Women of Color, Space Invaders, and Political Science: Practical Strategies for Transforming Institutional Practices

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In its recent report, the American Political Science Association's Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century (2011) persuasively argues that, to be relevant and effective, political science must come to grips with the increasing diversity in the US and its interconnectedness across the globe. Like other disciplines, political science has made "progress," but there is still much to be done (56). Although there has been an increase in the numbers of women and racial minorities, for instance, the improvement is relatively modest. Men still overwhelmingly dominate political science faculty, constituting 89.7% of faculty in 1980, and 71.4% in 2010. Furthermore, although the number of black women faculty increased from 4.3 to 6.1%, and Latina faculty rose from 2.3 to 3.0 %, they are not similarly situated as their male counterparts in terms of promotion. In one recent survey of departments, there were 58 African American female and 38 Latina assistant faculty, compared to 88 African American men and 62 Latinos (Alexander-Floyd 2008). There were only 58 black women and 25 Latinas at the associate level, compared to 100 black men and 60 Latinos at that rank. The numbers are even more startling in terms of full professors, with 102 African American men and 37 Latinos holding that title, compared to 19 African American women and only 7 Latinas at that rank. Although the numbers are low for black men and Latinos, the relative lack of success in promotion for black women and Latinas suggests their story has a different dimension, and underscores, I argue, the necessity of institutional change.

Building on my earlier work on black feminist approaches to institutional and disciplinary transformation (e.g., Alexander-Floyd 2007, 2008), this article contributes to existing scholarship on diversification of the professoriate by examining the environmental and structural barriers that black women and other women of color confront in academe, with a special focus on their implications for political science. Political and social science research on critical race feminism, democratic theory, and embodiment (Puwar 2004; cf. Coole 2007) provides a useful framework for elucidating these barriers. As Nirmal Puwar explains, all dominant institutions have a raced and gendered spatial dimension and are structured by implicit "somatic norms" that, when traversed by non-normative bodies, are seen to be "invaded." This presents a variety of challenges for white women and people of color, therefore, as they enter into institutional spaces dominated by white males. Building on Puwar's framework, I argue that women of color political scientists are "space invaders," that is, individuals outside the "somatic norms" of political science, a reality that impacts their experience of the discipline in every way in which they are professionally evaluated. Because women of color fall outside the somatic norms of political science departments, particularly at traditionally white institutions, measures designed to achieve gender equity must go beyond the individual to look to changes in departments and other institutions to achieve APSA Task Force diversity goals.

I develop my analysis in several stages. First, after underscoring the importance of a diverse professoriate in terms of democratic theory and practice, I turn to Puwar's framework to explain why strategies are needed to confront institutional dynamics that are raced and gendered and inhibit retention of women of color faculty. I outline key components of her research, and then detail the challenges that face women of color as space invaders in terms of teaching, research, and service, paying particular attention to the implications for political science. Second, guided by a critical black feminist approach to equity that focuses on institutional change, I suggest practical interventions, such as alternative teaching evaluation methods and diversity training modules for administrators and faculty, through which political science departments can counteract these challenges. I also discuss the importance of institutional spaces, such as women of color mini-conferences and diversity caucuses within professional associations, in leveraging disciplinary support for such efforts.

WOMEN OF COLOR AS SPACE INVADERS IN THE ACADEMY: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE

Diversifying the professoriate remains an important goal, both because of the increasing diversity in the US and the benefits of diversity in teaching and research. Women in general have had higher enrollment rates at colleges and universities since the 1970s. In political science, over 50% of undergraduates are female. Demographic shifts, which have increased the number of racial minorities in the US, are translating into

more racially and ethnically diverse classrooms. These developments have profound implications, especially for political science, given the nature of the discipline's focus on democratic practice, civic engagement, and political participation (cf. APSA Task Force 2011).

Certainly, if political science is going to be relevant as a discipline and assume the leadership role outlined by the APSA's Task Force, diversity also needs to be articulated as an important dimension of effective pedagogy. Diverse classrooms provide the most expansive contexts in which learning can take place. To the extent that we see students as co-participants in the educational process, that is, as agents whose diverse backgrounds and experiences situate them to provide the broadest context in which critical pedagogy can take shape, diversity is not only something that provides "added value" to educational environments, but is, in fact, constitutive of the most vibrant contexts for learning.

