Underpinnings of Colorism and Gender in the Culture of 'Niceness' in Universities

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Most people in the US are familiar with problems of racial discrimination in a variety of realms including education and housing. But hidden in the process of racial discrimination is colorism. Colorism refers to color-based discrimination that is based on skin tone. Skin color has been used to polarize and classify humanity for almost 50 years since scholarship first explored the history of the establishment of groups based on skin color. A hierarchical stratification based on skin color exists because of the values associated with physical features. Skin color bias shapes experiences of women of color; especially dark-skinned women. Globally, dark skin is viewed as a liability.

Past work on colorism has drawn attention to its historical basis and the ways in which it is folded into race and hierarchical stratification (Hunter 2007; Glenn 2009; Feagin et al 2001). The colorism hierarchy is grounded in the notion that dark skin and white skin represent opposites such as cruelty (being aggressive, harsh) versus gentleness (being nice, smiling always). Such considerations have major consequences for the daily life experiences of people with dark skin who do not meet the standards of 'niceness.' How do the intersections of colorism and gender operate in both overt and covert ways to shape women's experiences within universities? How are these experiences structured by normative understandings of 'niceness' that overlook differences among women?

Niceness is part of the larger issue of difference. I argue that universities need to be cognizant of difference in all forms – skin color, nationality, tone of voice (including high-pitched and loud voices), expression of feelings (excitement and/or disappointment), and overall expression of emotion. Difference is the hallmark of diversity and it is not only about demographics such as race or age but about the deviation from the normative and standardized ways in which one speaks or displays expression, what I call the culture of niceness (more below). Inclusion requires understanding, embracing such differences, mitigating, and mediating conflicts that arise from varying perceptions of such differences. We need to develop mechanisms for embracing such differences particularly within universities. Overlooking differences can significantly impact the success and retention of women of color. As discussed below, I extend Mohanty's (1991) definition of women of color as people of African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and native peoples of the US often referred to as 'new immigrants' to include those of dark skin color.

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In order to address the above questions, I reflect on my experiences of about 15 years in academia; my narrative is interwoven with those of many others in different ways – those who understand my experiences; those who relate to my experiences as being similar to their own; some who may suggest I co-opt their experiences into mine despite the similarity or frame it as a 'narrative' similar to mine or that it is not compelling; and others who reject my experiences because they are plain ignorant or fail to consider them because it does not fit into what they see through their own lenses.[1] This essay is not intended to be an empirical (quantitative or qualitative) article, but I will derive hypotheses focused on faculty that can be examined in future systematic research and also recommend strategies to address such bias. For the most part we know about the biases and climate concerns of women and women of color faculty, and we need to consider what to **do** (implement initiatives for change).

As an immigrant woman of color, I pursued a PhD in sociology, which I came into via other disciplines (Physics honors with Math and International Development with an emphasis on economics). As I progressed through graduate school, I recognized the power of sociological ideas and approaches to explain the social reality of relationships, individuals, and institutions. These ideas allow for constructing knowledge about faculty experiences in the academy not by universalizing experiences but by learning and understanding differences beyond a mere superficial commitment. Even though my own experience cannot be universal, I defend my privileges in writing this essay as one that is a project, based on my knowledge, to be modified, criticized, and clarified vigorously by others. I cannot erase my experiences or the opportunities and challenges that they involve/d. However, what I can do is to bring to the forefront, if not to the center, experiences of women of color like me and be an ally to work through the knots of the hierarchical and structured social matrix within universities. I am not confident that this narrative will be well-received because naming or calling out colorism is often seen as not being nice. However, I firmly believe that this work will challenge many of us to consider issues related to faculty experiences in general and that of women of color specifically to open-up debates and pay attention to differences.

Colorism and Gender
As noted above, colorism has been operative for the past few decades (Hunter 2007; Glenn 2009) with foundations in the European colonial project; plantation life for enslaved African Americans, and the early class hierarchies of Asia (Hunter 2007). According to Feagin et al (2001), colorism in the US is broadly maintained by a system of white racism. The colorism hierarchy is grounded in the notion that dark skin represents savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority. White skin, and, thus, whiteness itself, is defined by the opposite: civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority. These contrasting definitions are the foundation for colorism.

