Black Female Perspective of "Diversity" Programs: Considerations of Hospitality on a College Campus

The town I grew up in was predominantly white. My peers were white, my teachers were white. From elementary school to high school, I had never had a black teacher. That observation wasn't odd to me. It wasn't something I had even really notice at the time. It simply was the reality of my situation and I couldn't grasp it being any other way. Therefore, the thought of attending a university that was predominantly white didn't concern me. When I chose to attend the University of Pittsburgh, I figure it would just be like how it was back home but on a larger scale. As a minority student who received a scholarship I was invited to the diversity program, BRIDGES whose goal is to, "connect students to each other, campus leaders, resources and opportunities, professional networks, and build leaders with the skills for lifelong success"(Bridges). I additionally joined a program known as RISE which operates in a fashion similar to BRIDGES, however, a scholarship is not a necessary requirement to join. The programs also hold study hours each week and if you attend the them for a certain amount time your recive money for books in return. Due to both of these programs I gained an unexpected amount of exposure to other people of color. Although it might seem odd, on this predominantly white campus I was experiencing more "blackness" than I've ever had in my entire life and it didn't stop there.

My freshman year, I took Seminar in Composition Topics in Diversity: Hip Hop Writing, in order to fulfill an English Gen-Ed requirement. I didn't think much of it, other than it looked more interesting than every other seminar course available. I didn't realize it would be the first time I experience a black educator. That was something that didn't even register in my mind

when they first walked through the classroom door. It wasn't until my professor, Dr. Khirsten Scott, started talking to and engaging with my peers and I that realize this was the first I had ever 'experienced' a black female from a teaching position. From that point, the situation kept escalating into unknown territory as this a black female educator, who saw potential in me and wanted to nurture it. Meeting a fellow black woman that wanted to support me, who was not my mother or someone I was related to, was a completely foreign experience, a welcomed one, but a foreign one nonetheless. Dr. Scott introduced me to Dr. Maraj, another black writing professor who took up a supportive mentorship role for me as well.

Prior to college, I was accustomed to speaking in front of white audiences, however it was never about issues or concerns directly related to me or experiences of black people. Being part of this new community and meeting Dr. Scott and then Dr. Maraj opened my eyes to look at what opportunities were available for young black women. Being in this position of support from other people of color has helped me feel more comfortable about seeking out other forms of support as I create opportunities for my future. Within this supportive environment I have gained more confidence in myself as I receive assistance with honing my craft. The times I have spent reflecting on the individual support I received from professors such as Dr. Scott led me to think about college minority programs and what makes them work for students of color, particularly black women.

Thesis

Throughout their lives black women have been allocated negative stereotypes by a white audience and as a result are treated worse by those around them. In an effort to show themselves redeemable in the eyes the public, white majority social institutions such as universities preform acts of tokenism in the form of minority based support programs in order to display feelings of

care and consideration, however, when black women attend these institutions that they believe can support them fully, they find that they are forced to create their own communities that are limited in the resources they can provide.

Roadmap

While reflecting on my own experience, I started to think about how college students experience the transition from moving from one environment to another. This resulted in me wanting to explore the concept of hospitality via "inclusion" programs in relation to reported experiences of black women on predominantly white college campuses. Through surveying 15 women who attend the University of Pittsburgh, a predominately white institution, I wanted to understand how these programs work to support community-building for these women in particular. This presentation delves into the well-being of black women as it is negatively affected by forces of stereotyping and tokenization specifically in white academic arenas. I will analyze the negative consequences of their presumed incompetence as well as how Black feminist thought reveals the alternative ways black women's subjugated knowledge poses a threat to these presumptions. Furthermore, I will examine the tokenistic behaviors university's express and how the facades they attempt to conjure negatively impact black women rather than benefit as a white audience may like to perceive. Then I plan to explore how the oppressive forces these women face results in them seeking out community networks that they are then forced to create themselves as the institution has failed to supply sufficient support for their success. Through highlighting how these diversity programs have failed to support Black women I hope to invigorate the establishment of institutional efforts that appropriately enhance the success and of experience of Black women on predominately white universities.

