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Socializing Women Doctoral Students: Minority and Majority Experiences

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The doctorate is a ticket to employment in faculty positions, particularly at major research universities. Yet few minority men complete doctorates, and even fewer minority women complete doctorates. The 32,943 doctorates awarded nationwide in 1984–85 went differentially to majority men (45.6 percent), majority women (27.1 percent), minority men (5.6 percent) and minority women (3.6 percent) (Anderson et al. 1989, 219). In their discussion of the American professoriate, Howard Bowen and Jack Schuster (1986) conclude that minorities continue to be severely underrepresented in higher education.

Some reasons for this phenomenon are crumbling inner-city schools, a lack of role models, and a growing number of financially rewarding alternatives such as law, medicine, and business. In addition, many scholars

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suggest that current academic policies and practices may present barriers for both women and minorities while facilitating the progress of majority males (Finkelstein 1984; Baird, in press; Mitchell 1982; Menges and Exum 1983; Nettles 1990). Patrick Hill (1991) describes higher education institutions as organized to perpetuate "self-containment" and "marginalization." Several researchers assert that race and gender are interlocking sources of marginalization in higher education (Aisenberg and Harrington 1988; Collins 1989; hooks 1989; Carter, Pearson and Shavlik 1988; Aronson and Swanson 1991).

The literature thus suggests that a subtle but critical source of this marginalization is a professional social environment that fails to support or encourage women (Clark and Corcoran 1986). Both majority and minority women apparently lack access to socialization experiences. Yet proportionately fewer minority women have doctorates than majority women. As a consequence, we asked: What is the difference between minority and majority women's socialization experiences in graduate education programs? Do minority women receive fewer? Does racial discrimination add significantly to the gender barrier they are already experiencing?

To address these questions, we asked minority women doctoral students about their professional social experiences in graduate school.¹ We then compared their perceptions with those of majority women. Finally, from narrative data and related literature we drew implications for recruiting and retaining minority women as faculty. A conscious and well-planned effort to make the academic environment as attractive and supportive as possible for minority women could increase the number of minority women faculty in the future.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES: DOCTORAL STUDENT SOCIALIZATION

Socialization is the process by which a person learns the ways of a group or society in order to become a functioning participant (Kozier and Erb 1988, 47). John Van Maanen defines socialization as a "life-long process that helps to determine a person's ability to fulfill the requirements for membership in a variety of life groups . . . work, school, clubs, family" (1984, 213).

¹We invited women who self-identified as black, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic to participate in this study. Few minority women are enrolled in doctoral programs at Midwestern University and, in most instances, our respondent was the only minority woman in her department. Thus, for purposes of confidentiality, we do not designate ethnic and department affiliation.

Doctoral programs typically involve a lengthy period of adult socialization in cognitive skills, appropriate attitudes toward research and scholarship, and field-specific values. Shirley Clark and Mary Corcoran define three stages in this process: (1) anticipatory socialization, recruitment, and choice of field, (2) occupational entry and induction focusing on extensive formal training in graduate school including attendance in classes, advising, preparation for exams and dissertation, internships, mentoring, publishing, presenting, and getting a job, and (3) faculty role continuance or retention.

Naturally, as Beverly Lindsay (1988) points out, both institutional and individual forces influence this process. First, the departmental context in which students are socialized is created by institutional influences—federal and state laws and policies, institutional policies and practices, and the traditions and values of the institution, the department, and the discipline. Second, how individual students experience socialization opportunities is influenced by their cultural values, prior experiences with socialization, personalities, individual support system, level of commitment, and gender-related issues and values.

A successful socialization process is critical for a successful graduate career. Historically, the socialization of graduate students has been controlled by the prevailing culture which, until rather recently, has been overwhelmingly white and almost exclusively male. Acculturation has been generally most successful for those who could fit the status quo most comfortably (Boulding 1983; Hughes 1988; Martin and Siehl 1983). Women and minorities of both genders frequently come to academe with traditions very different from the majority culture. In fact, their values may actually conflict with those of the white male academic culture (Hall, Mays, and Allen 1984; hooks 1989; Sandler 1986; Collins 1989). In addition, racism and sexism have been cited as primary reasons for the marginalization of minorities and women in higher education (Baird, forthcoming; McClelland and Auster 1990; Menges and Exum 1983).