For some people, the distinctive differences are based in the histories of colonialism wherein white skin is equated with greater power. Ronald Hall (1994, 1995, 1997) suggests that 'the bleaching syndrome' the internalization of a white aesthetic ideal, is the result of the historic legacy of slavery and colonialism around the globe. He argues that many African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans have internalized the colonial and slavery value systems and learned to valorize light skin tones and Anglo facial features. He understands this deeply rooted

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[1] Narrative is a term used by sociologists (and sometimes by other social scientists and humanists) to capture the 'story' of the everyday life experiences of individuals. It is a positively used term.

cultural value as a cause of psychological distress and socioeconomic stratification. Yet, country of origin is not a proxy for colorism and that is because skin tone varies among women and men within countries such as in the case of India and South Africa or even the US where light skin tones are valued (cf. Glenn 2009). While experiences based on country of origin may vary, other differences such as immigrant status, speech, and expression persist unless they conform to the normative standard of 'niceness' (discussed below). I argue that these distinctions have major consequences for the daily life experiences of people of color – not only in terms of how they look but, in the perceptions and interpretations of their behavior as well. Colorism, like racism, consists of both overt and covert actions, outright acts of discrimination, and subtle cues of disfavor. It is no longer about race and ethnicity.

In her 1996 book titled, *The Shock of Arrival: Reflections on Postcolonial Experience*, Meena Alexander notes that as she walked down the street in Harlem, New York, she saw "no harm in not being white" but then she comments that she "is not black either…" (p. 66).

> The racial lines of black and white have been complicated by the layers of immigrants who have entered and are remaking this country. And we are part and parcel of a world of complex, often fluid allegiances. Ethnicity in such a world needs to be recast so that our moving selves can be acknowledged. … Who am I? When am I? The questions that are asked in the street, of my identity mold me. Appearing in the flesh, I am cast afresh, a female of color – skin color, hair texture, clothing, speech, all marking me in ways that I could scarcely have conceived of (Alexander 1996: 66).

The above excerpt implies that colorism is not only about race, but that it can have consequences for those within a single racial category such as variations in skin tone among those categorized as African Americans. In addition, the above experiential narrative draws attention to belongingness, such as do you belong in this academic space? It also calls for considering the 'cultural' meanings associated with speech and expression that are markers of difference. In the workplace including in a university setting, the markers of difference can be viewed, interpreted, and judged as deviating from the normative standards of what is appropriate and acceptable. The result is conflicts and complaints that are scrutinized using the normative standard leading to censoring, silencing, and isolating those who differ. Importantly, colorism intersects with other forms of difference to shape peoples' experiences in universities.

Intersectionality of Differences
Scholars increasingly examine gender, race, and class as being intertwined and point to the need for studying these axes of difference in relation to each other, i.e., adopting an intersectional approach (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1991; also see Choo and Ferree 2010). The book *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (2012) includes narratives of women in academe who have faced challenges grounded in sexism, racism and class-based subordination. Intersectionality takes account of status and power and focuses attention on how they contribute to systematic injustice and social inequality. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall write that intersectionality provides "a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities" (2013: 788). In this way, intersectionality provides a more sophisticated approach to addressing questions of power and representation and suggests that diversity and inclusion involve more than counting bodies. The key point is that diversity that treats all difference as

benign misses the critical element of power and how relations of power are structured using an intersectional lens. A discussion of the intersections of difference, including colorism, is incomplete without explaining the term 'woman of color.'

The term 'woman of color' designates a political constituency, not only a biological one. It is a sociopolitical designation for people of African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and native peoples of the US. It also refers to 'new immigrants' to the US (Mohanty1991). What seems to constitute 'women of color' as a viable alliance is a common context of struggle, rather than racial identification alone, against specific exploitative structures and institutions. I adopt Mohanty's definition for women of color and include those of dark skin color in my consideration of colorism in this essay.