In academic spaces black women often have their options greatly limited in the ways in which they can choose to present themselves (Kupenda 2012). They can display themselves in a joking manner and be as hilarious as their white audience expects them to be or depict their sexuality in a "free" fashion that might then confirm their audience's misconception tracing back to slavery in which black women were considered animals or inhuman in nature(Kupenda 2012). However, taking this route is questionable, because in response the white audience might then assert their suspicions that black women are not competent enough for intellectual endeavors (Kupenda 2012). But even at times where black females act in a professional and competent manner, white members of their cohort will still claim to witness the "black behavior" that their minds conjure up because that is the type of behavior their minds want to see even if it is not reality(Kupenda 2012). Moreover, in terms of the black women faculty at university who can also be seen as a comparable model for black female students, the act of supervising black women is a new experience for both white men and white women (Shields 2012). Supervisors often see expectations based on their own racist, sexist, homophobic, and classicist belief system that they then projected on to the individual (Shields 2012). If the person deviates from the stereotype concocted, anger and anxiety is usually incited in the perceiver (Fiske and Taylor 1984). This reaction especially holds true at times where an individual shows an exceptional level of competency as conscious and unconscious biases are provoked in regard to who is entitled to having control over whom (Dovidio and Gaertner 2010).

As result of these false visions being projected on to them, black women might respond by undermining their own competence (Niemann 336). They may succumb to stereotype threat which is defined as, "being vulnerable to internalizing the negative stereotypes about your own group in a given situation, even when you do not accept these stereotypes" (Niemann 336(1994).

A common stereotype about African Americans is the inadequacy expected from them in the academic arena, resulting in black students being particularly susceptible to the self-undermining effects of stereotype threat (Niemann 1994). Furthermore, concepts such as vocational occupational socialization exposes the different ways black women are dissuaded from striving to accomplish their goals early on in their academic career and those who have not been still continue to face challenges as they struggle with ideas concerning identity that are projected on to them while pursuing their career path (Glenn 136).

U.S. black feminist thought as a specialized thought reveals unique themes within Black women's experiences (Collins 1990). Black feminist thought's main themes: work, family, sexual politics, motherhood, and political activism, heavily depend on paradigms that highlight the significance of intersecting oppressions that configure the model of domination present in the U.S (Collins 1990). However, communicating these themes and paradigms has been quite difficult because black women must continuously struggle against the white male view of the world (Collins 1990). Under these circumstances, black feminist thought can best be understood as subjugated knowledge (Collins 1990). Usually the forced submission of black women's ideas within white male dominated arenas resulted in African American women utilizing music, literature, conversations, and everyday behaviors as integral mediums for creating a black feminist consciousness (Collins 1990). In more recent times, higher education as well as media come to be vital areas for the activities of black intellectual feminist (Collins 1990). However, although black feminist thought has become highly visible in the new areas for social activity, it has become subjugated in a different fashion (Collins 1990).

For years, subordinate groups have had to utilize alternative means to construct independent self-definitions and self-valuations, continuously reiterating them through their own

specialist(Collins 1990). Similar to other subordinate groups, black women created their own unique viewpoint as well as developed their own alternative means of generating and verifying knowledge (Collins 1990).In the U.S. social practices that validate knowledge as well as the Eurocentric system of beliefs, they uphold two established interconnected parts of the legitimization process of dominant knowledge (Collins 1990). Most commonly, scholars, publishes, and other experts, specialize in certain interests and accreditation processes (Collins 1990). Those claims of knowledge must meet the desires of the political and belief system of the circumstances in which they reside (Collins 1990). However, this undertaking is regulated by white men and, therefore, this system of knowledge verification is reflective of this group's concerns (Collins 1990).

When asked about the way in which racial environments affected them growing up, Black women who grew up in predominantly white neighborhoods had notably varying experiences that followed different trends. Some discussed how their status as a black woman meant that they were treated worse by those around them. Other participants specifically mentioned how they were subjected to stereotyping and blamed for actions that were not their fault. Additionally, those women discussed how they were not given any positive recognition in instances in which they deserved it. One participant discussed how due to their status as a black woman, "her authority and validity was undermined in the eyes of her peers".

