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Black Faculty in Predominantly White Schools of Social Work: A Qualitative Assessment

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Abstract

The researchers conducted a national survey of Black faculty members at predominantly white schools of social work. Two basic questions guided the search effort: (1) What are the principal roles and responsibilities of Black faculty? and (2) To what extent do Black faculty members perceive themselves as receiving sufficient professional satisfaction, respect, and support? Analysis of questionnaire responses indicated significant differences in the responses among Black faculty based on factors such as sex, academic rank, and tenure.

Comments

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Black Faculty in Predominantly White Schools of Social Work: A Qualitative Assessment

by LARRY DAVIS, PHYLLIS FREEMAN, LOUIS H. CARTER & RAMÓN CARTWRIGHT

*The researchers conducted a national survey of Black faculty members at predominantly white schools of social work. Two basic questions guided the research effort: (1) What are the principal roles and responsibilities of Black faculty? and (2) To what extent do Black faculty members perceive themselves as receiving sufficient professional satisfaction, respect, and support? Analysis of questionnaire responses indicated significant differences in the responses among Black faculty based on factors such as sex, academic rank, and tenure.**

One of the most discussed issues in schools of social work in recent years has been the inclusion of minority content in the academic curriculum. A great deal has been written on why, how, and where to include this content.¹ However, little has been said of the Black instructors who, often by default or request, teach this material.² As Trader stated in 1972, "Much has been written about the need for the

inclusion of content on ethnic groups in the curricula of schools of social work. However, little attention has been given to the teacher of this content."³ This statement is even more true today.

There has been some concern for recruitment of minority faculty in schools of social work.⁴ Once hired, however, they appear to have been left to fend for themselves; little attention has been given to the Black faculty person other than to amass descriptors such as numbers, rank, and the like.⁵ But information that pertains to the qualitative as well as the quantitative nature of the Black faculty member's experiences in schools of social work is also of concern. Specifically, how do Black faculty members perceive themselves as progressing professionally? How do they perceive themselves as getting along with others who also teach and work in this setting? And, in general, how satisfied are they with their academic positions? Surely answers to these questions are of interest to all who teach and work in these environments.

The writings of Dubois and more recently those of Staples and Norton, address conceptually what is perhaps the key problem for Black professionals everywhere: a sense of dualism.⁶ These authors contend that Blacks, because they must take on a dual perspective, may experience more job-related stress than whites. Black professionals who are employed by predominantly white institutions are presented daily with the dominant group's perspective on the world and that particular institution's relationship to it. Indeed, the Black faculty person is viewed from a dual perspective as well. He or she is a member of both the in- and outgroups; he or she is at once "one of them (Black) and one of us (faculty)."

The study to be reported in this article was conducted in an effort to assess how Black faculty are faring in predominantly white schools of social work. For example, how well are they getting along with institutionally relevant others (students, faculty, and administrators), and do they perceive their work environments to be enjoyable and hospitable ones? We decided to focus in this study only on schools that are predominantly white because we believed that substantive quantitative and qualitative differences might exist between predominantly white and Black schools.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for this study, which was conducted in 1978, was selected from the Council on Social Work Education's roster of ethnic minority faculty for 1977. Only faculty members who were listed as working in predominantly white schools of social work were selected. The total sample meeting this criterion included 350 Black faculty members. Of the 350 who were mailed questionnaires, 133 or 38 percent returned them. Although we had hoped to obtain a much higher rate of return, comparisons with previous findings indicate that our sample closely approximates the total population of Black social work

faculty. Consider, for example, the following three characteristics: sexual distribution, teaching rank, and highest degree attained.

Rubin and Whitcomb reported that in 1977 there were 489 Black faculty members in graduate schools of social work.⁷ Of this number, 45 percent (219) were male, while 55 percent (270) were female. With regard to teaching status, they found that 78 percent (381) were full time and 22 percent (108) part time. Of the full-time faculty, 16 percent were instructors, 41 percent were assistant professors, 33 percent were associate professors, and 11 percent were full professors. Regarding highest degree attained, Rubin and Whitcomb reported that 69.1 percent of the total population possessed MAs or MSWs, and 30.9 percent held DSWs or Ph.D. degrees.