Colorism, Gender, and Culture of Niceness in Universities
Gender and colorism intersect in the structuring of relations of power which is visible in the ways in which people who are 'different' are required to conform to forms of behavior – the culture of niceness – which excludes what they have culturally known and internalized as appropriate.[2] According to the Thesaurus, 'nice' means being pleasant, agreeable, and friendly. Robin diAngelo (2019) in a recent article in *The Guardian* discusses niceness in connection with racism and as a contrast to kindness. She says, "it becomes essential for white people to quickly and eagerly telegraph their niceness to people of color. Niceness in these instances is conveyed through tone of voice (light), eye contact accompanied by smiling and the conjuring of affinities (shared enjoyment of a music genre, compliments on hair or style, statements about having traveled to the country the "other" is perceived to have come from or knowing people from the other's community)." She notes that, "kindness is compassionate and often implicates actions to support or intervene…. Niceness, by contrast, is fleeting, hollow and performative."

At the same time, being 'nice' has varying cultural meanings. Being nice is also a relational concept – in relation to whom and in what culture. Operationally, I define the culture of niceness as conformance to normative standards of behavior – expression, emotion, and language – familiar to the culture in the US, but one that is gendered, racialized, and colored as I discuss below. Non-conformance is penalized in subtle, covert, and overt ways but the form and severity of penalty may vary.

As I have noted above, this is not a data driven article. I rely on narratives of experiences – my own and what I have been told - to derive specific hypotheses about faculty (women, women of color, and men). Narratives serve as a means by which women give themselves voice, construct histories, and make meanings of their experiences. In order to protect my own self from attacks and accusations, I have not used quotes or verbatim comments and have also disguised the context to ensure that identities of those I have interacted with are not revealed. I discuss three key themes pertaining to the experiences of women of color: gender stereotypes in enforcing the

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[2] Consider for example the *extensive* use of 'thank you' in this I have learned over time (perhaps assimilation). The phrase was a part of my vocabulary before I came to graduate school in the US. But my extensive use of the phrase when I return to India now has made family and friends point out to me that it is a misnomer in the culture I was born in and certainly with those you 'know' and are not 'acquaintances'. What I am noting here is the cultural differences even in use of expressions.

culture of niceness; consequences of non-conformance to elements of culture of niceness; and administrative leaders' responses to non-conformance.

Gender stereotypes in enforcing the culture of niceness
In an initial step, the standards of niceness are gendered and can take stereotypical forms such as being assertive and authoritative is acceptable for men but not for women and which has been well documented in scholarship (cf. Vannoy 2001; Barres 2006 among others). Gender based norms regulate what men and women faculty can do. Relations of power structure what is expected and what one can do irrespective of professorial rank. I recall my experiences with a staff member who repeatedly challenged my ideas and authority in carrying out work within a unit. Such constant questioning of my authority and abilities was noted by others and pointed out to me as well. Initially I did nothing and when I eventually responded, it resulted in additional issues and complaints by others. My experience is similar to that of a tenured Caucasian woman faculty member who shared with me the constant resistance to her instructions by a staff assistant. Women in leadership positions are expected or even required to adhere to gender stereotypes of being submissive, in not exercising authority, and if they do not they are described as aggressive.

> H1: Women are more likely than men to be challenged if they are not nurturing, smiling, and deferential (submissive) controlling for professorial rank.

Colorism and non-conformance to elements of culture of niceness
When gender intersects with colorism, additional characteristics come into play in the operational forms of the culture of niceness. They are about varying intonations of voices, the demeanor particularly being serious about standards and accomplishments, the ways in which requests are made, and perhaps even the fewer uses of 'please' or 'thank you' because of the different cultural meanings accorded to these imperative forms of verbs. The characteristics I am referring to are not about being rude or nasty, but about the pressure to assimilate[3] to the dominant norms of forms of expression of emotion, gestures, and pitch of voice.[4]