Although diversity is an important value, it is imperative to underscore the necessity of defining it from a critical black feminist perspective. As I and others have outlined elsewhere, Critical Race Black Feminism, a subset of Critical Race Theory, aligns with an expansive notion of social justice (e.g., Alexander-Floyd 2010; Graham 2007). A Critical Race Black Feminist approach takes as its point of departure several basic assumptions. First, it insists on understanding race as co-constitutive of other categories, such as race and class, that is, it does not presume a hierarchy among what are often deemed separate "categories" of identity. Second, it understands oppression as operating not only in terms of individual attitudes and behaviors, but examines institutional and cultural factors as well in the dynamic processes of identity construction and the production of inequality. Third, it eschews value neutrality as a defining dimension of the law, institutions, and public policy, exposing the ways in which race and other forms of "neutrality" operate to encode particular types of embodied norms and privilege and undermine evaluation of systemic problems. Finally, it directly challenges the epistemological assumptions of knowledge production, highlighting the importance of subjectivity and interpretive methodology in the production of scholarship.

to the ways in which members of underrepresented groups experience institutions and the ways in which spaces can be transformed and practices re-scripted. Substantive equality so conceived constitutes a social justice orientation in direct opposition to bourgeois notions of liberal equality. A substantive equality approach to engendering political science would entail both increasing the number of women of color in the profession *and* meaningful engagement that transforms institutions.

In this vein, the work of Nirmal Puwar (2004) is particularly helpful in thinking about the experiences of white women and racial minorities as underrepresented groups in academic spaces and the challenges for substantive equality in terms of institutional transformation. Drawing on her study of institutions in the United Kingdom, such as Westminster, Puwar argues that institutions may appear neutral but in fact run according to and reinforce implicit "somatic norms." White males, according to Puwar, are often the invisible prototype of those who are seen as rightfully belonging in spaces of power and authority. Hence, when white women or racial minorities enter into those spaces where they are not the somatic norm, they are seen as disrupting those contexts, presenting ontological uncertainty for white males whose identities are seen as defining the environments.

Puwar outlines several ways in which white women and racial minorities, moreover, experience the paradox of "in/visibility" (58). As "in/visible" subjects, space invaders are highly visible, and, indeed, often sought out and highlighted as representative of difference. At the same time, they are invisible in terms of their evaluation as persons able to competently fulfill their job responsibilities. Thus, those who are "bodies out of place" not following the somatic norm, face a number of challenges: "a burden of doubt, infantilisation, super-surveillance and a burden of representation" (58). With the burden of doubt, white women, racial minorities, and particularly women of color are never seen as measuring up. Space invaders often resist this ubiquitous uncertainty about their capacities by "overfunctioning" (Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2009) at work. Even those space invaders who have attained senior positions within organizations are infantilized

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In a Critical Race Black Feminist approach, analysis must account for and ultimately move beyond descriptive forms of representation that focus on removing barriers to access to institutional spaces. Such approaches embody the definition of formal equality, that, if taken as a point of closure, can leave institutional patterns and practices of discrimination insufficiently challenged. A substantive equality approach looks

or seen as being junior, because their presence in general is taken to be so much out of the norm (99). Their in/visibility also generates heightened scrutiny or surveillance, a point made even more meaningful because they are not seen as a "one" (i.e., person), but bear a metonymic relationship to the groups to which they belong. This scrutiny, again, compels overfunctioning and induces stress, among other things,

which has a deleterious effect on health and saps time and energy needed for research and writing. The impact of this in/visibility on black women and other women of color has been well documented in professions, such as academe, business, law, and medicine (e.g., Bell and Nkomo 2003; DuCille 1996). In political science, scholars have examined the gendered and raced nature of institutions, such as legislatures, and the experiences of women of color therein (e.g., Brown 2014; Hawkesworth 2003; Smooth 2002).

