Sustaining Diversity in Higher Education: The Importance of Investigating Success

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Sustaining Diversity in Higher Education: The Importance of Investigating Success

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This presentation is dedicated to our research participants: self-identified women of color undergraduates. We see your success. We see the burdens imposed upon you. We see your strength, endurance, and resilience. But most of all, we thank you for your time. We thank you for your insights. And we thank you for all your energies every single day.

I have received permission from my research assistants to use their names to credit them for their intellectual contributions. All other names are changed.
Commitment to DEI

LAUNCHING FALL 2020
INSTITUTE FOR
CULTURAL COMPETENCE &
INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE
Open to all students, faculty & staff

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION
COMMITTEE
THE LATEST ADDITION TO
WCU ATHLETICS

BLACK LIVES
MATTER
EVERYDAY!
Promises of Diversity

The website lied because it is totally different from what I saw.

They had it on the front page, we are building up equity, something else in diversity, I laughed so hard. Diversity, where?

The claim to be diverse is frustrating because it is not diverse.

They have multicultural organizations, but all those organizations don’t really get funding at all so to keep it going, it’s kind of like their own passion. Then coming here and doing tours and stuff, statues in the middle of campus and it’s like wow this school is actually big on diversity and making people feel included but it’s kind of like a token more than anything.

The websites make an effort to highlight people of color but when you get here it is a lot of faculty and staff of color (except for food service) You never really see that many individuals of color outside of those roles. We are not as diverse as they make it seem.

Promises of Diversity
Neoliberalism in Higher Education

Commodification of Body Emotional Labor

ON BEING INCLUDED
Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life
Sara Ahmed

SENSATIONAL FLESH
RACE, POWER, AND MASOCHISM
Amber Tamblyn

The Managed Heart
Commercialization of Human Feeling
Abbie F. Russell

CATHETERS, SLURS, and PICKUP LINES
Professional Intimacy in Hospital Nursing
Lisa C. Ruchti

OUR EDUCATION NOT YOUR BUSINESS
HOW DO WE MEASURE “SUCCESS”?

QUESTION:
What “invisible” barriers do women of color face while thriving on a campus that excludes them?

METHOD:

• An ethnographic case study of one regional, state-funded public university (PWI) 2014-2017 and informed by intersectionality theory, black feminist theory, and critical race theory

• Participant observation of campus events dedicated to race, gender, or both (2014-2017);

• In-depth semi-structured interviews with women of color undergraduate students (N=55);

• Content analysis of university promotion and recruitment materials;

• Inductive thematic analysis using Dedoose software which includes systematic coding of all observation notes, interview audio files and transcriptions, and content images.
The Price of Diversity

Black women are more involved than Black men. We always show up at the men’s programs, but they never come to ours.

I know we should reach out to white people, to help make it better.

I do have a white friend who likes to bring up that there are so many scholarships for minority students. It’s always a difficult conversation because I try explaining to her why so many minority students are targeted, but she is like nah nah nah. And I understand because she comes from a very white high school so she cannot make those connections.

I don’t want them to think they can’t ask questions.

It gets kind of burdensome having to educate those around you.

Sometimes it makes me nervous to talk about race and gender and I had to do it as an RA. We had a staff of 16 and there were 4 people of color. I was so nervous that I would come off as a crazy Black girl.

I know I need to make it comfortable for white people, so they don’t feel called out for not being PC.
The Daily Normal

I don’t feel comfortable enough to call [my college campus] home.

Well you are barely Black, you don’t look it, you don’t act like it.

There were just a lot of times I felt like I was doubted as a woman of color, especially in the sciences.

But during orientation, I was an orientation leader, it was the first day, and I was handing out candy and I had this professor come to me and I don’t know why I thought this was ok, you’re a professor, and he comes up to me and he says, I like your hair. And at this time, I had extensions in a weave, long, loose, typical European hair, and I said, thank you. And then he said, ‘Where did you get your hair? Oh is it horsehair?’ And I’m like, are you kidding me? Did you just say that?

What are you?

An advisor was like it’s ok if you graduate a semester late, a lot of people like you graduate a semester late.

[School name] is for the white people

An advisor was like it’s ok if you graduate a semester late, a lot of people like you graduate a semester late.
Preserving energy: If it is nonsense it doesn’t deserve my energy.

I would tell them to carefully research schools about diversity.

I would say all of it is community, that there are other women of color experiencing the same things. It does feel good to kind of like – what is it – be around the kitchen table.

I would say choose your battles, but don’t let anything limit you because what society is showing you isn’t all that you can do.

I would say don’t be surprised by the comments, but don’t take them either.

I surround myself with people who are like minded with my major.
Recommendations

✓ Re-instate a cascade mentorship program just for women of color; should be led by a woman of color.

✓ Match mentoring programs by race AND gender and keep these pairs/groups small (2-3 people).

✓ Provide safe zones/programs that are specific and available only for women of color.

✓ Require white students to learn anti-racism.

✓ Create initiatives to hire and retain women of color faculty, staff, and counselors.

✓ Most important: Avoid claiming success, DEI programs should be ongoing and consistent.
Conclusions: The Importance of Investigating Success

Investigate the veneer of traditional success measures.

Measure success of DEI by effort and practice, not just outcomes.

Higher Education

- Critical Race Feminism
- Intersectionality
- Emotional Labor
- Critiques of Neoliberalism in Higher Education