Presently, she is an assistant professor at Widener University's Institute for Graduate Clinical Psychology. Her research interests lie in the areas of family violence and diversity. Her clinical interests are primarily with couples and family therapy. She has presented nationally and internationally for a number of professional organizations as well as published several articles in peer-reviewed journals.

Dr. Leslie Hicks received his Ph.D. in Physiological-Comparative Psychology from the University of Wisconsin under Harry F. Harlow. He is a full professor at Howard University, where he has been on the faculty since 1954. From 1970 until 1999 he was the Department Chair. From 1968-1970 he was the Executive Officer of Scientific Affairs at the American Psychological Association. From 1978-1979 he was a Fellow at that Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, California. Dr. Hicks is widely published in the areas of brain-behavior relations and Black studies in psychology.