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The Voices and Choices of Women in the Academy

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The Voices and Choices of Women in the Academy

Ramona Ortega, Brenda L.H. Marina, Lena Boustani Darwich, Eunju Rho, Isa Rodriguez-Soto, Rajade Berry-James

Abstract

While it is clear that gender inequity still exists, this situation is compounded by race, ethnicity and sexism. The daily experiences of women confirm that racism and sexism is alive and well. This article presents and examines the experiences of Latino, Black, Arab, and Asian professional women and the consequences of their career decisions. Synthesized with literature, conceptual patterns of significance are noted for young girls and women of color aspiring and pursuing professional careers in education. The strategies utilized by these diverse professional women to cope with the trials and tribulations of contemporary educational and professional challenges are reviewed. It is necessary to continue to educate the public about the struggles and successes of women of diverse backgrounds to assist both high school and college age women as they prepare to contribute to the global economy of the 21st century.

This work seeks to take advantage of the opportunity to understand a social phenomenon by engaging in a conversation about issues that matter to women of color pursuing professional positions within academic communities. While alienation and marginalization have been identified among women of color in the academy, much of this prior work is based on survey data. Most do not include a woman's daily experiences and interactions with others in the work environment and there is little discussion of the links between what takes place in larger societal contexts.

Women of different cultures continue to experience the double oppression of racism and sexism in the educational arena. Utilizing narrative inquiry and case studies, this paper offers a conceptual framework upon which to assign meaning and practical application for Latino, African American, Arab, and Asian women specifically, and to women of diverse backgrounds in general, as it relates to workplace marginalization. This paper makes a contribution to the literature because it focuses on a group of women of color struggling to take their rightful places in academia, and about whom little is known.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry and the case study are the two methodological approaches used in this paper. Yin (1989) suggests that "...the case study contributes uniquely to our knowledge of individual, organizational, social, and political phenomena" (p. 14). Case studies effectively uncover detailed information about organizations and individuals that otherwise may be obscured.

Narrative inquiry is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling. Connelly & Clandinin (1988) and Clandinin & Connelly (1994, 2000) were among the first to bring the experiential focus to educational research.

Connelly and Clandinin (1994) suggest that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. They espouse the view that the study of narrative is the study of the many ways human beings experience the world. In other words, people's lives consist of stories. We suggest that storytelling is a reflective practice that has the possibility to transform daily experiences into social, cultural and educational significance. Many women of color at the pinnacle of their professional and academic positions have exceptional stories to tell and lessons to teach.

In the next section the voices of “Rolanda, Brandy, Mona, Mariana, Keisha, , and Hana” are presented as narrative case studies in which professional women of color describe their experiences as they enter and progress through the tenure track process and the all too frequent sense of being marginalized as working professionals. Following the voices of these women, we discuss degree attainment and faculty employment statistics which contextualize the current reality of academe in the United States. In the final sections of this article we discuss mentoring as a critical component in “surviving” the climb up the ladder in academia, a male dominated society.

Rolanda’s Voice

Rolanda began her story by revealing that, “I have faced and overcome many obstacles, enjoyed numerous opportunities and promotions, made new friends and colleagues and simultaneously left old friends and family members behind. It is not a matter of choice; it simply happens.” Here are some of the obstacles that she overcame in an effort to find a rewarding career.

Economic condition

Like other members of minority groups, says Rolanda, “My family’s economic status fell among the lowest socio-economic strata of society. I was raised as a daughter of Mexican migrant workers. My parents were transported by Mid-western farmers from Mexico to the United States to work in sugar beet, cotton, and corn fields from Arkansas to Minnesota. I am one of eleven children and one of the three youngest. My parents were never out of work largely because they never turned down any job no matter how small, low paying and humble. Eventually, both of my parents worked themselves out of the fields as migrant workers to equally hard jobs in factories and bakeries. Leaving the migrant fields was an important step up on the social scale no matter how small.

Rolanda says, “What I learned from my parents, who primarily spoke Spanish and broken English, is that industry and self-sufficiency made the difference in surviving in a harsh world. Dad built by hand the house my family lived in. The ceilings were low because dad was only five feet two inches tall and he could only reach so high. There was no indoor plumbing and the privy (toilet) was outside. An iron pump stood in the yard and that is where we went to pump water even in the winter time. Life was hard, but somehow we seemed to get along. I cannot say we moved up the social ladder, but we managed to get along. In the 1950’s and early 1960’s, there were few social programs upon which to depend. As a family, we earned the money to buy what we needed or we went without. The same may be said about college—there was no money for it, so none of my brothers and sisters made plans to go to college. We expected to go to work at the

age of 16 and we did—all of us. College was only a dream; neither of my parents completed college or high school for that matter. Neither ever imagined any of their children would go to college, but we did.”

Single parenthood—A major obstacle

Continuing her story, Rolanda says, “High school counselors never suggested I was college material. The world I grew up in gave me the clear impression that college was for the White, upper-socio-economic class, and at seventeen I became a single-parent and had to depend on the secretarial skills I learned in high school to get a job to support my child and myself. Social programs encouraging single parents to continue their education had not been introduced and I was on my own.”

Education

In explaining how she found her way in college, Rolanda says, “although college was not on the horizon for any member of my family, it is remarkable that, out of the nine children who survived childhood, five earned college degrees. Each of us worked our way through college one way or another. From a younger sister living in Arizona, I learned that community college was affordable. It was not easy, but I moved from the Midwest to Arizona, entered and completed a two-year degree and went on to complete a Bachelor of Science degree graduating *magna cum laude*; then on to Harvard to complete a master’s degree. Harvard was an exhilarating experience. I felt at last I had entered the community of scholars. Having a Harvard degree opened many doors and I credit that degree with moving me one step closer towards the academic career I have today.”

Employment opportunities

With my master’s degree in hand, I sought employment at the local state university. It was my goal to become an advisor for minority students to help inspire them to new heights and I was hired as an academic advisor after only one interview. The job was a low paying position, but I had my foot in the door at a major university.