Women of color in academe experience all elements of in/visibility in academic spaces. In the classroom, students are constantly challenging women of color instructors' competence, which has an especially deleterious effect on student evaluations of instructors' performance. Because white males are the unspoken, legitimate norm associated with classroom spaces, women of color are received as "bodies out of place." Although women of color are illegible or invisible in terms of being regarded as competent instructors, they are hypervisible in terms of service. Faculty of color in general experience what has been aptly termed a "cultural tax" (Padilla 1994), where institutions extract additional labor out of them in order to include diversity on committees. Predictably, when women of color spend extra time on service or teaching they have diminished time for research. Moreover, when they research subjects or utilize methodologies that challenge disciplinary norms for knowledge production, their publication records receive additional scrutiny. In disciplines such as political science that still have a strong positivist orientation and preference for quantitative methods, women of color experience pressure to conform their work to these norms. Additionally, they are sometimes penalized for utilizing alternative methodologies and methods, qualitative methodology and ethnography, even though these may be favored in subfields, such as women and politics or comparative politics, contributing to the crisis identified by Sinclair-Chapman (2015) in this symposium. Finally, "pet" individuals may be used to project a pro-diversity image, even as these same folk are complicit in oppressing other minorities (Muhs et. al. 2012, 12).

In sum, as space invaders, women of color in political science confront an environment of exclusionary practices and norms that undermine their careers and well-being. Although the

transformation. In particular, I focus on three strategies: utilizing teaching portfolios in evaluation and promotion decisions; training faculty and administrators about bias in evaluation; and regularly monitoring academic climate and providing departmental reviews and trainings.

Teaching portfolios are one important mechanism for assisting with the tenure process. Typically, teaching evaluations performed by students form the core "data" assessed for teaching. Teaching scores are often assessed in terms of general course satisfaction and also in terms of how a particular professor's course scores compare against departmental means. For women of color this is problematic, because student perceptions of instruction are filtered through dominant cultural norms, which see white males as the somatic norms for academic spaces. It is not uncommon, therefore, for women of color faculty to experience hostility, resistance, and negative evaluations. Teaching portfolios focus on a broader array of data concerning student teaching, thereby defusing the potentially biased and, at times, distorted results from student evaluations. Teaching portfolios often include, for instance, course syllabi, sample assignments, mid-term evaluations, sample work from students, and self-reflexive commentary from faculty on their teaching development and growth (Seldin, Miller, Seldin 2010). It is also typical to include teaching evaluations by peers. Portfolios provide more comprehensive grounds for teaching assessment, and permit faculty to compile materials they deem important for evaluating their teaching. Where these have been used in tenure and promotion hearings, they have provided a more robust process, one arguably less susceptible to derailment by student perceptions that may be guided by (un)conscious gendered, raced, classed, or other assumptions that bias perceptions.

While teaching portfolios help to counteract (un)conscious bias in student perceptions of teaching, training for faculty and administrators directly addresses bias in evaluation more broadly by those actors empowered by institutions to perform reviews. Georgia Tech has instituted one such training program, called ADEPT, as part of its National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant for Institutional Transformation, the grant so named because of its goal of "advancing" women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math

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strategies to address these limitations, such as mentoring initiatives, summer programs, and workshops focused on navigating academic spaces are beneficial, because they focus on the individual, they implicitly put the onus for dealing with gender inequity on those who are most burdened. These must be complemented with strategies that focus on changing the contexts in which women of color political scientists perform their labor.

SOLUTIONS

In this section I highlight some of the evidence-based practices that suggest promising possibilities for institutional

(STEM).[1] ADEPT, which stands for "awareness of decisions in evaluating promotion and tenure," provides a blog detailing important literature on bias and evaluation, and offers an interactive, web-based training module that leads faculty and administrators through tenure and promotion evaluation scenarios that highlight issues identified in research as typically generating bias in evaluation processes, such as where research is published, "soft" versus "hard" research, differential service requirements, uneven research output, disability, authorship, and access to lab and other research materials (ADEPT Team 2014).

