

June 2005

Feature Article:

Leadership in Higher Education: Influences on Perception of Black Women

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There is an under representation in the number of Black women in senior leadership positions (American Council on Education, 2003; Nelson-Porter, 2004). Although many research articles have addressed leadership in the workplace, few studies have examined Black female leaders in higher education.

*The pathways to academic administration are discussed. For most academicians, academic administration is an afterthought and not an aspiration, because assuming these positions is seen as changing careers, while others view the university's business as the work of the intellect, thus believing that faculty should participate in the administration and governance of the campus. This is supported by the **first among equals** concept and the notion that administrators should come from the ranks of faculty. Regardless of the view one holds on this matter, one thing should be clear from this analysis—an effort is needed to move toward a balanced representation of African-American males [and women] holding academic administrative positions. (Jackson, 2003, Conclusions and Implications section, para. 11).*

The American Council on Education (1999) reported that women have made some progress in advancing beyond entry-level positions but are underrepresented when compared to men. Chliwniak (1997a) and Burkhart (1999) argued that men possibly possess fear towards the feminizing of leadership roles. Parker (2004) argued, “Black women in positions of authority represent a contradiction to the normative meanings for organizational leaders as White and male” (para. 12). As a result, women have been omitted from leadership positions and have obtained devalued positions, prestige, and ultimately value within higher education. “Professors are the kings of academe, not the queens. Fewer than one in 10 professors worldwide is a woman. Within any academic system, the higher the prestige of an institution, the lower the proportion of professors who are women” (Bain & Cummings, 2000, p. 512). Austin and Leland (1991) proclaimed, “While the success of the female movement is amply demonstrated by entry and inclusion of females in the labor force, the workplace is still organized according to the male model, hierarchical and competitive” (p.51). Women have had to adapt to the male leadership model. Moses (1997) argued that in the White man’s world, Black women are viewed as having little or no worth. Martin (2000) attributed women entering higher education to immigration. “Cultural assimilation is a matter of degrees; it is natural for immigrant groups to assume that if they just try harder to acquire the natives’ cultural patterns, they can speed up the entire assimilation process” (p. 152). Dr. Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot, a leader in the field of education stated, “It takes some courage to say, ‘I am going to go down my path...I am going to figure out a way of working that capitalizes on my gifts’” (Collison, 1999a, para. 18).

Hammonds-Bryner (1995) published that the academia culture has been universalized by the experiences of white men and thus female and minority groups have been treated as anomalies. According to the American Council on Education (1995-2003), women and minorities hold a greater percentage of the top positions in colleges and universities but are underrepresented to their share of faculty and senior staff positions. Brown (1999) argued that a better balance in roles in top leadership positions might change the climate in decision-making policies. Nelson-Porter's (2004) organizational gender perception theory suggested that gender perceptions are stimulated when male senior executives display aggressive characteristics and female executives display nourishing characteristics when making strategic decisions.

This article is an abridgement of research Dr. Jones is currently conducting.

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