Roland said, “Getting a foot in the door is one of the lessons I have to teach. Never turn down a low paying job out-of-hand without thinking about future prospects. In my case, one job led to another in rapid succession. Inside of one year after graduating from Harvard and going to work as a minimum wage academic advisor, I met a Member of Congress and went to work for him. The position, while prestigious, was not highly paid, still it gave me the chance to develop my natural skills in public relations, administration and office management. Shortly thereafter, I won a prestigious Kellogg Fellowship and went off to see the world. Fellowship dollars allowed me to travel to and conduct research in England, Sweden, Finland, Japan, Australia, Canada, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands.” Rolanda has presented academic papers on six of the seven continents.

Rolanda says, “After I began my work as a member of the staff for a newly elected Member of Congress, and without my knowledge, I was scouted by an investment banking firm. The firm offered to provide training for me as an investment banker. The

firm intended that I would specialize in municipal finance—university and school bonds. I became an associate banker and learned about Wall Street stocks and bonds. I became one of a few Hispanic women to earn my Series 7 stock brokers certificate and was registered with the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC). My banking experiences, although it was exciting, was not destined to last long. When the stock market “correction” occurred on October 19, 1987, thousands of bankers were out of work—and I was one of them. By this time; however, I had earned a reputation as someone who was efficient and well-organized; and I returned to a position at my local state university.

For a second time another door at the same university opened. Returning to the same workplace provided the right time and place to complete my doctorate in public administration. At fifty-five years of age, I became one of the oldest and few Mexican Americans to graduate with a doctoral degree in public administration.” Rolanda says, “Completing the degree is a point of pride, but I did not do it alone.” She credits her White male professors for having confidence in her and one in particular who became an effective and caring mentor. The importance of mentoring to successful career advancement is discussed in a later section.

Brandy’s Voice

Brandy reflected on her preschool and elementary school years. “At an early age I learned that speech and grammar were of the utmost importance for any type of success.” Over the years, Brandy listened to her father’s voice change whenever he answered the telephone; his tone was different and his words were eloquent. As time went by she watched her aunts negotiate business at the counter when they visited the stores downtown. They too consciously and deliberately adjusted their tone of voice and spoke as if they were orators for an elaborate ceremony. Brandy’s recalls these experiences as her introduction to the informal mentoring process.

Economic Conditions

Brandy’s father worked long hours, which she later understood as “working overtime.” Her mother stayed at home as a homemaker. Brandy’s parents owned their home, which was not the norm in the African-American community where they lived. The homes were small with well-maintained lawns. Several families in the neighborhood used food stamps rather than cash or checks to buy food. Most of those families did not own automobiles. Although she grew up with more than her neighborhood playmates, Brandy later discovered that they actually lived below the medium income and could be classified as living at the poverty level. Brandy’s father worked hard and applied for any and all the on-the-job training he could find. He modeled a strong work ethic, persistence, and, desire for continuous learning. From the time Brandy’s father obtained a GED, the precedent had been set for additional education in this family.

Education

In middle school, Brandy was called to the counselor's office; he wanted to congratulate her on high test scores, and encouraged her to take courses related to math and science. In high school, some of her teachers continued the encouragement for the sciences. Brandy graduated from high school as one of the top 10 students in her graduating class of 363 students. She was the vice president for the national honor society, a member of the executive council (a student organization that assisted with policies and procedures), and she received the "womanhood" award as a senior in high school. With her father as the foundation, one African American male guidance counselor, two Caucasian male teachers, and one white female teacher encouraged her to continue with her educational pursuits.

Brandy received a small scholarship and obtained an Associate's degree in Radiologic Technology. While working in this field, she was able to continue her education with paid tuition assistance from her employer. "Being married, having a child and working was not the traditional college student demographic" Brandy stated. While some sniggered and talked of how old she would be when she received a degree, Brandy pressed on, one or two courses at a time. While pursuing her master's degree Brandy's, summer internship mentor sent her to a meeting which led to a graduate assistantship. The supervisor for this graduate assistantship became a mentor and encouraged her to pursue the doctorate degree.

While pursuing the doctorate degree, Brandy listened to the conversations of her peers who had been invited to make presentations with their professors. Then she discovered that her peers had also been invited to work on scholarly publications with their major advisors and some professors. These opportunities were never presented to Brandy while she worked through courses and the dissertation process. Brandy now has a Ph.D. in Secondary Education. Although she is the only college graduate among six siblings, two of her sisters have been inspired to continue their education. The advanced degrees have been directly related to the employment opportunities afforded.

Employment Opportunities

Brandy actually took a pay cut to move from the medical field into the field of education. This decision was supported by her husband, family and friends. Brandy went from the position of a part-time education coordinator to becoming an assistant dean with teaching privileges. Continuing her story, Brandy says "As a graduate assistant my supervisor and mentor was one of the committee member's that interviewed me for my first real job in the educational arena. He spoke highly of my work ethic and leadership capabilities. As a result, I gained another mentor with my first university position. This gentleman was a Caucasian who modeled leadership and a commitment to service. He was innovative and supportive of my ideas, which enhanced my confidence to seek positions with greater responsibilities."

Now a professor and coordinator of a higher education administration program, Brandy reflects on her career advancement. She states, "There were several men, both African American and Caucasian that mentored me through educational and career pursuits. At that time, I did not notice that I had very few women as role models and

mentors. This realization has caused me to reach out to young women in general and women of color in particular that are pursuing careers in education and educational leadership.” Brandy stated that her education and persistence to assert herself for leadership positions has taken her many places. She has made presentations about women across the United States, England, Australia, and China. Although she believes that she will continue to influence and impact many women across the globe, she has a very simple but profound message. According to Brandy, “There is no substitute for hard work, mentoring relationships are essential, and family support is priceless.” The importance of mentoring to career advancement is discussed in a later section. later section.