Consider for example the reactions to the different expressions and emotions of women of color. The seriousness that some women of color convey in their interactions is described negatively as having 'rolled her eyes' or 'looks angry' (similar to the well-known description of the 'angry black woman') because they do not fit in with the normative notion of "niceness." Loud voices in excitement or despair are interpreted as 'shouting' or loud hearty laughter as lacking in niceness. Asking a question or clarification of a person in authority is viewed suspiciously, and disagreement or difference in opinion has negative consequences for the woman of color. For

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[3] Assimilation is the process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. The concept of "assimilation," as originally formulated came under serious attack in the 1960s, mostly due to its ethnocentric and normative formulation.
[4] Variations in expressions of emotion across cultures and transnationally are well documented. Several years back, I had assigned a story from the Pulitzer prize winning book of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*, by Jhumpa Lahiri as a reading for an undergraduate course on gender and multiculturalism. While the crux of the story is about immigrants' lives across borders, the students were interested in discussing the expression of emotions by the characters because it was distinctly different than what they were familiar with. Perhaps our faculty, staff and graduate students need such education.

example, only after I became a full professor did I publicly mention that I did not attend events/gatherings because as a vegetarian there was no main entrée I could eat.

Non-conformance to the culture of niceness standards has serious consequences for the daily life experiences of women of color faculty, such as being challenged about the legitimacy of their knowledge and authority, being denied requests for routine assistance pertaining to their work, and negative interpretations of their expressions. For example, a woman of color's request for assistance from an office staff person to enable her to do her work was misinterpreted as demanding work; she (faculty member) could expect no help from the unit head. Similarly, an assistant professor's rude email questioning the ability and knowledge of a tenured woman of color evoked no response from a head. By not calling out such incidences, administrators fail to use the opportunity to address concerns with colorism and at the same time convey a lack of value for the woman of color which further isolates her (more on isolation below).

When women of color question errors in work or the quality of work being not up to the mark or express frustration, it is interpreted as threatening people or as making demands that are unacceptable. These emotions do not fit into the standardized notion of 'being nice.' When these women are constantly challenged, they are expected to remain 'nice' even when provoked; expressions of frustration by women of color do not fit into the dominant repertoire of niceness. Men, in general, and men of color are typically viewed as legitimately being assertive and/or demanding of timely and quality work from staff or students (Vannoy 2001). Men's demand for high standards of work is explained as high-achieving while similar demands by women of color are noted to be insensitive. Based on these arguments, I propose the following hypotheses.

> H2: Women of color, irrespective of professorial rank, who are serious about their work and accomplishments are more likely to be described as aggressive and/or angry than other women and men.
> H2a: Men of color who are assertive and serious are less likely to be challenged than all women (including women of color).
> H3: Expressions of emotion such as frustration/despair or joy by women of color are more likely to be described as loud or aggressive but the same emotions expressed by other women are viewed as being feminine irrespective of professorial rank.

Administrative leaders' responses to non-conformance
Isolation, and lack of value and support from unit heads increases the vulnerability of women of color who are uncertain about with whom they could share their experiences with, who would understand what they are going through, and from whom they could seek support. When heads do not value and are not supportive of women of color, others, such as faculty colleagues, staff, and students, follow the cue and become dismissive of them. Moreover, it enables the majority, often the dominant group, to exert power to define and explain interactions and actions differently than her (woman of color) description and explanation. A faculty member of color noted that perceptions, interpretations, and explanations of 'others' (the dominant majority including faculty colleagues, staff, and students) about actions of a faculty member of color are considered more relevant and real than her own explanation or motive. These experiences also convey a lack of value for scholars who look, talk, and behave differently. Such vulnerability is visible in subtle and overt attacks by faculty colleagues, staff, and students. Even graduate students of color are aware and often make it known that power rests with the 'white' woman or

man and not a woman of color faculty member. All these experiences have an impact on integrating faculty who are 'different' and has implications for their health and academic success.

