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## Voices of the Disenfranchised Within the Academy: Black Faculty Matter

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## Voices of the Disenfranchised Within the Academy - Black Faculty Matter

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**Abstract:** The grassroots initiative of addressing racial disparities that includes lethal force of police officers on unarmed Black Americans gave rise to the slogan, “Black Lives Matter.” Just as the “Black Lives Matters” slogan came under attack with a counter slogan, “All Lives Matter,” the academy continues to address the recruitment, retention, nurture, mentoring, and support of all faculty in the same manner. There is an unspoken and hidden subculture that emphasizes, “All Faculty Matters.” The result is the ongoing lack of Black faculty receiving promotion and tenure. This paper will provide an overview of the research literature on the challenges of Black faculty’s journey to promotion and tenure.

**Keywords:** Black faculty, promotion and tenure, cultural dissonance, racism in higher education.

The grassroots initiative of addressing racial disparities that includes lethal force of police officers on unarmed Black Americans gave rise to the slogan, “Black Lives Matter.” In a similar vein Black faculty continue to be an endangered racial/ethnic group at predominantly white institutions (PWIs). Black faculty may describe the academy as an unending battlefield strewn with daily experiences of racial battle fatigue, being enveloped in imposter syndrome, professional isolation/invisibility, insufficient resources, salary discrimination, challenges with intellectual collaboration, and the institutional circumvention of an inclusive academic community (Edwards, Beverly, & Alexander-Snow, 2011; Griffin, 2014; Stanley, 2006; Sulé, 2014). They face disparate scrutiny by peers and students when teaching and/or adopting a research agenda on race and racism, when compared to their white counterparts (Closson, Bowman, & Merriweather, 2014). This results in a state of silencing, where it is the exception, not the rule, to seek and listen to the frank experiences of Black faculty as a method for developing effective recruitment and retention strategies (Stanley, 2006).

Just as the “Black Lives Matters” slogan came under attack with a counter slogan, “All Lives Matter,” the academy continues to address the recruitment, retention, nurture, mentoring, and support of all faculty in the same manner. There is an unspoken and hidden subculture that emphasizes, “All Faculty Matters.” One Midwestern university announced 150% increase in Hispanic faculty and 0% increase in Black faculty. With the continual hiring of Black faculty, there was no acknowledgement that this meant a serious challenge in retention. The revolving door for Black faculty suggested that for every new recruit, one faculty member exited. Research indicates that the increase in Black faculty has not resulted in a corresponding increase in Black faculty at the associate or full professor rank (Edwards et al., 2011). In addition Black women faculty were less likely to be promoted in comparison to all faculty of color (Edwards et al., 2011).

In attending a symposium of Blacks in Higher Education, this author facilitated a discussion among faculty. Approximately 30% in attendance were tenured. The discussion included the challenges for Black faculty, success strategies, the lack of institutionally provided authentic mentoring, and questioning of the probability of the futility of the journey to tenure. Knowing what is needed for tenure and achieving tenure was articulated as non-congruent and non-intersecting realities, comprising the myth of meritocracy. Sulé (2014) surmises the struggle

within a culture of dissemblance, by recognizing the disenfranchisement within the academy in stark contrast to the personal or familial culture of being valued for the level of education and accomplishments. Black women faculty live dual lives of acceptance and disenfranchisement, giving way to the professional isolation/invisibility and imposter syndrome, referenced above.

This ongoing action research project is constructed to address the challenges Black faculty face as culturally different from the lens of the majority culture and how those differences can inform the creation of a highly successful and rewarding academic professional journey. This project is conceived within collaborative action research. Collaborative action research provides a compelling and comprehensive framework to structure shared processes for addressing problems (concerns), discovering new ways, exploring solutions, and developing knowledge. Participants will seek to critically engage with reflections on their perspectives and how they inform their professional journey, define success as an academic, and address the disparate treatment (if experienced).

The four research questions guiding this study are:

1. How would you describe authentic culturally tailored mentoring for Black faculty?
2. How is mentoring evaluated at your or another institution?
3. What are the challenges that you perceive at your institution for Black faculty obtaining promotion and tenure?
4. What best practices have your or another institution employed for Black faculty recruitment and retention?

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