Mona’s voice

For Mona, her story begins when a colleague referred to her as a “woman of color.” She says she was struck by how surprised she was to hear this reference. She says she had always referred to herself as “white.” People have always assumed she was Italian or Greek because of her light skin. She corrected them as she shook her head and wondered whether people will learn the difference. She never wondered whether her “identity and the identity of other Arab Americans were threatened by just how invisible these assumptions made proved us to be”, never thinking that their race has been marginalized and their culture stigmatized (Abraham, 1989) and never admitting that they were at the receiving end of discrimination by society and its institutions.

Then she began in her late twenties to wear the *hijab*, the covering for women required by her religion, *Islam*. And people’s interest in her changed. She suddenly became someone to strike up conversations with about women’s rights. And after 9/11/2001, she became someone to stare at suspiciously, sometimes even questioning her loyalties. She felt alienated at work.

Mona teaches at a university where the student body is predominantly of western European Christian background and has little contact with people of different heritage. She responds diplomatically to students’ probes about her personal beliefs and her choices. She tries to respond as graciously to colleagues and supervisors, but finds it difficult at times because she expects them to have more knowledge and to demonstrate respect for others’ customs, ideas, values and beliefs. In her search for answers to their behavior, she reflects upon her own thoughts of who she believes herself to be. She realizes that she hold some of the same stereotypes as they. She says at times “I cannot decide which was sadder: being marginalized by a society or being marginalized by oneself.”

Education

Mona grew up in middle class suburbia. As a Lebanese American, she felt safe in a society that seemed to embrace her. She felt certain that she was prepared to function as a productive member in that society with the right education. Her parents made sure she went to the best schools in their community. She attended catholic elementary and secondary schools. She earned her undergraduate’s degree from a Jesuit university. Her professors were impressed with her potential and took interest in her goals. They

discussed with her career opportunities in medicine and law. She chose the Peace Corps after graduation and served in Africa. Upon her return home, she earned a doctorate in education. But knowledge of herself, what she calls her “self-discovery”, is happening now, as she lives and teaches in her own homeland. It is here at home that she works at understanding what it means to be a female struggling in the face of religious discrimination, racism and sexism.

Identity

Mona sees herself as representing a relationship between race, gender and religion: “I am a Muslim woman of color, and I think I belong to today’s least trendy minority group.” She is aware of the bewilderment her person seems to cause in many of her colleagues and students. She states that “To the insular observer, I am too diverse. To the multiculturalist, I represent too much diversity. Not many can seem to find a best practice to work with me.” This weighs heavy on her, and she questions the significance of her diversity in a society where she feels isolated.

Employment Opportunities

Mona is a member of the faculty at a state university. She does not accuse any of her supervisors or colleagues of discrimination. She simply feels an aversion in some behavior toward her. She is rarely invited to collaborate on projects. She was overlooked twice for promotion. She was once made to defend her effectiveness as an educator when a colleague questioned her choice to wear the *hijab* at work.

She admits that she feels least productive in her professional life, even though she invests long hours in her work. She wishes that her supervisors and colleagues can “see” what she contributes to her students and her field. She realizes it is as much her responsibility as theirs in this and engages with them in conversations. These conversations have helped her rethink her approach to her colleagues. She is reaching out to those she feels most receptive and finding that, once approached, senior women faculty are more willing to build a mentoring relationship with her.

Mona explains that these relationships are a source of “comfort”. They give her access to meaningful academic discourse and innovations, and they provide her with opportunities to participate in supportive personal dialogues. She states that her experiences have made her better aware of the unique problems facing women of color in higher education. She says they have given her resolve to serve as a mentor to her students, “particularly students of color, who are isolated and would thrive given the opportunity”.

Mariana’s Voice

Mariana aspired to be an educator ever since she can recall, which may be a product of coming from a family of teachers. This ambition rose not only from her desire to emulate her relatives, but also from a deep desire to share her experiences to foster tolerance. Mariana is Puerto Rican, born and raised on the island. In that context there was no need for awareness of otherness, this became an issue when she left the island.

Mariana explained: “I was keenly aware of gender differences, and inequalities, but it was not until I came to the mainland that I gained full awareness of being part of an ethnic minority.” Her journey in understanding otherness and prejudices began at that point.

Economic Condition

Mariana was raised in a middle class household; her father a physician and her mother a ‘domestic engineer’. Her family went to great strides to give both Mariana and her sister a private school education, focused on learning English and being completely bilingual. “My father always said that learning English would create opportunities that we would otherwise not have.” Their efforts included the rare experience of sending both daughters to summer camp in the United States, and to travel abroad in Europe. Mariana expresses that her family’s economic situation while growing up was not the norm for most Puerto Ricans, especially the emphasis placed on educational experiences. Both her parents came from humble backgrounds and limited resources and this possibly motivated them to go to great lengths to ensure their daughters education.

Education

Mariana’s parents told her that the best, and probably only, inheritance they could guarantee was the education they could help provide for her. Mariana attended the state university’s top campus in Puerto Rico for her bachelor’s degree. She studied natural sciences, partly because it was considered more prestigious than social sciences and humanities. She shifted her focus for the master’s degree, choosing to combine natural and social sciences. Her sights were set on a state university in the southwest in the U.S. This was a break with tradition of most Puerto Ricans clustering in the northeast, even for higher education. All her mentors up to that point were Puerto Rican, and many of them women. None of them anticipated the relative isolation that would occur during her years in the master’s program. Her experience as being a minority in academia was new and Mariana grappled with her identity and representation in this setting. Due to her bilingual education Mariana’s accent was relatively mild, and some colleagues questioned her Latina authenticity. She realized that being Puerto Rican was both a source of interest and contention in a dominantly white university that lacked ethnic diversity.