Nevertheless, Clark and Corcoran's work shows that socialization opportunities are extremely important to successful professional academic careers for women. This study examines whether minority women who are currently in graduate programs do, in fact, receive the socialization opportunities they need and whether they receive as many opportunities as majority women. We examined student experience using the stages of doctoral program socialization identified by Clark and Corcoran and found four indices of social opportunity in the experiences of the women in our study: (1) recruitment of student by department, (2) participation in apprenticeship and mentoring experiences, (3) perception of the departmental environment as competitive or cooperative and

whether they found support networks in the department, and (4) experience of discrimination.

METHODOLOGY

We call our study site Midwestern University. It is a 123-year-old land grant institution with several campuses and research stations around the state. The main campus boasts one of the highest single campus enrollments in the United States and attracts students from every state and from 900 countries. Approximately 8,000 students are enrolled in the university's 180 graduate programs, making it one of the nation's top doctoral-granting institutions. This research university is located in a large metropolitan area in the upper Midwest.

The data on doctoral students that Midwestern University has collected for the last nine years follow national trends with remarkable fidelity. To provide a historical context for the study, we collected institutional data on self-identified minority and majority doctoral students attending Midwestern University from the winter of 1981 to spring 1990: statistics on enrollment, years to degree, and degrees completed.

Minority women doctoral students made up 1.5 percent (199) of the total doctoral student enrollment (12,847) during this period; majority women students comprised 28.7 percent (3,687); minority males comprised 2.2 percent; and majority males comprised 36.8 percent. Forty-six percent of the minority females and 30 percent of the majority females were in education. The only other major with an enrollment of more than ten minority female doctoral students was psychology.

Data on completed degrees indicated that minority women earned 1.5 percent (67) of the total doctoral degrees granted (4,593); majority women earned 26.9 percent (1,234); minority males earned 2.5 percent, and majority males earned 42.8 percent. Mean years to degree was 7.8 for minority women; 7.6 for majority females; 7.8 for minority males; and 6.5 for majority males. Few minority women enrolled in research doctoral programs; consequently, they receive few doctorates. Minority enrollment is largely confined to education and the liberal arts disciplines. Compared to majority males, minorities and women take longer to complete their degrees.

After examining these data, we took a closer look at the experiences of minority and majority women currently enrolled in doctoral programs. The graduate school gave us the names, addresses, and phone numbers of women registered during the fall of 1987 to the spring of 1990. A hundred and one were minority women. We then generated a random list of 101 majority women doctoral students registered during the same period. The graduate school sent all potential respondents a

letter inviting them to take part in the study. Thirteen minority students and twenty majority students declined to participate. From those willing to participate, we interviewed a random sample of thirty-seven minority women doctoral students (ten blacks, seven Native Americans, fourteen Asian Americans, and six Hispanics) and twenty-five majority women doctoral students. Time, funding, and logistical constraints did not allow us to interview as many majority women as we wished, but all interviews were conducted in person and face-to-face.

To elicit information about backgrounds and future career plans, we asked interviewees to complete a two-page questionnaire of demographic data, including ethnic/racial background, marital status, number of dependents, full-time/part-time student status, department affiliation, and intent to pursue an academic career. Most respondents, both minority and majority, intended to pursue a faculty career, were in their mid-thirties, attended school full-time, commuted to campus, had no dependents, and reported high undergraduate (3.3 or better) and graduate (3.8 or better) grade point averages. Approximately half were married. Twenty-seven (73 percent) of the minority respondents and twenty (80 percent) of majority respondents were enrolled in the humanities and social sciences, including education. Ten (27 percent) of the minority respondents and five (20 percent) of the majority respondents were enrolled in the physical and life sciences, including engineering.

