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A Case for Investigating Gender and Work-Life Inclusion Among Black Women Faculty in Business Schools

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There is a dearth of African American, Hispanic, and Native American faculty in US business schools, however, black women may be among the most prevalent, yet still underrepresented, minority faculty group. Taken together, insights from the PhD Project, a variety of nonprofit public policy organizations and think tanks, and other academic fields suggest that as compared to their white women counterparts, black women faculty may be more likely to be unmarried, already mothers or actively contemplating motherhood, and are more likely to desire employment in Universities that embrace intersectional conversations on gender and work-life inclusion. This paper posits and explores two related hypotheses and proposes ideas for future research and policy development that are intended to increase the recruitment and retention not only of black women faculty but underrepresented minority faculty as a whole in US business schools.

I would like to begin by offering two untested hypotheses that I believe warrant further research investigation as we begin to understand intersectional differences and desires among women faculty in business schools, specifically, and fostering gender and work-life inclusion. My first hypothesis is that *underrepresented minority faculty in US business schools are more likely to be black women relative to any other underrepresented minority group of women or men*. My second hypothesis is that *as compared to white women faculty in business schools, black women faculty in business schools are more likely to be unmarried, already mothers or are actively contemplating motherhood, and are more likely to seek employment in Universities that embrace intersectional conversations on race and work-life inclusion*. While it would be wonderful to test these hypotheses, it is clear that we know very little about black women business school faculty as a whole, which makes it difficult to paint even deeper intersectional insights within this already intersectional group. I believe that it is troubling that we (a) lack adequate research on black women business school faculty given their representation within the larger group of underrepresented minority faculty and (b) lack adequate research on differences among black women faculty given the intensive and extensive efforts that are being made to increase and retain faculty diversity in business schools. As evidence, I draw on insights from the PhD Project, research from a variety of nonprofit public policy organizations and think tanks, and research from other academic fields to support my assertions.

Since 1994, the PhD Project has taken on the task of helping to increase the number of underrepresented minority faculty in business schools. As of today, more than 200 US business schools work with the PhD Project in some capacity to increase faculty diversity. Doctoral student members of the PhD Project outperform their peers on doctoral program completion rates with a 90% doctoral program completion rate for PhD Project members as compared to a 70% completion rate for US doctoral students overall. Doctoral student graduates of the PhD Project also outperform their peers on faculty retention rates with a 97% retention rate for PhD Project professors as compared to a 60% retention rate for US professors overall. Through their efforts, the PhD Project has helped to quadruple the number of minority business professors (including African American, Hispanic American, and Native American faculty) to more than 1,000 total in 25 years (PhD Project, 2018).

Despite these successes, I would be remiss if I did not suggest that black women business school faculty, in particular, may face tough choices, challenges, and a stark reality when it comes to marriage and motherhood and balancing those life choices with a professional career in academia especially in environments that are not forward-thinking when it comes to intersectional differences and experiences. Here, I will offer an array of statistics that I have pieced together from nonprofit public policy organizations and think tank sources on four-year college completion rates, marriage rates, and motherhood rates among white and black women. Let me start with **college completion and marriage rates**. According to the Brookings Institute, women are **completing four years of college** at faster rates than men and the marriage gap among college educated and non-college educated women is widening such that non-college educated women are more likely to be married (Brookings, 2017). In 2015, the Brookings Institute revealed that 45 percent of white women in the US ages 25-35 had four-plus years of college education as compared to 35 percent of white men, 20 percent of black women, and 17 percent of black men in this same age group. However, marriage rates are actually declining for black women with an undergraduate degree. While black college graduates as a whole are less likely to be married (Brookings, 2017), “a black woman with an undergraduate degree aged between 35 and 45 is 15 percentage points less likely to be married than a white woman *without* [an] undergraduate degree.”

In addition to college completion and marriage rates, **motherhood rates** differ among black and white women in the US though mothers as a whole are increasingly unmarried. We know that women as a whole are waiting longer to have children than a decade ago (Livingston, 2018). Yet, there has been an uptick in the number of unmarried mothers ages 40 to 44 in the last 20 years. In fact, since 1994, motherhood rates among never-married white women in their

early 40s has risen from 13% to 37%. Among never-married black women in their early 40s, motherhood rates have risen from 69% in 1994 to 75% in 2014.