For Mariana it was not just about being the only Latina in her program, but also being a colonial subject in the heart of the empire (Puerto Rico is a territory and colony of the United States). Various white colleagues would try to correct her assumptions and experience of otherness, by trying to suggest that the colonial situation lent itself for her to be almost like one of them. When she was not being exoticized she was being encouraged to assimilate.

After her master’s degree Mariana returned to Puerto Rico to work as a teacher in a program for high school dropouts that desired to obtain their high school diploma. She credits this experience with refueling her desire to obtain her doctoral degree, especially to in some way serve her fellow Puerto Ricans. She returned to the southwest to pursue her doctoral degree in a different institution, one that counted with higher diversity to avoid her previous experience.

Mariana had always consciously chosen female mentors because she felt more comfortable, and their experiences were more similar to her own. Her first doctoral advisor was a tenured female professor. She was expecting her first child just as she started her doctoral degree. Mariana learned that the professors regarded family and graduate school incompatible, and that many told female students to avoid pregnancy while studying. They expressed lowered expectations for Mariana due to being a student, mother and wife. In the course of developing her research proposal Mariana concluded that her advisor's style and her own were not compatible, regardless of gender.

The new advisor, a white male, was a break from Mariana's traditional choice of mentor. "He was the most compassionate, critical and encouraging mentor I had in graduate school." Mariana defied the expectations of faculty and fellow students and was the first in her cohort to graduate and obtain a tenure track position. She credits her mentors including her father, her Puerto Rican female mentor and her doctoral advisor as key to her success.

Employment Experience

Mariana returned to Puerto Rico while conducting her doctoral research, and taught as adjunct faculty in a private university. She was also adjunct faculty in a community college in the southwest. Both of these opportunities generated little economic remuneration, and demanding preparations. However, Mariana regarded them both as the singular teaching opportunities, especially the community college in a U.S. The costs and benefits could not be weighed in dollars and cents, but rather in making her more marketable. Her mentors were all supportive of that decision, which helped prepare Mariana for her next career move.

Entering the academic job market at a time when adjunct positions dominated and tenure track positions were scarce in her field was difficult, but not completely disheartening. Her doctoral advisor encouraged Mariana to apply for many positions and to work on her interview skills in order to prepare for the possibility of a lengthy job search, possibly of various years. Mariana met with many professors in her institution, in national conferences, conferred with Puerto Rican professors on the island and abroad, to obtain advice about academic positions. "If I would have limited myself to talking with Puerto Rican women in academia, then I would have missed other viewpoints that in many cases represented the people on hiring committees." Mariana obtained a tenure track position on her first year of being on the job market in an institution that provides the necessary balance between research, teaching, and service--and is family friendly.

During her graduate career Mariana has served as mentor to various Native Americans, Latinos, first generation scholars and international students. She highlights: "There is a vital need for mentoring, especially groups that are not highly represented, and to assist in closing the education gap at all levels."

Keisha's Voice

Keisha was born to a single mother who had her first major depressive episode (MDE) at the age of 17. Keisha's mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia and dropped out of an elite boarding school just a few months shy of graduation. For Keisha's mother, trying to quiet the voices in her head fueled her addiction to heroin. Unlike Keisha, her mother grew up as part of the Black middle class, with two hard working parents who made numerous sacrifices for their only child. For more than 40 years, Keisha's grandmother worked as a psychiatric nurse for a state institution and her grandfather was a career veteran in the armed services. Despite the personal sacrifices of Keisha's maternal grandparents, her mother suffered from co-occurring disorders of mental illness and substance abuse. During Keisha's childhood, her mother was often absent from the home because of her mental illness and drug-seeking behavior. Because of her mother's abandonment, Keisha was determined to excel in life and her grandmother's love fueled her work in the public sector.

Economic Condition

Over the course of a decade, Keisha's mother had nine pregnancies with only five children surviving childbirth. Her father passed away, leaving Keisha's mother to raise her children alone and to depend on public assistance for survival. Keisha's maternal grandparents lived close by and her grandmother won custody of the five minor children after Keisha's mother abandoned them. For the next 10 years, Keisha and her siblings lived in a small two-bedroom cottage with her maternal grandparents. The sunroom at her house was quickly converted into a bedroom for Keisha's two brothers and along with her three sisters, she shared the other bedroom. Despite her grandmother's professional career as a psychiatric nurse and her grandfather's pension, it was difficult for them to make ends meet while raising five children on a public sector salary. The family lived at or close to the poverty line and relied on public assistance as well as the church for financial and emotional support.

Education

In school, Keisha was constantly encouraged by her teachers - she excelled in math at a very early age. Throughout her school years, Keisha was a quiet, dedicated and determined student. She earned her spot among other students who were placed in the college-track at the local high school. Keisha's last few years of high school were turbulent. Keisha's grandfather passed away and her grandmother's health was declining as she neared retirement. To make matters worse, her mother's psychiatric condition was uncontrolled. Despite her family circumstances, Keisha earned good grades, participated in extracurricular activities after school and worked part-time during her junior and senior years to help make ends meet. A few months before she graduated from high school, Keisha applied for admission into a private college and was accepted into a business program for first-generation college students. As an upperclassman, Keisha secured a coveted internship at the state department of higher education. Her undergraduate

internship paved the way for a long career in higher education. She graduated with her business degree in four years and began working at a college right away.

Employment Opportunities

After college, Keisha was hired to work with university administration at one of the largest public institutions in her home state. Keisha was mentored by many upper level administrators at the university. Several of the women helped groom her as a professional and the men encouraged her transition from an early career professional into an unflappable administrator. Each of them encouraged Keisha to take full advantage of the educational benefits and professional opportunities afforded to her as a member of the administrative team. She said, “I was a part of a privileged group of professionals. In my twenties, I attended leadership meetings, helped develop a university strategic plan, and was financially rewarded for my professional contributions to the administrative team. As a young professional, I took full advantage of every opportunity to excel in the field of higher education. I created a ten-year plan that highlighted my professional and educational dreams. While working full-time, I accepted tuition-remission assistance and tuition reimbursement to earn a professional management certificate, a master’s degree and finally a PhD. Luckily for me, I was surrounded by faculty and administrators who encouraged me to pursue an advanced degree and continuously challenged me to pursue my dreams of becoming a member of the faculty. I was the first African American student in my academic institution to earn a PhD. After I graduated with my doctoral degree, I resigned my administrative job for a tenure-track position in a liberal arts college. While I believe that my strong administrative skills got me my initial academic position as a faculty coordinator of a graduate program, my long-term term dreams were fulfilled as I pursued tenure in my field.”