We also conducted an interview in which we used a semi-structured questionnaire as a guide to examine the process of personal and professional development of respondents. We asked each student to describe the kinds of relationships she had with other students and faculty members, and the range and type of opportunities that she has had for acquiring professional values and skills inside and outside the classroom. Interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the length of responses given by the interviewee. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and separately coded by two researchers.

We identified student perceptions on four points from the interview data: the university recruitment process, departmental opportunities for apprenticeship and mentoring experiences, a cooperative or competitive departmental environment, and racial and gender discrimination in the department.

FINDINGS

Our study found that minority women generally had fewer opportunities for professional socialization experiences than majority women. Although a few more minority than majority women reported being ac-

tively recruited by graduate departments, the social environment for majority women was generally much richer. More majority women had apprenticeship and mentoring experiences. More frequently they reported the presence of support networks inside their departments.

Interestingly, minority women students reported little racial discrimination except for a lack of curricula on race issues. (This was also true of gender and class.) However, both minority and majority women overwhelmingly reported gender discrimination. Still, the comparative lack of socialization for minority women suggests that racism provides a double barrier for them, one they may not even be aware of, since they feel gender bias so conspicuously.

Recruitment

Despite strong verbal concerns expressed by Midwestern University administrators about the need to recruit solid minority candidates into graduate programs, only six of the thirty-four minority students (three Asian, one Native American, one African American, and one Hispanic) said they had been actively recruited by their department. Ironically, even fewer majority women—only two—had been departmentally recruited. In most cases, minority women reported that they had investigated the top institutions in their field and had chosen Midwestern University. As one minority woman stated, “No one recruited me or talked me into it. I investigated some of the programs on my own. I talked to some of the people in the department, and I felt good about [it].”

One majority woman had worked with a professor whose doctoral degree was from Midwestern University and who had encouraged her to apply. The second student had received a call from a professor in the department offering her a three-year appointment if she became a doctoral student.

Apprenticeship Experiences

In general, majority women participating in this study had more opportunities than women of color for such apprenticeship opportunities as research and teaching assistantships, coauthoring papers with a faculty member, making presentations at professional conferences, and being introduced by faculty to a network of influential academics who could provide support for students seeking entry-level jobs.

Forty-nine percent of minority students held research or teaching assistantships, while 60 percent of the majority women did. Coauthoring articles ran 52 percent for the majority, 27 percent for the minority. Forty-eight percent of majority women students had opportunities to

copresent papers with faculty members at professional conferences, while 38 percent of minority women did. When asked about help with entry-level job searches, 64 percent of the majority respondents and 51 percent of the minority respondents reported receiving such assistance.

Most minority women doctoral students who did not work full-time received financial support such as fellowships. However, only a few (those in the physical and life sciences) had research or teaching assistant positions leading to close working relationships with faculty. Some minority students believed that they were left out of funding and apprenticeship opportunities.

Although minority students reported getting along reasonably well with faculty, with few exceptions they did not have mentors—someone who takes a personal interest in providing apprenticeship opportunities for a given student. These minority women described their lack of sponsorship in graduate school this way:

I guess I don't feel mentored. He [graduate advisor] doesn't seem as actively a mentor as my undergraduate advisor. So far I haven't seen the possibility of coauthoring articles with professors. I've only seen it with male students. I'm not participating in research projects. . . . So far for me, none of that has happened.

Sometimes I feel very marginal. I attribute this to being off campus, although sometimes I wonder if it has to do with my age too. It's clear that there is a cohesiveness among the TAs that I don't participate in.

I've noticed that several graduate students have had the fortunate opportunity to work collaboratively with professors. I don't know of any students of color who've enjoyed that same opportunity.

I had no opportunities. I was left to figure things out for myself, and I didn't always know what I was doing. I don't feel I got the kind of advice I really needed.

Minority students who have mentors initiated the process. One minority graduate student described her advisor:

He is accessible and has given me opportunities that have been really good. . . . But you see, I had to initiate them. . . . I think that is part of the process of being a graduate student. At first I was kind of expecting to be helped a little bit more and it didn't come, but he's one of the people who also says, "Well, we don't coddle you in grad school," but if you ask for something he will give it. . . . He's great. I just wish I had hooked up with him earlier, especially considering he's the reason I came here, but I was so intimidated by him that it took a while.