In situations where only white men or other excessively homogeneous groups control the process of knowledge verification, the result can be a suppression in Black feminist thought (Collins 1990). With the understanding that the US public has shaped their culture around the "taken-for-granted" knowledge of community experts, an action that has caused the pervasive belief of black female inadequacy, new assertions that appear to find fault in this basic

assumption are usually seen as deviations from the norm(Collins 1990). For some time, black women have created knowledge declaration that challenge those promoted by white men, however, due to black women being refused positions of power, they commonly depended on alternative means of knowledge verification to produce contesting knowledge claims (Collins 1990). As result, academic disciplines deny those declarations (Collins 1990).Furthermore, any form of qualification or credibility regulated by White academics could then be denied due to the fact that the black women used alternative mediums, therefore, their methods shouldn't be considered credible research methodologies (Collins 1990)

Tokenism

Black women face the negative psychological and career effects of tokenism, which is defined as, "the policy of making only a perfunctory effort or symbolic gesture toward the accomplishment of a goal, such as racial integration; . . . the practice of hiring or appointing a token number of people from underrepresented groups in order to deflect criticism or comply with affirmative action rules" (American Heritage Dictionary 2000, "Tokenism"); ". . . the practice of making only a token effort or doing no more than the minimum, especially in order to comply with a law" (Collins English Dictionary, 2003, "Tokenism"). Tokenism can be highlighted in the concepted of the "just be our Negro" ghost with an emphasis on the "our"(Kupenda 2012). To be "our" Negro is for black people to present themselves in a fashion that whites believe is appropriate: obedient, submissive and silent unless they're making a joke (Kupenda 2012). To put it simply the "just be our Negro" ghost wants black people to not be "a Negro's Negro, and do not be your own Negro" (Kupenda 2012). It demands that black women act only in a fashion that meets the expectations and desires of whites (Kupenda 2012). Furthermore, this ghost orders that black females be deemed "Negros" (Kupenda 2012). It insist

that black women not be proud of their skin color in any manner, not nationally or internationally, and to definitely not claim to have dual citizenship, belonging to both the continent of Africa as well as America while on American soil (Kupenda 2012). To just "be our Negro" calls for black women to know how to know how to "stay in their place", and not strive for anything more (Kupenda 2012).

Other than the biases and challenges black women confront due to being both a woman and a person of color, they also are met with the additional obstacle of being invisible. Minorities as a whole are usually judged through standards depicted by the men of their groups, and women of color are commonly viewed in relation to standards tailored to white women (Dovidio 2012) Therefore, it is harder to understand what it means to be a black woman psychologically Black women are commonly dismissed and "falls through the cracks"(Dovidio 2012). As result anything they say or do often goes unnoticed or is overlooked (Dovidio 2012). At times where black women are visible, it is usually owed to their token status which typically leads to negative consequences (Dovidio 2012). Black women may offset these effects by declaring their differences and calling for recognition (Dovidio 2012). However, the respect they desire cannot be demanded and those who speak out are usually punished for their actions (Dovidio 2012). Alternatively, black women can respond by trying to act and present themselves in ways that don't draw attention (Dovidio 2012).

Women of color who are entering the academic arena commonly feel that the only way they can prevail and be seen as well as heard is to assimilate and conform to the norms that surround them (Collins 2000). However, through the process of assimilation, they lose their distinctive identities that make them who they are and safeguard them socially as well as psychologically from the wounds of discrimination (Collins 2000) Additionally, when they try to

assimilate, a diverse set of voices is lost (Collins 2000) Universities can make attempts to achieve diversity in terms of numbers, but they lose out on actually having a diverse set of perspectives if this type of assimilation occurs (Collins 2000).

In legislating for equality in a tokenistic fashion, it can be falsely assumed that equality has been achieved (Ahmed 2012). A negative consequence in having these policies is that they can be seen as a substitute for taking actual action (Ahmed 2012). Presumptions concerning whether these policies act as substitution can then lead to the concealment of inequalities that these laws were meant to address in the first place (Ahmed 2012). The same can be said for diversity programs and initiatives institutions put in place. Institutions create these programs in a performative fashion that presents evidence of minorities and minority support, however, in reality that "proof" is quite limited in nature.

When I asked if there a specific reason they chose to attend a Predominantly White Institution, Black women expressed that they felt that they did not know or understand that the university was lacking in diversity and felt that they had made a mistake when choosing to attend the University of Pittsburgh. As one participant mentioned, their initial interactions when visiting the campus were through inclusion programs such as RISE and BRIDGES, therefore, I concluded that some students might feel as if the University of Pittsburgh falsely advertises itself as a diverse campus.