Keisha’s academic career began at a small liberal arts college, yet she was able to secure a tenured position at a research university when she left her initial appointment for personal reasons. As a faculty member, Keisha worked at three different colleges and universities and she was the first African-American faculty member hired in each of those academic departments. After more than 20 years in higher education, Keisha earned numerous awards for professional and community service. According to Keisha, “The professional recognition for mentoring graduate students means so much to me. The awards that hang on my wall remind me of the personal and professional support that I received as an under-represented minority. These rewards inspire me to be a role model for other under-represented students and early career professionals. I am committed to helping others achieve their academic and professional goals – I see my professional commitment as a way of paying it forward.”

Hana’s Voice

Hana began her story by describing unique Korean culture, as one “obsessed with education.” Korean society has long emphasized the role of education as a main driving force for the success of individuals, groups, communities, and the country. She said, “No other nation has greater enthusiasm for education than Korea.” Korean parents are desperate to provide better educational environments for their children. In a very

competitive environment, “nowhere are students under more pressured to study.” Continuing her background, she said, “I look back over my life, a young girl who dreamed of becoming a famous and influential scholar, and then ask myself what drove my life to chase the dream across 6000 miles? It was her positive attitude that sustained her. Hana credits her role models and mentors. She explains, “I was lucky to have role-models and mentors who supported my passion in different ways.”

Economic Conditions

Hana grew up in a lower-middle class family. Her parents were not very affluent but very supportive of Hana and her sister. Her father owned a small business and mother used to be a housewife. Hana said, “When I was young, we traveled almost every week all around the country. My parents took us and showed us a variety of national historic sites, museums, national treasures, or even tourist attractions; because they believed that those experiences would serve as invaluable educational assets for me and my sister. So, I considered my family to be average maybe a little higher in the income bracket than the people who lived around me. I never worried about economic problems or concerns in my family until I went to the high school.”

Since the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s, Hana’s family has been living in debt. Nevertheless, her parents valued education and did pay for her education. Hana said, “I felt sorry when I decided to continue my education by going to graduate school. I thought that I put a heavy strain upon the economic condition of my family. Some of my friends in a similar situation took a year off from the university to work part- or full-time to pay for school. However, my parents wanted me to continue my education because they always believed that education is the most important investment in an uncertain world. I will always thank my parents for encouraging me to value intellectual achievement and for making it possible for me to receive a great education.”

Education

She grew up in an urban city that had more than a million people. In that area, public high schools admitted students based on standardized test scores and grades. She studied hard since middle school and went to an elite high school, which was ranked No. 10 in South Korea. She remembered her high school life as “a studying machine.” In South Korea, high school students are commonly expected to study long hours to get into attractive universities, such as the top SKY universities (Seoul National, Korea, and Yonsei University). Like other high school students, Hana rose early and left home at 6:00 a.m.; returning home at 10:00 p.m. Her day did not stop then; she went to private specialty institutions until 2:00 a.m. from Monday to Saturday. She said, “I only slept three or maximum four hours a day, and I finally got into a top SKY university.” Throughout her elementary, middle, and high school years, her mother was her primary mentor. Even though both of her parents did not have bachelor degrees, Hana’s parents valued education and they tried to offer their children a better environment in which to study. Her mother clipped news articles she found about the social, political, and historical issues, and she loved to discuss these issues with Hana and her sister. Hana

said, “Thanks to my parents, I could enjoy learning about social science, literature, and history as well as applying things I have learned from the textbook to the world issues.”

Hana attended one of the top universities in South Korea for her bachelor’s and master’s degree. Hana majored in literature, but chose to start the master’s program in social science. She said, “At that time, everyone around me tried to dissuade me because my undergraduate major is totally different. But, my family was supportive when I made every critical decision.” While pursuing her master’s degree in her country, she met good mentors and colleagues. In her master’s program, there were six female cohorts out of thirty, and there was no female professor in her department. Her mentors and colleagues were primarily male, and this was typical in social science academia in South Korea. She got used to this environment and came to feel and work comfortable with male colleagues and professors. Hana said, “At that time, I was working as an editorial assistant and my immediate superior was a male doctoral student. We both had common interests in our academic area and became best friends regardless of gender. With other colleagues, we loved to discuss what we have and how we could contribute to the development of our academic field. I also met professors who devoted their life to scholarly research and they are the role models for my future academic career. Among them, my advisor encouraged me to study abroad in the United States, and his advice led me to embark on a new chapter in my academic career.”

She wanted to continue studying in the United States; however, the economic situation of her family got worse. Her mentors advised her to find the master’s programs that provided generous scholarships for international students, and she was finally granted a scholarship and started the master’s program in America. In this program, she was the only one Asian female student. During the first year, she experienced language barriers that led to embarrassment, depression, and relationship problems. Fortunately, she found three mentors. The first mentor she met was a White male who was a distinguished professor. He praised her for doing well on written assignments and the exam, particularly for her theoretical insights and analytic thinking. Hana said, “He has inspired me to continue my study in the doctoral program and to become a better scholar in my field.” Another mentor was an African American female visiting associate professor. Regarding the language barriers, Hana said, “She told me that the problem of public speaking is natural and obvious, even for American students. She said that she, even a native English speaker, took several public speaking classes to improve communication skills. Once I realized that I was not the only one who had communication problems, I could actively participate in group projects with other classmates.” The last mentor she met in her master’s program was a White female assistant professor who had a baby. Her husband was also teaching in the same college. Sometimes, she cancelled the class because her baby was frequently sick. Hana said, “While working for her as her research assistant, I observed the difficulties of being a scholar, mother, and wife. I got married while pursuing the doctorate degree. From time to time, I reminded myself what she told me about the ways to overcome such difficulties.”