This student pointed out that the mentor-student relationship is utility-based:

They care about the ones [graduate students] that work with them. Faculty in general don't care about graduate students. There are exceptions. And if you work for someone, then they are more helpful to you.

In contrast, majority women were more likely to mention both apprenticeship and mentorship opportunities provided within Midwestern University. One majority student provided this description:

I feel very well mentored by my advisor, who is really well known in the field and the reason I came here. Also, I work with another professor on a research project and I feel like he is really taking time to not only have me work for him but teach me the ins and outs of research. I have participated in research projects and have been invited to coauthor an article which is just at the beginning process. A professor invited me to apply to present at a conference (I haven't heard yet) and I know they'll help me get a job.

This past year I really felt that my advisor was watching out for me. He provided me with an assistantship and then a fellowship. Both my program director and my advisor have really gone out of their way to make sure that I'm okay [financially]. . . .

I think [publications are] one thing our faculty is really supportive of. In fact, they really push you on it, which is good because, you know, sometimes you might not do anything if you're not pushed a little bit. Then most of the faculty I think really help you write and revise and get [the paper] ready for publication.

Most minority and majority students were first generation academics, and both minority and majority women reported being mentored by someone, usually a relative or a coworker, outside Midwestern University. However, relatives as mentors, in or out of the university, benefited majority women more often. Approximately one-third of the minority women doctoral students reported that at least one other family member held a doctoral degree, whereas almost half of the majority students interviewed did.

Departmental Environment and Support Networks

Majority respondents perceived their departments as cooperative, while minority respondents saw the department as competitive. Majority women doctoral students perceived themselves as part of the academic community at Midwestern University, and minority women doctoral students typically reported feeling detached from that community, even though they had positive relationships on campus.

During their interviews, most minority women made assertions of their autonomy—and isolation. A typical statement is: "I would say stu-

dent relationships are supportive. . . . but I don't study with other students. . . . There is a formal student organization, but I haven't been a part of it because my job takes a lot of time." More minority students than majority students report that they work outside the university at least part time.

Minority students characterized the departmental environment as individualistic and competitive, particularly at the faculty level. Although they reported friendly relationships with other doctoral students in their programs, they did not generally have close friends on campus, and few lived on or very near the campus. When asked further about support, many reported that they achieved a sense of balance in their lives by being part of a broader ethnic/racial community. One student praised her community: "They'll support me! I've got a relationship in my community that's pretty wonderful. I go into my community a lot. . . . I retain a lot of connections."

Minority respondents wanted more opportunities to meet and hear about others like themselves. Said one: "Every once in a while I'll meet a black woman graduate student, and I'll wish I had more time to talk to her and I don't, and that's hard for me. . . . I don't think there are any resources really for minority graduate students, and it seems to me that most of things on campus are remedial, but where are the things that applaud us when we do well? We don't hear as much about them."

Majority students, on the other hand, reported a cooperative environment and described participating in collaborative study groups:

Students are primarily supportive, some cooperative work done. Students do study together. . . . Probably my strongest supporters at the university are the people that I work with [on-campus].

Students are very supportive and cooperative. Students study together.

I would say it's a real cooperative environment as far as the students. . . . I go to students before I go to my professor to talk about what classes to take and what are useful classes. We have a real close-knit group of students working together.

Discrimination

Minority women seemed to perceive gender discrimination as a stronger barrier than racial discrimination to success in graduate school. They reported little racism, but, like majority women, reported extensive gender discrimination.

Most minority respondents said they had not experienced racial discrimination in either their programs or at Midwestern University in general. However, three minority students provided the following perceptions:

The students were not friendly towards me at all. Part of it, I know, is racism.

Experience racial discrimination? Well, of course, but of course. I live in America. Yes, I've experienced racism and sexism in my program, on this campus and in the community. . . . I feel that some females, my white counterparts probably are aware of fellowship money and other types of monies and are encouraged to apply.