Another NSF ADVANCE recipient, the University of Michigan (UM), has implemented several university-wide initiatives in an effort to address issues of climate for women on campus. Like other ADVANCE recipients, UM's efforts were guided by a baseline university-wide climate survey. The first assessment, in 2001, was followed by assessments in 2006 and 2012. The assessments examined a range of questions, dealing with issues such as overhearing "disparaging comments based on race or gender," "experiences of discrimination," "scholarly isolation," and "felt evaluation" (UM ADVANCE 2012, 7–8). Although there has been little change in terms of climate, some areas have shown improvement, notably a decrease in reporting by white women, in particular, in "unwanted sexual attention" (1). A qualitative study of 26 faculty of color affirmed many results provided in initial assessments, and yielded recommendations directly from faculty such as providing clear guidelines for promotion and structured mentoring (UM ADVANCE 2006). In response to internal assessments, UM ADVANCE (2013a, 1) seeks to address four aspects of diversity at UM, namely: "recruitment," "retention," "climate," and "leadership" and has developed three especially noteworthy programs, as described below.

First, the STRIDE (Strategies and Tactics for Recruiting to Improve Diversity and Excellence) committee provides Faculty Recruitment Workshops and has trained over 530 faculty (UM ADVANCE Overview 2012). Second, UM, through its Center for Research on Learning and Teaching CRLT Players, has presented dramaturgical renderings of common academic scenarios—"The Faculty Meeting, Faculty Advising Faculty, The Fence: Dynamics in Tenure and Promotion Discussions, and Institutional Change: The Musical"—to over 150 audiences as a context for educating the broader community about discrimination. Third, UM has provided trainings—Strategies Toward Excellent Practice—aimed at facilitating departmental environments conducive for everyone to flourish irrespective of gender or race. Although UM recognizes that much remains to be done and a protracted effort at institutional change is required, it also discerns "*significant progress* regarding the recruitment of women" (UM ADVANCE Overview 2012, 2, emphasis in original). Notably, although originally targeted at the STEM fields, UM has extended ADVANCE's scope to encompass the entire university and has continued to fund it when the initial NSF grant ended.

The aforementioned strategies directly address the difficulties that perceived space invaders encounter. The use of teaching portfolios counteracts student biases. The bias education in promotion evaluation assists in short circuiting views that can distort or fail to appreciate the contributions of women of color faculty. And the climate studies and education and training resources regarding institutional inequality provide a context for addressing women of color's unique challenges.

As noted by all the contributors to this symposium, organizations such as the American Political Science Association can incentivize departments to change. My focus on promotion and tenure suggests that the APSA could recommend standards for political science departments following the strategies here: teaching profiles assessed as part of tenure and promotion, bias training, and climate evaluations and departmental workshops. The APSA's Teaching and Learning Conference already provides a context for deliberation concerning teaching as it relates to women of color in the discipline and affirms the APSA's support for pedagogical innovation. Likewise, the APSA's Minority Fellowships, its support for the Ralph Bunche Institute, and its standing status committees furnish an important base of interventions upon which to build. The APSA produces an annual survey of departments, although the response rate limits available data. APSA can generate incentives for the creation of these surveys within departments. Also, it can survey and interview the membership of its national and regional groups, along with other political science associations, such as the National Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS), to assess institutional climate at various universities and within associations. This next wave of efforts toward the APSA Task Force goals can complement and extend this earlier work. Given the historic role of organizations such as the Women's Political Caucus and the NCOBPS, these organizations should also be involved in this process.

Of course, enacting any initiative is only a beginning. Diversity language, as Sarah Ahmed (2012) points out, is "nonperformative" in and of itself. We have to trace the implementation of diversity, carefully utilizing quantitative and qualitative methods and foregrounding the widest range of women of color's voices, as ours are the ones most sidelined in discussions, especially on institutional climate and even in units and with individuals ostensibly committed to feminism and intersectionality. Although instituting any set of measures will not be a panacea, utilizing teaching portfolios, requiring bias training, and establishing institutional assessments to construct workshops and other measures to educate faculty and shift departmental climates can counteract the damage done to women of color who are perceived as invading institutional space. The suggestions here point to the possibilities for institutional transformation, and the APSA, along with other political science associations, would do well in utilizing these and other promising approaches to institutional change. ∎

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