Continuing her story, Hana said, “During my time in the doctoral program, I was really lucky. I started my Ph.D. program as research assistant to my advisor, a White male distinguished professor. I was the first Asian student working as his assistant. Most Korean students had a bias against him because in our particular Korean culture: In

interpersonal relationships, Koreans value emotional support, attachment, bonding, and affection. Even in the doctoral program, many Korean students expected to get emotional support from the faculty. For them, my advisor seemed to be too rational, rather than emotional and friendly. However, I was different from other Korean students. I was comfortable working with him because he judged me fairly. He was satisfied with my work progress and gave me the opportunity to become involved in several research projects.”

Hana experienced the biggest life change during this time period. “I got married and my son arrived during my third year of the Ph.D. program. I had to take the comprehensive examination three months after the birth of my baby. But, I hated to be treated as a special case. My advisor did not express lowered expectations for me; it made me feel more comfortable and helped me to get back to my work sooner. His faith in my abilities gave me strength through each hard moment during the five years in the doctoral program. Moreover, I cannot thank him enough for his emotional support for me.” She continues, “I have heard that many Korean female students studying in the United States seem to feel uncomfortable working with hard-worker-type professors because they feel often frustrated when they do not find sufficient emotional support and motivation from the faculty. My views are a little bit different. Being ‘supportive’ means different things to different people. In my case, my advisor likes someone who is industrious, diligent, responsible, and professional in carrying out tasks or duties. This style is not to everyone’s taste but it just suits my work style. That’s why we can build up mutual trust and, further, emotionally supportive relationship.”

Employment Opportunities

As an Asian female foreigner Hana has faced many challenges in the United States. During her master’s program, she applied to several internship positions in local and state governments, but she has been denied because she did not have the U.S. citizenship and had no work experience in the U.S. Continuing her story, she said, “Maybe, at least for me, academia seems to be the most generous place for non-U.S. citizens compared to other fields. However, even in academia, it is really difficult for Asian scholars, including male Asian students, to get a faculty position in the U.S. In my department, there were many Asian senior students who had really good research records and publications. However, Asian doctoral students usually have very little or no teaching experience compared to American students. Of course, I understand that teaching opportunities are deeply related to language skills and this is the weakness of many Asian or international students. When applying for faculty positions, teaching experience is as important as research. Many international students feel that we are not standing at the same starting line. We used to say that international students were not competing with American students, but with ourselves over the rare opportunities after American students took their chances.”

Hana has overcome a number of weaknesses and challenges and, on her first year of being on the job market, she finally obtained a tenure track position in a state university. Hana concluded, “I tried to be more proactive to find someone who gave me helpful advice and to find more opportunities to build up my academic careers. I always believe that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. The

most invaluable characteristic of my family and my mentors has been ‘positive attitude’, which changed my life once and is transforming me now. I have always been inspired by endeavor and passion of my mentors. I aspire to do the same for someone else someday.”

In the next section we transition to a presentation on the numbers of degrees earned by several ethnic backgrounds, in both male and female categories.

Degrees Attainment and Faculty Employment in the United States

Earning a college education is the most important challenge that each woman faced. Completing a terminal degree at the doctoral level appears to be the single most important accomplishment and has made the primary difference in the success of these women in the academy. Figures show however, that they are among the smallest minority of women of color who have completed college degrees at the highest level. Table 1 indicates the number of college degrees earned by ethnic groups: Hispanics, Blacks, Whites non-Hispanic, Asian, American Indians and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders and Others; datum is separated by gender: male and female. We also note that the category “Black” does not differentiate between African American and other African cultures.

Table I presents the number of higher education degrees conferred by gender, and by race/ethnicity for the year 2010-2011. The statistics indicate that non-Hispanic whites earned 64.3% of all bachelor’s degrees. Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, American Indian, and Pacific Islanders earned fewer bachelor’s degrees, with only 8.4%, 9.4%, 6.4%, 0.6%, and 0.2% respectively. The trend of non-Hispanic whites obtaining more degrees than their minority counterparts remains for the master’s and doctoral degrees. Examining master’s degrees, 56.2% were awarded to Whites while much smaller percentages were awarded to Hispanics (5.7%), Blacks (9.7%), Asians (5.1%), American Indian (0.5%), and Pacific Islander (0.2%) respectively. Among those earning doctoral degrees, Whites earned 59.4% of all doctoral degrees, Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, American Indian, and Pacific Islander have been conferred with significantly fewer doctoral degrees earning only 4.8%, 6.1%, 9.4%, 0.5%, and 0.2% respectively. These numbers bear evidence that Latino/Hispanics lag behind Blacks and Asians earning doctorates. It is worthy to note that of the minorities reported American Indians/Native Alaskans, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific islanders are the group with the least number of academic degrees (bachelor’s master’s and doctoral). With regards to gender, the table shows that men earn *fewer* higher education degrees than women, but at the doctoral level the numbers of men and women are more even than for bachelors and master’s degrees. Men earned 48.6% of the doctoral degrees awarded and women 51.4%.

