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ABSTRACT

The author offers some tentative hypotheses regarding barriers which limit progress of mature, married, black females in preparing and entering academe. The assumptions are based on limited data which are still coming in for a larger study on women in academe. The barriers discussed include: (1) limited role models, (2) limited encouragement to enter atypical fields, (3) racism, (4) limited financial support, (5) self-concept, (6) marriage, (7) maturity, and (8) lack of information on black women. Four suggestions are offered for overcoming barriers which impede the progress of this group: (1) development of programs to help develop awareness and solve problems of sex bias, (2) initiation of ongoing human resource development programs, (3) implementation of professionally run child care centers, and (4) establishment of a center for the study and dissemination of information about black women. (Author/PC)

The Mature, Married Black Female in Academe

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Introduction -My interest in the topic stems from the fact that I am a mature, married, Black Female in Academe. I am a counselor educator in probably the largest predominantly Black University in the United States. Employed on this campus are more Blacks with doctorates than you will find in most academic settings--fifteen or more are women and some six or seven are married couples each of whom holds an earned doctorate.

Barriers -There are barriers which mitigate against women psychologists entering the profession. These become multiplied many times when we think of Black, Mature, Married Women entering Academe not to mention psychological professions and allied areas (non-traditional professional endeavor for women).

These are some of my tentative hypotheses regarding barriers which limit progress of this sub-group in preparing and entering academe. These assumptions are based on very limited data which are steadily coming in for a larger study on women in academe.

Limited Role Models. For the most part, mature Black Women in this survey had not had the kind of positive reinforcement which could come from significant role models (parents, teachers, counselors etc.) who are functioning successfully in nontraditional areas for women in academe.

Limited Encouragement to Enter Atypical Fields. For the most part these women had no counselors to help them during their formative years. If they had been lucky enough to have had one, they were not prepared to help these women expand their horizons in the career world.

They were generally cautioned to go into where jobs seemed available for women--Play it safe. Thus they became elementary or secondary teachers like most other educationally prepared Black women they knew or went in to other career areas like nursing and secretarial work. They were reinforced positively for helping their husbands achieve at the highest academic level and to "keep the homefires burning".

Encouragement to branch out into atypical areas often came from husbands who were often professionals in academe.

Racism. Limited options offered to white women smack of sexism but both of sexism and racism where Black women are concerned. It is probably a myth that Black women with a high degree of academic preparation can choose their position in academe. Also, there are very limited chances for upward mobility when employed in these settings.

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Segregated systems forced some of this sample to defer their educational plans for advanced or terminal degree study or to leave the state for study. Black Institutions where most pursued undergraduate preparation did not and, for the most part, do not offer masters and/or terminal degree study. They generally entered advanced study later than most males and non-black females due to out-of-state fees.

Limited Financial Support. Limited financial assistance is a general problem of Blacks who wish to pursue advanced educational experiences. Until recently there have been few special scholarship programs for Blacks. Rarely does one find a program which encourages Black women to prepare themselves in nontraditional programs by offering fellowships, scholarships or stipends. Thus women who returned the survey form placed their efforts on helping their spouses complete their studies first. If they were past thirty or thirty-five, grants or stipends or fellowships may exclude them completely.

Self Concept- A Major Barrier. A number of the women in the sample felt that they often settled short of maximal development because of a fear of venturing into atypical areas of endeavor. Some expressed uncertainties regarding their ability to be successful and often felt the pressure to demonstrate unusual intellectual capabilities and academic skills to offset some attitudes regarding the capabilities of Blacks and women. These general fears seemed to grow out of practices of both racism and sexism prevalent around us as perceived by them. Generally they indicated that women in this sample or category tend to accept the ascribed status associated with being women and being Black. They indicated that women tend not to take self seriously. They are content to follow suit.

Marriage - a Barrier. Major barriers are associated with child rearing responsibilities since most of the respondents have one or more children. These responsibilities also do not decrease when she pursues advanced educational preparation. She often refuses attractive positions because of location of husband's position. Her wishes are generally subordinated in terms of what's Best for the Family.

When both husband and wife are located on same campuses, they are often confronted with policies regarding nepotism. Often couples working on same campuses are viewed with much skepticism. Wives are more despicable than husbands, their salaries are often lower and chances for promotion and status are often limited.

In several instances the discrepancy between the educational preparation of the husband as compared with the wife creates real barriers. Her more advanced preparation in some cases and her job locations in an academic setting increase the communication gap and thus make for marital difficulties.

Maturity (Age) - A Barrier. Age and maturity coupled with experience often are positive factors for males but negative for females.

Lack of Information on Black Women. One of the greatest barriers is the lack of information on Black Women. Most sources are willing to help you find information and agree that it is needed but are hardpressed to locate any which focuses specifically on Black Women in Academe.

Ways of Overcoming the Barriers. Four suggestions are offered for overcoming barriers which impede the progress of mature, Married Black Women and women generally in Academe. These are as follows:

1. Systematic Programs should be developed in educational settings which will help individuals develop some awareness of the problems of sex bias, identify facets of the problem which they would like to solve and assist in developing a variety of programs to counteract and/or solve them.
2. Ongoing human resource development programs which focus on maximal development of each individual should be established on all campuses. These would increase the likelihood that all individuals (including women) will have equal opportunity to develop fully.
3. Professionally run Child Care Centers should be established on all campuses where women are either matriculating or employed.
4. A federally or foundation funded Center for study of and the dissemination of information about Black Women should be established. Ideally the Center should be located in the South and on the Campus of a predominantly Black University. Many of these individuals still receive their education from these predominantly Black institutions. For the most part these institutions with all of their limitations have provided the educational foundations, motivation and inspiration for this segment of society long before opportunities were made available in other institutions. Because of these efforts on the part of these colleges many Black people generally and women specifically have benefitted such that they can take their places and perform adequately in a variety of professional roles in a variety of academic settings. Because of their long history in the educational preparation of Black people this kind of campus provides a unique and fitting setting for an adequately staffed Center for the Study of Black Women.

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