Black feminist has delved into the connections between diversity and power displaying how aspects of diversity is integrated into these institutions (Ahmed 2012). The concept of "diversity management" is developed into a manner in which discord and conflict are managed (Ahmed 2012). Specifically, in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's Feminism without Borders, Mohanty delves into how diversity is a dialogue of ''benign variation,'' which ''bypasses power

as well as history to suggest a harmonious empty pluralism". Furthermore in M. Jacqui Alexander's Pedagogies of Crossing, Alexander shows how diversity discourse functions ideologically in a ''manufacture of cohesion'' in order to construct the feeling of there being ''more diversity'' than ''actually exists''. As a black woman your mere existence embodies the diversity a predominately white institution wants to display (Ahmed 2012). This leads to the responsibility of the presence of diversity and equality in university spaces being unevenly distributed (Ahmed 2012). The fact that as a black woman you simply residing in a homogeneous area may result in institutions believing they have done their part in creating a comfortable diverse space for minorities is a faulty deduction (Ahmed 2012).

Community

Despite institutions knowing that having a support system is critical to a student continued success throughout their academic career, the level of mentorship black women receive is severely lacking (Moses 1989, 9– 10) Women of color who are a part of faculty are incredibly rare and those who do exist are usually overburdened (Bowen 2009). While the number of white male faculty are abundant in the in the sciences, and even the amount of male minority faculty appear to be more numerous, black female student assert that male minority faculty members seem to possess a standpoint similar to their white male colleagues which is that they perceive black female as individuals who are less committed, less capable, and too aggressive (Moses 1989). It has been observed that while black male mentors may be informed about the struggles black students as whole must deal with, they do not yet know or fully understand the obstacles faced by black female student (Moses 1989).

Furthermore, chances for informal interactions and relations with faculty are social connections that seem to elude black female students in particular (Moses 1989). It's less likely

for black female graduate students to have informal interactions with members of faculty such as unplanned conversation or invitation to lunch (Moses 1989). The problem appears to be grounded in indifference as oppose to outright hostility (Bowen 2009) Moreover, the campus climate as well as the as the support network a black female student possesses, plays a large part in the way black female students configure their identities and sense of self (Bowen 2009) Research has shown that institutions usually focus on gender and race as two disconnected attributes and then demands that minority females pick one characteristic over the other (Terhune 2008). The consequence is that race becomes a more important issue due to gender issues entirely being focused on white female standpoints that completely alienated minority females (Bowen 2009) Therefore, black women are regulated to only challenging the connections between their race and gender in academic environment (Bowen 2009). In more recently conducted research, it is reported the success certain elite research institution have had with generating minority PhD holder in the math and sciences, through implementing strong systems of support (Tapia 2009).

   In the research study I conducted, I noticed that a large number of the surveyed black women primarily chose to attend the University of Pittsburgh for the scholarship opportunities they were provided with rather than other factors such as social climate. An additional group of participants mentioned that they chose to attend this university due to its high ranking in relation to the specific major they were interested in. It appears that from my small surveyed group, those who chose to attend the University of Pittsburgh mainly based their decisions on the financial and academic benefits the college could provide rather than social.

   A few of the participants discussed how they currently interact largely with other black individuals and how although they attend a university with a predominantly white campus, they

feel that they have had a lot of opportunities to interact with its small black community. I also noticed that when asked what clubs and organizations these women chose to be a part of, a large amount became members of black-based organizations such as BAS (Black Action Society), HUNIE (Black LGBTQ organization), and ASO (African Student Organization). From the trends observed, it appears that when coming to Pitt a large number of black women from this surveyed group attempted to become involved in organizations where they would be surrounded by individuals like themselves. Therefore, I concluded that they attempted to execute their own form of community building in becoming involved in the enclave space that is known as Black Pitt (a community of black students attending the University of Pittsburgh who are interconnected through clubs and organizations).

Participants also discussed their feelings towards the minority based institutional support program, BRIDGES. Concerning the positive aspects, a large number of participants stated that they enjoyed the support the program provided them with initially. They felt that the program helped them with transitioning from high school to college and assisted them in getting situated. However, a common theme within the answers was that many participants felt that the support they received tapered off with each passing semester. When discussing the minority-based program, RISE, most stated they enjoyed the opportunity it provided to obtain scholarship money for books, however, they had various complaints concerning the programs. Additionally, while others did enjoy certain parts of the community aspect of the program, they felt that more could be done in terms of bonding with fellow peers, recommending that more relaxed and fun activities be conducted. It was also recommended that some of these proposed events and activities could focus on mental health as well as issues that relate to the black community. Within my surveyed group it appears that while some of these black female students enjoy this

scholarship opportunity, they desire more of a community-building experience where they can bond with their peers.