Looking at the present sample, 47 percent (62) were male and 53 percent (71) were female. Ninety percent (120) were full-time faculty, and 10 percent (13) were part time. Among the full-time faculty members, 10 percent were instructors, 45 percent were assistant professors, 28 percent were associate professors, and 16 percent were full professors. Finally, regarding highest degree attained, 62 percent (81) of the total sample reported having MAs or MSWs, while 36 percent (48) reported holding DSWs or Ph.D. degrees.

There are some differences in the proportional makeups of the population reported by Rubin and Whitcomb and the returns received in our study. Notably, our sample includes greater percentages of full-time faculty and holders of Ph.D. degrees. However, the similarities are sufficient to suggest that our sample, although small, closely approximates Black social work faculty in general. The small sample size is, however, a noteworthy limitation of the study, and a more complete return would have improved the study's overall quality. In fact, many points that might have been made from analysis of the study's data were omitted because the size of the *N* in particular cells or comparisons was too small. This was especially true for some comparisons of

males and females. Of course, one can never be certain why an individual fails to return a particular questionnaire. Perhaps, given the personal nature of this questionnaire, the researchers should have taken greater pains to assure respondents of the confidentiality of their responses in an effort to increase the rate of return.

Instrumentation

The survey questionnaire consisted of forty-one items. Twenty-five of the items assessed either demographic or occupational characteristics of the respondent. Although the foremost goal of this project was to assess the qualitative nature of Black faculty positions, it was still necessary to ask many demographic questions to allow us to report our findings with greater specificity. The remaining sixteen items were either direct or indirect assessments of the respondents' level of job satisfaction. All these questions were single-item measures for which the respondent was required to make a response on a five-point Likert scale, with 5 representing the highest level of satisfaction.

The questionnaire was pretested on a small group of Black faculty members from three different schools of social work. These individuals were not included in the final sample. Although this method was used to test the wording and format of the questionnaire, no tests were performed to examine specific types of measurement validity or reliability. However, given our experience with the questionnaire's pretest, we believed that face validity of the items was achieved in the construction of the instrument. The questionnaire was mailed to the 350 potential respondents along with a return envelope and a cover letter describing the project.

FINDINGS

An interesting observation is that Black faculty members in this sample were widely dispersed in both age and academic rank. As already noted, the greatest number of the Black faculty were of the assistant

professor rank, with an almost equal number at the associate level or above. Similarly, there was considerable dispersion in tenure status, with approximately equal numbers not on a tenure track, on a tenure track but not tenured, or tenured. Thus, although 44 percent had the rank of associate professor or higher, only 39 percent were tenured. With regard to highest degree obtained, the majority possessed MAs or MSWs, and the minority possessed Ph.D.s.

As already reported, the proportion of males and females in the sample were quite close, as were their average ages, 43 years for males and 45 years for females. They were also alike with regard to status on faculty, with 90 percent of both groups on staff full time. There did appear to be some slight differences in their academic ranks. Primarily, there were approximately 13 percent more female assistant professors than male assistant professors. There also appeared to be some sizeable differences in the tenure status of the two groups. Males and females had similar proportions of nontenured faculty, 36 percent and 30 percent respectively. However, almost twice as many women as men (37 percent compared to 19 percent) were not only nontenured, but also on a nontenure track. In addition, a significant status difference existed between the two groups at the tenured level, with 45 percent of the males being tenured, but only 33 percent of the females.

Considerable differences between males and females also existed with respect to the highest degree attained. The males were divided evenly, with 50 percent having MAs or MSWs and with 50 percent having Ph.D.s or DSWs. In contrast, 74 percent of the female faculty had master's level degrees with only 26 percent having doctorates. In view of the importance that the doctorate is thought to play in promotion and tenure and the sexual disparity among Ph.D. holders in this sample, it would not have been surprising to have found an even greater disparity in the tenure status of males and females.⁸

Employment Responsibilities

Thirty-nine percent of the faculty reported classroom teaching as their primary area of employment, while a slightly larger number (42 percent) considered the "field" as their primary area. Of those who reported teaching as an employment responsibility, 15 percent teach administration and policy, 14 percent teach human behavior and social environment, and the largest number (45 percent) teach practice methods. Only 8 percent reported research as their principal area of teaching.

