Chapter 39

Mentoring African American Women at Historically Black Colleges/Universities:
Beyond the Misconceptions of Our Identity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes how a considerable milestone for new faculty entering academia has been awarding tenure by the institution of higher education. This is often referred to as the Academy. Tenure-track faculty working towards tenure spend several years honing their craft in the areas of teaching, research, and service. Senior colleagues assume the lead in determining activities, and others who are considered authorities and leaders in the chosen field of scholarship. While HBCUs have provided an enormous source of support for African-American women who are tenure-track faculty, they continue to be underrepresented in the academy and are adversely impacted by the tenure process. Barriers that impede the tenure process of African-American women faculty include societal biases, stereotypes, systemic oppression, and lack of mentorship. This chapter seeks to provide awareness, discuss unique challenges specific to African American women faculty, and existing strategies to negotiating the tenure and promotion processes.

INTRODUCTION

African-American women who serve as faculty within the academy face challenges that are unique to their male counterparts (Herbert, 2012; Lucas & Steinmel, 2009). Contextually, African American women have historically had to bear the weight of stereotypes, and negative perceptions which serve

to diminish credibility within professional settings such as predominantly white institutions, colleges, and universities (Grant, 2012; Grant & Ghee, 2015). African-American women continue to focus their efforts to reframe and deconstruct, assumptions, biases, and stereotypes that still exist in today's society (Schwartz, Bower, Rice & Washington, 2003). Moreover, these barriers that African American women contend with in society also tend to find their way in professional settings such as the Academy and serve to impede further her ability to be seen as an equal colleague. Therefore, the African American woman in the academy, who has dedicated her career to thriving in higher learning institutions, finds herself at odds with what society expects her to be, and who she has become through extensive training and development (a professional).

Historically, a majority of tenured black faculty are employed at historically black colleges/universities (HBCUs). Despite the weak attempts of predominantly white institutions (PWI's) to recruit black faculty, there continues to be little change in improving representation. Thus, HBCU's have provided a refuge for black academics to grow professionally, and strive for tenure. However, there are ongoing challenges that are faced by HBCU's. These issues are related to the limited resources, and the difficulty in recruitment of high achieving black students who are enrolling in traditionally white institutions (Mack, 2011; Riley, 2010). Although these challenges persist, a disproportionate representation of black faculty who are women contributes to the pool of role models, which have been found to have a positive influence on student success (Bettinger & Long, 2005; Mack, 2011).

That said, as African-American women in academia make strenuous attempts to negotiate their career, they also have to assert their ability to others in providing premier education with the use of sound pedagogy. To further complicate matters they are also faced with the dilemma of how to convey this message assertively. The aim of this chapter is to address identified disparities, give voice to these phenomena that serve to stagnate the professional growth of African American women in academe and bring awareness to barriers and negative perceptions held. Further, the goal of this chapter is to provide strategies to minimize the impact of these difficulties. Therefore, the objectives of the chapter are as follows:

Objectives of the Book Chapter

1. To increase the awareness of individuals in academia regarding the stereotypes and stigmas placed on African American women.
2. To increase the knowledge and awareness of African American women societal perceptions and negative stereotypes.
3. To raise awareness of African American women of mentoring opportunities, and strategies that will help them navigate through the academic experiences and contribute to their success.

BACKGROUND

It has been a longstanding discussion regarding the importance of diversifying the professoriate on college and university campuses. As recently as 1993, differences in tenure and promotion characterized by gender and race/ethnicity continue to persist, and disparities related to African-American women who are tenured, let alone receive full professoriate ranking, continue to exist within the academy (Oakes, 2008; Perna, 2001). While the magnitude of womens' growth in tenured or tenure-track appointments has grown, African-American women's' growth in tenured or tenure-track appointment is less impres-

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