When discussing their feeling towards pursuing mentorship through RISE, one participant mentioned that they attempted to, however, there were no available mentors in her field. An additional response I noticed was that a participant stated they received a mentor; however, they did not find the experience helpful because the mentor they received wasn't a part of the field they were interested in. In these two instances, we can see a reiteration of the fact that although these programs can attempt to provide support to these women in different forms they are still limited in their capabilities.

Black women face challenges in constructing their personal and professional identities even beyond academic setting which results in conflicting emotions and feelings of anxiety as we move from "anticipatory socialization to assimilation in our careers" (Glenn 2012). However, in spite of all the conflicting career messages, through creating and engaging in safe environments and facilitating societal changes that allow us to assert of inner selves, we have managed to resist negative notions concerning our identities (Glenn 2012). These safe environments consist of interactions with mentors, groups of friends, and members of family (Glenn 2012). Mentors who are also black women can provide black female students with methods that allow them to confront negative stereotypes and perceptions of their academic career progression as well as give words of support and wisdom (Glenn 2012).

When black women entered white universities, whether that was as a student or a faculty member they were met with mistreatment, marginalization, sexism, and racism (Terhune 2008). Studies have shown that black women more than any other minority group are more likely to be face with disconnection from the academic community, and experience discrimination (Combs

2003). As black women experience isolation and marginalization in academic space, they have created different coping mechanism in order to buffer themselves psychologically as well as maneuver the damaging terrain (Terhune 2008). Relying solely on themselves to achieve success (Cobham 2003), making jokes, utilizing tactics of avoidance (Shorter-Gooden, 2004), and hiding the negative effects of the oppression they face by using a mask (Hassouneh-Phillips & Beckett, 2003) are only a few of the identified coping mechanisms. These strategies result in changes in behavior and attitude as the women are overburden in their attempts to disguise the wounds of oppression (Terhune 2008). Black women undergo a shift as they are forced to comprise their structural integrity as they handle the countless stressors, they are burdened with (Shorter-Gooden 2004). These identity altering disguises deny black women the opportunity to convey their true inner selves. As black women shift from one facade to another in order to assimilate, in attempt to survive their well-being is greatly compromised (Terhune 2008).

Systems of support within the black community and the creation of support networks have proven to be key coping mechanisms for black women (Terhune 2008). Studies have shown that when African American individuals are faced with stress inducing situation, they turn to socially derived networks, family, and community (Daly,Jennings,Beckett,and Leashore 1995). Historically, the black community has acted as safeguard between the aggravators of the dominate mainstream community and the network of familial comfort (Terhune 2008).

The cultural roots of systems of support within the black community can be traced back to the composition of African culture and conceivably the heavily ingrained worldview of black women (Akbar, 1998).Having kin networks or systems of social support can help black women with mitigating feelings of isolation or tokenism, negative effectives that can be felt by blacks in white spaces (Terhune 2008). Furthermore, in these spaces, the standard used to examine and

consider everything becomes White and proficiency in deducing oppressive from normal white behavior becomes skewed (Tatum, 1987). Additionally, token status or being the "only one" of your minority group can have two conflicting effects on an individual's coping strategies (Crocker & Major, 1989). Firstly, it can cause a decrease in one's ability to make valid in-group comparison, due to an individual's using the dominant group as a basis for their comparison (Terhune 2008). Secondly is the continuous and at times damaging reminders of their disadvantageous position in comparison to the dominant group (Terhune 2008). Having a token or solo status can weaken these strategies of defense resulting in the need for at the very least a small group of peers in a similar situation to provide a sufficient support network (Terhune 2008).

Conclusion:

In order to improve the experiences of black female students while attending the University of Pittsburgh it's important that various factors are taken into consideration. A large number of black female students attend the university due to the scholarship opportunities provided as well as the school's academic ranking for specific fields. Their reasons for attending are highly academic based, however, that does mean the social climate of the university does not factor into their well-being. It appears that once entering Pitt they attempt to execute their own form of community building by locating black spaces that they feel secure and comfortable in. The university provides academic spaces and organization for these minority students, however, at times they can be lacking or limited in the support they are able to provide. It's important that these issues as well as suggested remedies are voiced to the individuals in charge of these programs in order from them to improve their overall effectiveness.

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