Some noteworthy differences appear between males and females in this area. Appreciably more males (47 percent) than females (28 percent) had the classroom as their primary area of employment. However, relatively small numbers of both groups listed the field as their primary employment responsibility. In contrast, a significant portion of both groups, approximately one-fourth, listed a combination of class and field as their primary area of employment.

With respect to the primary content areas of teaching, although as noted the largest proportion of all Black faculty who teach reported doing so in practice methods, considerably more females (66 percent) than males (30 percent) teach in this area. There is also a wide discrepancy in the numbers of males and females who teach social policy. Twenty percent of the Black male faculty

teach in this area, while only 1 percent of the females do so. If we combine the areas of administration and social policy, an area often referred to as macro, the differences between Black males and females in areas of teaching become even more apparent: 35 percent of the males and only 9 percent of the females teach administration and policy.

Rapport and Respect

Six closed-ended questions were used to assess the respondents' degree of rapport with significant others in their respective schools. Faculty members were asked to rate on a five-point scale (with 1 being low and 5 high) the degree of rapport they thought they had with (1) white faculty, (2) Black faculty, (3) white administrators, (4) Black administrators, (5) white students, and (6) Black students. As can be seen from Table 1, Black faculty perceived their rapport with individuals to vary as a function of both race and position. What is most apparent, however, is that respondents perceived themselves to have less rapport with whites than with Blacks, whether they were other faculty members, administrators, or students. Pair-wise comparisons of mean scores within these groups indicate that the reported mean differences in rapport between Blacks and whites for all three positions differed significantly (for faculty, $t=8.06, p<.00$; for administrators, $t=4.66, p<.00$; and for students, $t=6.36, p<.00$). Thus, as a group, these Black faculty members

TABLE 1
Black Faculty Members' Perceived Rapport with and Respect from
Faculty, Administrators, and Students

	Faculty			Administrators			Students		
	N	Mean Score	SD	N	Mean Score	SD	N	Mean Score	SD
<i>Perceived Rapport</i>									
White	129	3.6	1.0	124	3.7	1.1	130	4.1	0.9
Black	125	4.3	1.0	87	4.3	1.0	128	4.6	0.6
<i>Perceived Respect</i>									
White	131	3.6	1.0	128	3.4	1.2	130	4.1	0.9
Black	123	4.4	0.7	98	4.5	0.8	129	4.6	0.6

rapport, faculty members were asked to rate on a five-point scale, with 1 being low and 5 high, the degree of respect they thought they received from (1) white faculty, (2) Black faculty, (3) white administrators, (4) Black administrators, (5) white students, and (6) Black students. The responses to this question were similar to those for rapport. Black faculty reported receiving more respect from Blacks and less respect from whites. Pair-wise comparison of mean scores within these groups indicate that the reported mean differences in respect between Blacks and whites for all positions differed significantly (for faculty, $t=9.79$, $p<.000$; for administrators, $t=7.66$, $p<.000$; and for students, $t=6.35$, $p<.000$). Hence, as a group, it appears that black faculty perceived themselves to receive more respect from blacks than whites, irrespective of the position held by whites. Analyses indicated no differences in reported perceptions of males and females for either rapport or respect.

Employment Satisfaction

Two closed-end questions were used to ascertain the respondents' degree of overall and comparative job satisfaction. Faculty members were asked two questions: (1) "Overall, how satisfied are you with your position in the University or College?" and (2) "In comparison to other Black faculty members in your department who hold positions similar to your own, do you believe your level of satisfaction is greater or lower?" Respondents rated their levels of satisfaction on a five-point scale, with 1 being low and 5 high. The mean score for overall job satisfaction was 3.1, indicating about average satisfaction. Slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents (27 percent) reported less than an average rating and therefore could be labeled as dissatisfied overall with their jobs. With

to others, the vast majority of Black faculty are at least moderately satisfied with their positions.