There is a difference in how students of color are treated, but it is subtle. I am not even sure that the faculty is aware of what is going on. "They" have a way of making you feel that what you have said is not as important as what the other students say.

In contrast to these three examples, both majority and minority respondents were vociferous and almost unanimous in reporting passive gender discrimination in their programs—a sense of being passed over in favor of less able male students—in every major. Only one or two students reported more active sexual discrimination ("put downs" in class), and in both cases it involved the same department. Typical reports of passive discrimination were:

I took a seminar with him. There were five students. He spoke to the men. . . . When I would start to say something and be interrupted, it really bothered me. . . . I attribute it to sexism. He did not interrupt the men that way. (Minority)

I think the students that get treated best are young white males because they do what they are supposed to do. They play the appropriate role. (Minority)

The perfect graduate student is a young white male. (Majority)

They're not trying to actively do you in, but there is not that extra effort to help someone get along and get a job and to keep yourself supported during it. I think that people have certain people that they decide are special people, mostly the white men, and they're the ones that start getting everything right from the beginning. (Majority)

I have a coadvisor situation. My advisor in the field is a man who's very good, but it's not the same kind of relationship. I get more advice from [my coadvisor in a different field]. Both of them are helpful [but] she understands what my struggles are much more than he does. (Majority)

It's a recurring theme that the grad students want more women to come and speak. Something like 50 percent of the active researchers in the biological sciences are women and maybe 40 percent in our particular field and last year three men were on the committee (organizing department seminars) and there wasn't a single woman speaker. It just doesn't occur to them. (Majority)

Some (graduate students) are treated better, typically the males. Male grad students tend to be the stars and females aren't, and

that may change. In the second year class, there is one woman who is doing really well, but she just had a kid—she's doing well in research, but she is in a different track now, because she took time off. (Minority)

Most minority and majority respondents reported inattention to race and gender issues in curricula, a form of racial and gender discrimination by omission rather than commission. They said that their departments do not address issues of diversity or the role of class, gender, and race in research and teaching.

We have one faculty member, that's kind of her role is to look at cross-cultural issues and gender, but you know there's not specific coursework in that . . . no readings, no mention of works by minorities. (Majority)

They don't address it at all. . . . I don't really think the department . . . plans to address issues of student diversity and the role of gender and race in research and teaching. . . . I'd like to see the departments modify their curriculums in such a way that we do see other perspectives. (Minority)

Only one minority student provided an example of diversity consciousness in her department:

My advisor was one of the few people to really address the issue of race in terms of research and teaching and that was in our ____ class. He assigned a chapter on testing minorities and some of the issues.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The literature makes it abundantly clear that socialization experiences are critical to success in graduate school and in a subsequent academic career. In our study, minority women report less access to such experiences than majority women, a finding verified by information from current tenured faculty. Thus, we can conclude that minority women have less opportunity for successful academic careers.

The relation of graduate school socialization and doctoral degree completion, as well as in subsequent career success in academe, are discussed extensively in the literature. Robert Bargar and Jane Mayo-Chamberlain (1983) found that the advisor-advisee relationship is crucial to the successful completion of a doctoral degree. Karen Winkler (1988) indicates that apprenticeship experiences help to pave the way to acceptance as faculty members. Clark and Corcoran (1986) provide narrative evidence that successful, tenured women faculty had the opportunity for socialization experiences with advisors and colleagues. Elizabeth Whitt found that "administrators expected [new faculty] to bring with

them much of what they needed to know about being faculty members. They were expected to have prior socialization in research and teaching; appropriate values, expectations, and work habits; a research orientation; and a program of research already in progress" (1991, 191). Carole Bland and Constance Schmitz (1986) conclude that research knowledge and skills by themselves are insufficient to make a successful researcher; a supportive environment and role models are also required.