TABLE I**Table 1 Degrees conferred by sex and race/ethnicity 2010-2011**

| | Total | Men | Women |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Bachelor's | 1,707,984 | 729,309 (42.70%) | 978,675 (57.30%) |
| White, Non-Hispanic | 1,097,684 (64.30%) | 480,786 (43.80%) | 616,898 (56.20%) |
| Black | 160,073 (9.40%) | 54,585 (34.10%) | 105,488 (65.90%) |
| Hispanic | 142,816 (8.40%) | 56,127 (39.30%) | 86,689 (60.70%) |
| Asian | 108,557 (6.40%) | 49,719 (45.80%) | 58,838 (54.20%) |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 11,051 (0.60%) | 4,431 (40.10%) | 6,620 (59.90%) |
| Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander | 3,976 (0.20%) | 1,574 (39.60%) | 2,402 (60.40%) |
| Other* | 183,827 (10.76%) | 81,786 (44.5%) | 102,040 (55.5%) |
| Master's | 727,623 | 290,322 (39.90%) | 437,301 (60.10%) |
| White, Non-Hispanic | 409,014 (56.20%) | 155,425 (38%) | 253,589 (62%) |
| Black | 70,793 (9.70%) | 20,672 (29.20%) | 50,121 (70.80%) |
| Hispanic | 41,311 (5.70%) | 15,037 (36.40%) | 26,274 (63.60%) |
| Asian | 37,373 (5.10%) | 17,079 (45.70%) | 20,294 (54.30%) |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 3,485 (0.50%) | 1,234 (35.40%) | 2,251 (64.60%) |
| Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander | 1,189 (0.20%) | 474 (39.90%) | 715 (60.10%) |
| Other* | 164,458 (22.60%) | 79,978 (48.63%) | 84,480 (51.4%) |
| Doctoral | 163,517 | 79,469 (48.60%) | 84,048 (51.40%) |
| White, Non-Hispanic | 97,089 (59.40%) | 47,088 (48.50%) | 50,001 (51.50%) |
| Black | 9,921 (6.10%) | 3,472 (35%) | 6,449 (65%) |
| Hispanic | 7,918 (4.80%) | 3,626 (45.80%) | 4,292 (54.20%) |
| Asian | 15,436 (9.40%) | 6,776 (43.90%) | 8,660 (56.10%) |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 873 (0.50%) | 418 (47.90%) | 455 (52.10%) |
| Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander | 316 (0.20%) | 150 (47.50%) | 166 (52.50%) |
| Other* | 31,964 (19.5%) | 18,040 (56.4%) | 13,924 (43.6%) |

*Other aggregates the categories of: 2 or more races, unknown and resident alien.

Source: *Chronicle of Higher Education (2013)*

As shown in Table I, even among ethnic minorities, more women obtained bachelors, master's and doctoral degrees than men within their own ethnic group. What is remarkable is that though more women are evidenced to obtain higher education degrees, there are still more men than women in higher ranked faculty positions in academe (see Table II). These figures highlight the experiences of minority women in academia and serve to contextualize the obstacles and realities many face to obtain degrees and academic employment.

Table II Employment Figures for Postsecondary Teachers (Professors) (2010-2011)

| Academic Rank | Total (men and women) | Women | White, Non-Hispanic women | Black women | Hispanic Women | Asian Women | Pacific Islander Women | American Indian/ Native Alaskan Women | *Other women |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Total | 761,619 | 43.9% | 74.1% | 6.9% | 4.5% | 7.5% | 0.2% | 0.5% | 6.3% |
| Professors | 181,508 | 29.1% | 83.8% | 4.8% | 3.2% | 5.7% | 0.1% | 0.4% | 2.0% |
| Associate professor | 155,200 | 42.2% | 77.8% | 6.6% | 4.1% | 7.6% | 0.2% | 0.4% | 3.2% |
| Assistant professor | 174,045 | 49.3% | 69.3% | 7.6% | 4.4% | 10.0% | 0.3% | 0.5% | 8.0% |
| Instructors | 109,054 | 55.9% | 73.6% | 9.0% | 6.2% | 4.8% | 0.4% | 0.9% | 5.2% |
| Lecturers | 34,477 | 54.5% | 75.1% | 5.0% | 5.4% | 7.1% | 0.1% | 0.5% | 6.9% |
| Other faculty | 107,335 | 47.3% | 67.5% | 6.3% | 4.1% | 8.3% | 0.2% | 0.5% | 13.1% |

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2013), *The Condition of Education 2013*.

The statistics in Table II indicate that there were over half a million postsecondary teachers in the U.S. during 2010-2011. Of these, 43.9% are women, compared to 56.1% male postsecondary teachers. Out of the 43.9% women employed in the academic workforce for 2010-2011, 74.1% were white, 6.9% Black or African American, 4.5% Hispanic, 7.5% Asian, 0.2% Pacific Islander, and 0.5% American Indian. Women appear to be keeping pace with men; however, Hispanic women are least frequently employed as professors, with American Indians and Pacific Islander women being the least employed in academia after Hispanics. Table I and Table II demonstrate how members of minority communities lag behind the majority White community at all levels of education and university employment. In the next section we discuss the importance of mentoring to successful academic careers and the role mentors play in career advancement—both public and private.

Mentoring

Numerous studies have been conducted about the value of mentors to young professionals. We particularly point out older studies to magnify the historical context and significance of mentoring support systems. These early studies indicate that mentoring is vitally important for career success among White males (Taussig and Joslyn, 1932; Warner and Abegglen, 1955; Ortega, 1998). The Taussig and Joslyn (1932) study analyzed the careers of 15,000 American businessmen. It was one of the largest studies of its type completed. Warner and Abegglen (1955) although on a smaller scale also focused on White males. The primary reason for studying men is quite simple--men dominated the workforce. Women, Blacks, and Hispanic professionals had not yet entered the workforce as professionals. It was not until the 1980s and 1990s that the careers of women and persons of color began to be closely examined and results from these studies began appearing in professional journals.

Among their findings, Taussig and Joslyn concluded that sons of businessmen generally follow in their fathers' footsteps. Thus, sons of businessmen were more often recruited into business when compared to sons of farmers or laborers (Esquibel, 1976).

This suggests that being born into a higher status labor group proves advantageous in the job market. Reaching similar conclusions, Warner and Abegglen (1955) reported:

Men born at the top are more likely to succeed and have more advantages than those born further down. There is not full freedom of competition; the system is still sufficiently status-bound to work to the considerable advantage of men born to higher position (p.36).