Of note also are the differences reported in the satisfaction levels of Black males and females. As a group, men reported significantly more satisfaction with their university or college positions than did women ($t=2.62$, $p<.010$). A significant difference between men and women was also obtained when they were asked to rate their comparative levels of job satisfaction. Again, Black males reported being significantly more satisfied than did Black females ($t=3.08$, $p<.008$). Quite probably this reported lack of job satisfaction among females is affected by issues not discussed here, such as salary inequities and the like.⁹

PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Three perceptions of employment were also assessed. Black faculty members were asked to report their (1) perceived chances for advancement compared to white faculty members, (2) perceptions of discrimination in criteria for tenure, and (3) perceived permanence of employment. These results are reported in Table 2.

Chances for Advancement

Forty-eight percent of the Black faculty reported feeling that their chances for advancement (tenure and promotion) were not equal to those of whites. There was a slight difference between males and females on this dimension. Forty-seven percent of the males and 56 percent of the females reported feeling that their chances for tenure and promotion were not equal to those of their white colleagues. In a follow-up question, respondents were asked to provide rationales as to why they thought their chances were not equal. All such replies were of a perjorative nature, for

TABLE 2
Black Faculty Members' Perceptions of Employment

Questionnaire Item	Black Faculty		Male		Female	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Perceived chance for advancement (tenure and promotion) compared to white faculty						
Equal	58	48	31	53	27	44
Unequal	63	52	28	47	35	56
Total	121	100	59	100	62	100
Belief that existing criteria for tenure are discriminatory						
Not on tenure track	18	56	5	50	13	59
Nontenured but on tenure track	18	47	8	42	10	52
Tenured	29	60	18	69	11	50
Total	65	55	31	56	34	54
Five-year prediction regarding present place of employment						
Most likely to remain in the same institution	31	25	17	29	14	22
Will remain only if promotion and/or tenure is achieved	20	16	12	20	8	13
Undecided	28	23	15	26	13	20
May possibly leave if promotion and/or tenure is not achieved	13	11	6	10	7	11
Will definitely leave, regardless of rank or tenure status	31	25	9	15	22	34
Total	123	100	59	100	64	100

example, racism, the "old boy" system, and so on. The extent of this reported perceived bias is curious in light of the previous finding that the overwhelming majority of Black faculty are at least minimally satisfied with their university positions. This suggests that job satisfaction is influenced by factors other than issues of tenure and promotion.

Discrimination in Tenure Criteria

When asked if they felt that existing criteria for tenure was discriminatory toward them, 55 percent of the 118 Black faculty members who responded answered "yes." However, this question was intended

for and is most meaningful to those who are on a tenure track position but not yet tenured. Of these, 47 percent responded that they felt that the existing criteria for tenure was discriminatory toward them. Interestingly, 60 percent of Black faculty who had tenure and 56 percent of those not on a tenure track stated that the criteria was discriminatory. While a definitive interpretation of this response is not possible, it is clear that the majority of both those who had tenure and those not on a tenure track felt that the criteria for tenure were discriminatory toward either themselves or others. Again, although the rationales given

as to why the criteria were discriminatory were numerous, all responses were of a negative nature.

Looking at sex of the respondent, it can be seen from Table 2 that men and women as a group hold similar notions about whether criteria for tenure are discriminatory, with 56 percent of the men and 54 percent of the women stating that they are. However, once we control for tenure status, a slight difference between males and females becomes apparent. It appears that among the nontenured faculty a larger proportion of females than males—approximately 10 percent more—perceive the criteria for tenure as discriminatory toward themselves.

Job Permanence

Faculty members were asked to predict their probable employment situation for the next five years, based on five possibilities. (See Table 2.) As is readily observable, responses varied considerably. Twenty-five percent reported that they would most likely remain at the same institution. Sixteen percent stated that they would remain only if they received promotion and tenure. Twenty-three percent were undecided. Eleven percent stated that they would possibly leave if promotion and/or tenure were not achieved. Finally, twenty-five percent reported that they would definitely leave within five years regardless of rank or tenure status.