Yet despite the well-documented need for socialization experiences, minority graduate women in our study reported relative isolation, a lack of faculty mentoring experiences, and a lack of collegiality with other doctoral students. Few attend conferences, coauthor papers with faculty, or collaborate on faculty research projects. On the other hand, majority women doctoral students report more mentoring relationships and experiences, both student-initiated and faculty-initiated.

All respondents are doing well in the coursework, preliminary exams, and other formal requirements for the degree; however, minority women do not have the richness of mentoring experiences and apprenticeship experiences that majority women reported.

One of us received, in February 1992, a letter from a colleague that corroborated the accuracy of the minority women's perceptions. This colleague wrote:

As a professor, when I look for a graduate student to fulfill these roles, I look for the brightest, the most advanced, the easiest to work with, the ones who have a beginning of their own network, and who have a schedule compatible with mine. . . . [Minorities and women in your study] are progressing through their program at a slower rate, are not around the university as much because they are working off campus, and may be more involved in their community outside the University than in the University and in the discipline. . . . Few faculty, out of the goodness of their hearts are going to choose a woman, minority, or disabled graduate student to work with them on their grants and articles if there is a white male who is perceived as slightly better on these features, because faculty see their own productivity and future at stake. . . . Our minority programs do not address the complex professional/social interaction within the system that facilitates or inhibits, in small but significant ways, the future success of graduate students and young faculty.

James Blackwell also underscores the accuracy of minority women's perceptions:

Those who teach are often guilty of subconscious (though sometimes conscious and deliberate) efforts to reproduce themselves through students they come to respect, admire, and hope

to mentor. As a result, mentors tend to select as proteges persons who are of the same gender and who share with themselves a number of social and cultural attributes or background characteristics such as race, ethnicity, religion, and social class. Because minorities are presently underrepresented in faculty positions, such practices inevitably result in the underselection of minorities as proteges. (1989, 11)

Doctoral degree granting institutions, like the one examined in this study, must make a more conscious effort to foster the development of minority women scholars. However, providing successful socialization experiences for all doctoral students may require not only behavioral changes but dramatic changes in institutional structures or the creation of new structures. According to Hill (1991), marginalization is perpetuated if new voices are added while the priorities and core of the organization remain unchanged. He states: "Were a college or university truly committed to democratic pluralism, it would proceed to create conditions under which the representatives of different cultures need to have conversations of respect with each other in order to do their everyday teaching and research," then continues, "Marginalization ends and conversations of respect begin when the curriculum is reconceived to be unimplementable without the central participation of the currently excluded and marginalized" (1991, 44, 45).

Specifically, first a way must be found to implement current official policies to actively recruit minority students. We found little evidence that minority (or majority) women were being sought for doctoral studies. Second, some of the funding for programs to serve minority students should be directed toward the social needs of minority women, who are often the only minority women in their departments. Third, an effort must be made to modify the curriculum to include contributions of men and women of color. Fourth, efforts must be increased to recruit and retain minority women faculty. Not only would such efforts provide role models, but a diverse faculty also means a diverse research and teaching agenda, increasing possible avenues for students to connect with faculty of similar backgrounds and interests. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, ways must be found to encourage current faculty to provide mentoring and apprenticeship opportunities for minority women. As Blackwell points out, mentoring minority students should not be the sole responsibility of minority faculty members. All faculty must share in the mentoring process. He also states that while mentoring is very time consuming, it is neither appreciated nor adequately rewarded in academe.

The letter cited earlier from one of our faculty colleagues sums the situation succinctly: "What needs to happen is [that] our influential, pri-

marily older, white male faculty members need to want to work with, and find it to their advantage to work with research assistants, teaching assistants, and co-authors who are minority women.”

While this study is persuasive, further research is needed to support the kinds of institutional changes necessary to provide minority women with the socialization experiences critical to successful academic careers. National studies are needed so that responses can be compared across ethnic and racial groups and across disciplines and fields. If academia is to be truly inclusive—and it must become so to maintain a position in the world that is relevant—then discrimination at the more subtle level of socialization opportunities must be addressed. Moreover, it must be addressed in an institutional context with consequences or incentives that are effective.

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