So, let me now return to my original two hypotheses and propose some future research directions and considerations for gender and work-life inclusion of black women faculty in business schools. Hypothesis 1: *Underrepresented minority faculty in US business schools are more likely to be black women relative to any other underrepresented minority group of women or men.* While US business schools are increasing their representation of black women faculty, they have been less successful in increasing their representation of black men faculty, Hispanic faculty, and Native American faculty at the same rates. Currently, we lack clear, empirical insights into these discrepancies. An overly simplistic conclusion would be to suggest that these groups are less interested in pursuing careers as business school faculty. As a deeper thought, I offer the insights of our peers who are focused on increasing faculty diversity in STEM disciplines. Their research and insights suggest that participating in research during the undergraduate college years (Carpi, Ronan, Falconer, and Lents, 2016) and exposure to demographically similar role models who are faculty are vital aspects of building awareness of and increasing self-efficacy and interest in academic careers among minority students. That is, black male college students alongside Hispanic- and Native-American college students may be participating less in research during the undergraduate years as compared to their white and black female peers and may be less exposed to demographically similar role models suggesting a pipeline issue. Yet, there may be other reasons for these discrepancies including that those who are participating in research and finding demographically similar roles models may also be garnering greater access to supports and resources at different stages of the process that reinforce their career goals and decisions. My point being, additional research and insights are needed to explain the dearth of black male faculty and Hispanic- and Native American faculty as a whole in US business schools as compared to their black female peers and, of course, their white male and female counterparts.

At the same time, further research is needed to understand the lived experiences of black women faculty as a seemingly more prevalent though still underrepresented group of minority business school faculty. Of note, much of the conversation around increasing faculty diversity in business schools today either focuses on recruiting more women (AACSB, 2018) or recruiting more underrepresented minority faculty (PhD Project, 2018; AACSB, 2018) without similar attention to the intersection of gender and race. Attending to this intersection is important given insights from other academic fields suggesting that black women faculty face unique and often additional challenges that may affect their experiences in academia (Reid, 2012). For

example, in a commentary for the American Council on Education, Reid (2012) suggested that black women faculty are performing in roles that are considered contrary to both their gender and race, which may subject them to additional or more intense stereotypes. Thus, future research that examines faculty experiences at the intersection of gender and race is vital to understanding faculty recruitment and retention opportunities and challenges.

Hypothesis 2: My second hypothesis is that *as compared to white women faculty in business schools, black women faculty are more likely to be unmarried and already mothers or are actively contemplating motherhood and are more likely to seek employment in Universities that embrace intersectional conversations on race and work-life inclusion.* Many of the current work-life policies offered to help recruit and retain faculty as a whole tend to focus on the circumstances of married faculty and faculty with children. For instance, the AAUP (2010) found that concern over the issue of accommodating the partners of job candidates, often labeled as “dual career couples,” has increased since the 1990s. In some cases, domestic partnerships and civil unions have been included in related policies. As another example, some Universities have established dependent care funds for faculty who would like to travel to a professional event but also have child care obligations (Harvard University, 2018). In some cases, these policies also extend to faculty who have adult dependent care obligations (Harvard University, 2018).

Yet, the work-life considerations of black women faculty who are unmarried are often under addressed and simplistic insights by their race or their gender are often provided to narrate their experiences. As a result, our understanding of their work-life needs is limited. For example, a recent report on faculty diversity and campus climate at one university revealed that the turnover rate among underrepresented minority faculty has been increasing, which they related to the fact that the university is situated in a rural location (Cornell University, 2018). Yet, an independent investigation revealed that some underrepresented minority faculty attributed their departure in part to what they perceived as an overemphasis on gender diversity relative to racial diversity and other forms of difference (Liu, 2018). My final point here is that our struggles as an academic field and perhaps as a profession to openly discuss the intersections of gender and race in our conversations about work-life inclusion may threaten our ability to recruit and retain underrepresented minority faculty including black women faculty. I hope my insights and commentary motivate future thinking and policy development in this regard.

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