The same may be said of women of color. These women do not have the advantages bestowed upon them by virtue of being born into high-status families and thus must find their own path to the top of their careers.

The Influence of Mentors on Career Advancement

Others who studied career advancement include Roche (1979) and Knouse, Rosenfeld, & Culbertson (1992) who examined the relationship of mentoring to career advancement. As such, a mentor is defined as an individual who is usually older and established in an organization. Mentors provide younger employees with advice, counseling, coaching, social support, serve as sponsors, and provide entre to top management. The career of the protégée or “mentee” is enhanced because he or she becomes identified with a respected member of the corporation (Collins, 1983; Fagenson, 1988; Forbes & Piercy, 1991; Greenhaus, 1987; Knouse et al., 1992; Ragins, 1989). A mentor may recommend the mentee for promotion or identify opportunities leading to promotion. Results of Roche’s (1979) study of upper-level managers underscore the role mentors can play. Managers in the Roche study reported having mentors helped their careers.

With recent examples of women in leadership positions, much can be learned from them through mentoring. Mentoring is currently accepted as an effective means of identifying and promoting talent in all types of organizations (Mertz, Welch, & Henderson,., 1990). Robertson, Koll, Lampe, & Hegedus, (1995) suggest that women in administration and supervision should have a deliberate action plan for mentoring. Many women in college and university presidential positions reported that having mentors not only provided advice and guidance but it helped in dealing with procedures and the politics of the position (Hubbart, 1996). Many preferred to have women as mentors to help with plans for career advancement. Brown (2005) found that 91 female college presidents found mentoring and professional development programs to be important for recruitment and preparation. Over fifty percent of the women interviewed had more than one mentor. Several women indicated that along with their mentor, their spouse, family, and friends were their greatest assets (Shultz, 1997).

A study specifically examining Hispanics in mentoring relationships, *The Mentoring Process for Hispanics*, (Knouse et al., 1992), provides an example for minority/majority mentoring relationships and describes some of the advantages and disadvantages of Hispanics serving as mentors for other Hispanics. Also described are advantages and disadvantages of Anglos serving as mentors for Hispanics. One advantage of Hispanics mentoring other professionals like themselves is cultural identification. Awareness of special needs, serving as role models, and assisting in

socialization processes are other advantages. A disadvantage is that Hispanic and other minority mentors are perceived as less powerful—having only relatively recently made it into top-management positions.

Advantages of Anglo/Hispanic mentoring relationships include the perception that Anglos are more powerful, Anglo managers are in a position to socialize newcomers by modeling accepted behavior, and Anglo executives tend to have a significant network of high-profile friends to share by virtue of the rank and reputation they have earned. Disadvantages involve difficulty of Anglos relating to Hispanic, Black, or Arab employees and difficulty in taking the first steps towards initiating a mentoring relationship (Ortega, 2000).

Using lessons learned from these early studies alone, it is recommended that young professionals identify a mentor who can help guide them through the workplace maze. Studies suggest it is worthwhile to identify a White male in the workplace who can serve as a mentor. On the other hand, if successful women, Blacks, or Latinos, Asian, or Arab Americans, are available to provide mentoring, then their advice and counsel should be accepted. They are more likely to empathize with the struggles and challenges of minority professionals because of similar backgrounds.

Coping and Surviving in Professional Positions

The experiences of these Black, Latino, Asian, and Arab American women represent many other experiences told and untold. Such experiences suggest a need for mentoring programs for young women as early as middle school and high school to ensure they have a sense of self-efficacy and understand the importance of personal motivation. College level programs and professional development programs for entry-level minority professionals are also needed to assist in understanding and the value of mentors. In telling their stories these women of color verbalized the advantages and the barriers associated with being a female in the contemporary male dominated society. They exhibited strength, resilience born of necessity and self-confidence that helped them succeed. In their interviews, all six women agreed that females need to mentor other females and develop better networking mechanisms to promote and sustain their increased presence in professional positions. They also have committed time and effort to mentoring young girls, college students, and new professionals.

Middle and high school girls need both formal and informal mentoring programs and relationships presented to them. For women college age and beyond, joining mentoring, networking and personal support groups to help overcome large and small stresses associated with career seeking and career crises is recommended. The nation may be losing future leaders, especially women of color, because of a lack of appropriate training for their own self-survival (Gilgoff, 2009).

In academe mentoring is crucial at all levels (Wasburn & Miller, 2004; Settles, Cortina, Stewart & Malley, 2007). Undergraduate and graduate students feel that it is important to have mentors that match their gender or race. The relevance of matching mentorship with race and gender can serve to contextualize lived experiences, yet the academic outcome is not dependent on it, which was an experience voiced in the narratives offered for this study.

Summary

In this article, we suggest that “surviving” is dependent on several factors, including building a support network consisting of family, friends and trusted colleagues. Colleagues, friends and family members can offer guidance and counsel while pursuing public and academic careers. We recommend that women of color find someone willing to serve as a mentor and suggest that women not overlook the opportunity of having a White male as a mentor.

The literature suggests White males may be in more powerful positions and often mentors can play a vital role in helping and empowering minority women to pursue and successfully complete graduate education are better placed to help identify career and promotion opportunities because they have been in prominent positions longer than Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, or women. Finding a member of your own ethnic group to serve as your mentor also is valuable because they can relate to you on a personal level and understand the challenges you will face in your career. In addition, women of color must become a part of the established professional support system and take advantage of it.

Lessons learned from the six story tellers include, getting a foot in the door by accepting entry-level positions. Entry-level positions provide opportunities to hone skills and natural leadership abilities that may lead to greater employment opportunities. The importance of advanced education resonated in all six stories and is supported by the career advancement literature as one of the most important, if not the most critical; variables that influence careers in the public and private sectors. Finally, as women in general, we must consider how we can mentor young teens and college level women of color preparing for professional careers.

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