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The Intersection of Gender and Race:
Barriers to Minority Women in Formal Community Planning

This literature review evaluates research on barriers to entry into the field of formal community planning for minority women. Research suggests that there are several factors which pose as barriers for entry for minority women into formal planning occupations: a social structure that marginalizes women of color; a dichotomous argument which discusses inequality in terms of individual traits (race, gender, etc.) but rarely the intersection of two or more traits; and institutional bias against hiring people of color and women which is compounded for minority women in 'power-fields'.

The Social Dominance Orientation theory asserts that people high on the SDO scale are more likely to exhibit right-wing authoritarian behavior and that there is also a strong likelihood that SDO correlates with racism, sexism, and other bigotry such as "nationalism, support for immigrant persecution, war support, beliefs about war legitimacy, support for the death penalty, general punitiveness, and a preference for hierarchy-enhancing jobs."[i]

Gender inequality and arbitrary-set inequality (such as racism) are interdependent and strongly linked. Social Dominance Orientation theory suggests that the more a person is drawn towards social and occupational positions of power, the more likely that person will also hold bigoted belief systems.[ii] Generally men rank higher on the SDO spectrum than women, although this is somewhat influenced by social and cultural norms and belief systems.[iii] Sidanius and Pratto (1994) found in their research that gender accounted for differences in SDO across every culture surveyed[iv] while Foels and Pappas found that SDO traits could be unlearned and that exposure to feminist theory reduced SDO tendencies.[v]

The literature indicates that women self-select for occupations which attenuate existing hierarchies over hierarchy-maintaining or 'power' occupations. As community planning is within the realm of 'power-occupations' (policy making, law, architecture, government, and finance) it stands to reason that women would not likely self-select for these occupations. It is unclear whether or not this is because women are socially conditioned to be low on the SDO spectrum. Pratto et al. found that men in powerful occupations and roles allocate more resources to men to maintain their own hierarchy but argue that more women self-select for careers which attenuate

for traditional hierarchy's than women who chose occupations that support the existing hierarchy.[vi] Fraser et al. found that SDO is also tied to opposition to gender based affirmative action policies.[vii] In summary, the patriarchy of white men works to maintain the existing hierarchy especially in 'power' fields.

Minorities Women in Formal Community Planning

The American Planner's Association conducted a diversity summit to discover why there were so few minority APA members; minority membership accounts for fewer than 10% of all APA memberships. There were several concerns raised at the summit including: Lack of outreach to minority communities; Lack of training and educational opportunities; Lack of knowledge about planning and APA; and most importantly but ranked 5th, "perceived racism and lack of social equity within APA."[viii] The lack of minorities in the field of formal community planning is not new. In the March 1973 issue of black Enterprise the issue of race and planning was discussed in detail and the author found that roughly 10% of students enrolled in planning programs at the time were black. Even fewer African Americans, 150, were employed as planners.[ix] Minority women planners weren't even mentioned. Recent statistics indicate that the situation has hardly improved. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2011 only 40% of the 25,000 'urban and regional planners' were women, and fewer than 20% were black or Hispanic.[x]

Minority women are much less likely to hold political office. As of 2014, black women comprised less than 3% of the state legislature and congress. There has been only one black female Senator, and she has been out of office for almost 17 years. Two black women hold elected office at the state level and Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, Mayor of Baltimore, is currently the only black female Mayor in a large U.S. city.[xi]

In other words, opportunities for minority women to participate in formal planning work is limited in myriad ways and the black woman's voice is often lost or drowned out by the majority of white men that serve as senators, governors, city administrators, local planning officials, and as private planners or architects. This idea is supported by research on the concept of the "invisible black woman," which showed that black women's faces and words were more forgettable than black men's, white women's, and white men's.[xii]

Rose Brewer of the University of Minnesota argues that discussions of black labor are often framed in the context of the black Male experience and suggests that discussing the

intersectionality of race, gender, and class in labor discussions is critical as is critiquing dichotomous thinking.

> "The inequality of African- American life is conflated with black men's inequality... Dismissing intersections of race and gender in such autonomous analyses conceptually erases African-American women... Furthermore, the transformation of black women's labor is tied to structural changes in the state and economy as well as to shifts in the racial/gender division of labor... black women and men have often been left with the least desirable work." [xiii]

Another theory as to why there is a significant dearth of African American women in formal community and urban planning positions is because, "much of the writing about the relationship between the African American community and urban planning has focused on victimization." Thomas and Ritzdorf argue that African American women were working in the community planning sphere through the National Association of Colored women but that these efforts were undocumented largely because they were black.

> "Early in the century, African American women often focused on the civic improvement of their communities. While they, like white women, had no legal or voting rights in the public world of politics, they were very active. Yet they, like their African American brothers, are invisible from the records of their time that planning historians commonly consult."[xiv]

Thomas and Ritzdorf examine articles in *the American City*, an early urban planning publication, for a 10-year period between 1909 and 1920. During this time the publishers discussed the African American community once as compared to the several times white women's organizations were discussed. Essentially they state that minority women did participate in community planning but the public discussion was focused elsewhere.

Guimond, et al. argues that racial prejudices stem from a lack of diversity in the education system and a lack of multiculturalism in the media. Their research tied global prejudice to national diversity policies suggesting that as national diversity policies increase, national xenophobia decreases. [xv] Said in another way, tolerance at the local level is largely influenced by national policies. In the United States these policies are, for the most part, set by older white men which has resulted in a culture of otherness for all nonwhite men and women of all races. Further, the media is largely owned and controlled by older white men, who use the media to perpetuate racial and gender stereotypes that oppress those that might challenge their authority.

Sidanius et al. (1991) found that the maintenance of Social Dominance Orientation, associated hierarchies, and the mythology surrounding them explains why minorities are largely absent from positions of power despite decades of Civil Rights Legislation designed to eliminate discrimination in the workplace. They argue that society is complicit in institutional racism and that institutions of power are intrinsically racist concluding that individuals who self-select to work within these institutions are likely, themselves, racist and chose to work there because of their racist beliefs. The more institutions hire and support individuals high on the SDO scale the more likely those institutions will themselves discriminate perpetuating the cycle of racism.[xvi] Chow and Knowles' research supports this theory; they found that whites were in favor of color-blind public policies promoting white-oriented racial hierarchy and supported policies curtailing the government's ability to address racial inequality when the white hierarchy was perceived to be under attack.[xvii]

Conclusion

Formal community planning in America is the result of a system largely developed and maintained by and for white men likely ranking high on the SDO spectrum. It is not surprising that women, let alone minority women, have not achieved equality within the field. Their entrance is denied at every level of society and the system that has denied them entrance is carefully guarded by a cadre of white men who fear to lose their status in society. Those individuals who are inclined to believe that some groups are intrinsically better than other groups seek out positions of power and intentionally exclude those they believe to be in outsider groups. It is unlikely that minority women will be able to fully participate in the formal planning process until bigoted white men hire and elect them to positions of power, actions research has shown to be unlikely.

This is not to say that all white men are high on the Social Dominance Orientation spectrum, only that individuals aligned with that particular belief system happen to be overwhelmingly white and male and drawn to positions of power. Because planning is one of the most powerful occupations a person can have it follows that the biggest barrier to entry for minority women into the field is white men denying them access. Finally, white men are perpetuating the myth that they hold power over minorities and women because they control the media and thus all public conversations on gender, race, and community. Unless women, minorities, and minority women take up as much air-time as white men do, it is likely that the trend of minority women being excluded from positions of power.

I would be interested to see if these theories were reflected in the gender/race breakdown among MPA, MNM, and MCRP students and faculty at the University of Oregon.

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