Although the responses were almost equally divided among the choices, it would appear that the vast majority of Black faculty members (75 percent) are at least considering leaving their present university positions, and one in four has definitive plans to leave his or her present position. In view of the high levels of job satisfaction reported, this finding may appear somewhat surprising. However, other research suggests that job turnover rates may be more strongly affected by perceptions of inequities in the job than by levels of job satisfaction.¹⁰ In other words, an individual may be satisfied with the job but because of per-

ceived job inequities may seek employment elsewhere. In addition, some causes of faculty movement are probably unrelated to the job experience.

There is at least one major difference between males and females with respect to perceptions of job permanence. More than twice as many women (34 percent) as men (15 percent) reported that they would definitely leave regardless of whether they received tenure and/or promotion. Similar findings with respect to women have been noted for academic disciplines other than social work.¹¹ Unfortunately, the data as derived do not provide us with answers as to why proportionately so many more women than men plan to leave their present academic positions. Yet, given that women report less overall and comparative job satisfaction, and greater proportions of those who are not tenured perceive bias in the tenure process, it is perhaps not surprising that greater numbers of women than men should report their intentions to leave. It is also probable, however, that factors other than the job-related ones contribute to this readiness of female faculty to leave their academic positions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of this study was to ascertain how Black faculty members were faring in predominantly white schools of social work. Principally, the authors wanted to acquire qualitative data on the status of Black faculty in these schools. This research effort was an attempt to assess how this particular group of minority faculty were functioning in what one of our respondents referred to as "the plantation." This study put forth no hypotheses and consequently was exploratory. Yet there is little doubt that many more questions have been raised than answered.

First looking at Black faculty quantitatively, by and large, they are full-time personnel. Over 70 percent of them are at the assistant and associate levels. Approximately one in five of the men and one in three of the women are not on a tenure

track, with approximately 30 percent of both groups not yet tenured, but on a tenure track. Finally, almost half the males and one-third of the females are tenured faculty. As pertains to the degrees they hold, half of all male faculty have doctorates, while only one in four females hold such degrees.

There is considerable dispersion among Black faculty with regard to primary areas of employment. Almost equal numbers of Black faculty are employed in the classroom only and in the field only. With respect to those who teach, the greatest percentage of Black faculty teach practice methods. Less than half as many teach in the macro area, and of those who do, men outnumber women greater than three to one. Approximately 10 percent of the Black teaching faculty teach research courses.

Looking qualitatively at Black faculty, at least five general statements can be made regarding those who are employed in predominantly white schools of social work:

1. The majority of Black male and female faculty perceived their chances for advancement within their school to be less than those of their white colleagues.
2. Approximately half of all Black faculty at all levels of tenure status perceived the school's criteria for tenure to be discriminatory.
3. Both male and female faculty reported having greater rapport with and receiving more respect from black faculty, administrators, and students than those who are white.
4. Despite their perceptions of bias in chances for advancement and tenure, the overwhelming majority of Black faculty reported being at least moderately satisfied in their present positions. However, as a group, Black females report significantly lower levels of job satisfaction than do Black males.
5. The overwhelming majority of Black faculty are at least considering leaving their present institutions within the next five years, with twice as many

women as men having definite plans to leave their present jobs during this time.

The findings of this study are significant not solely because they provide quantitative data on Black faculty, but also because they afford insights into how Black faculty perceive themselves—that is, their perceptions of the quality of their relationships with the schools and with the significant others in those schools. Indeed, many of the findings of this study are disheartening, for it would seem that Black faculty in general perceive their roles and relationships in these schools to be much like many of their relationships in the larger society—problematic. Most definitely, the findings of this study demonstrate that schools of social work are part of the larger American society, and as such are not exempt from its social problems.

In sum, it seems fair to conclude that despite the social work professions' avowed commitment to the amelioration of society's ills of racism and bias, at least some of its schools do not, as yet, function in such a fashion as to convince many Black faculty that these ills have been sufficiently reduced. Hence, these findings appear to warrant the suggestion that, as a beginning corrective step, social work as a profession must address more assertively the existence of such problems and provide and promote greater opportunities for their discussion and amelioration.

NOTES

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