> H4: Women of color are more likely to be repeatedly 'pushed back' on their words and expressions by faculty, staff, and students compared to men and other women faculty thereby provoking them to react in frustration that are then viewed as conflicts.
> H5: Women of color are less likely to receive support from unit heads or administrators when conflicts arise compared to men and 'other' women faculty.
> H6: As women of color are isolated and may be embroiled in conflicts, they are more likely to find ways to step into positions outside of units or leave the institution to protect their health and sanity, often with the encouragement (subtle and overt) from the head.

I have heard suggestions from an administrator about finding ways for a woman of color to move out of a unit because she is unhappy with the immediate environment, as well as of a unit head sending a job ad to a woman of color faculty member conveying a negative message that she does not belong and so must consider leaving. This perhaps becomes a way to then describe the unit as having solved problems of climate and claiming that all is well. In reality, moving women of color out of units fails to meet the goal of inclusion or equality. Moreover, moving to outside units such as to administrative positions does not completely alter the experiences of women of color. "...the price that women of color pay may get heavier with increasing visibility, authority, and power within the institution" (Niemann 2012: 450). This quote reflects my own experiences as the legitimacy of my knowledge and the ability to make decisions about my responsibilities have been frequently challenged and questioned overtly and subtly by faculty colleagues, staff, and students.[5]

At the same time, it is plausible that women of color may conform and assimilate into the dominant culture of niceness, which allows for selective inclusion. Selective inclusion diminishes efforts to recognize difference and thwarts the disruption of the dominant norms of niceness. It reinforces existing relations of power in which women of color faculty are subordinate. Consider my own case of not being able to articulate my concerns with choices of food at events when I was an assistant or an associate professor for fear of being viewed as a non-conformant or as being a questioner.

The above discussion also draws attention to belongingness – do you belong in this academic space – as well as to the 'cultural' meanings associated with speech and expression that are markers of difference. In the workplace, including in a university setting, the markers of difference can be viewed, interpreted, and judged as deviating from the normative standards of what is appropriate and acceptable as niceness.

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[5] This has been my experience as a faculty member, which became more pronounced in my current position as the Director of the Butler Center (since August 2017). Yet, I have made every effort to pursue the mission of the Center and made it a central transformative unit on campus. I can do the work because of the enormous support that has come from allies and specific individuals in positions of authority. It has required much resilience on my part which most faculty who compliment the efforts of the Center are probably unaware about. Without the support, I doubt I would have lasted beyond a semester. I note this knowing fully well that it conveys my vulnerability and tentativeness.

Writing this essay related to colorism and gender as tied to the cultural 'baggage' of skin color, speech, and expression is not about portraying myself as a 'victim' – it is about agency; the ability to speak and enable change. For me, being different was somewhat isolating which some colleagues described as being private, perhaps without a critical lens into why that may be. But I did rely on good mentors and a few close-knit friends to learn and grow. Soon after I accepted the current administrative position, I recognized the dearth of women of color in positions of authority. I have no role model who would understand my challenges in exercising authority or provide me advice. But I have heard about the experiences of many women – of all shades of skin color – which made me think more deeply, about my experiences, than I had done in the past. Some of the women who shared their experiences with me expressed mixed sentiments; some are hopeful of interventions that can bring change and others are skeptical that despite my earnest efforts I will be pushed back by the system and be compelled to give up. So, my current position has provided me opportunities to hear about others' experiences which overlap with my own and at the same time, has posed challenges about how I can enable a process of change to alter these experiences. At the same time, being mostly outside my disciplinary unit, I have found allies from across colleges (faculty across ranks and administrators) who have heard me with seriousness and have shown tremendous willingness to learn, understand, and consider alternatives. These strands of hope cannot be overlooked or minimized in the experiences I have narrated above. How do we begin to consider change at the individual and institutional level to address the above discussed experiences?

Strategies to Address Bias Based in Colorism and Gender
Both individual and institutional strategies are essential for addressing concerns rooted in colorism and gender discussed above. I strongly believe that we continue to spend institutional resources in studying and documenting concerns, such as climate, and **do** little to address and mitigate concerns in bold and practical ways.

At an individual level, it would be meaningful for women and women of color faculty members to seek mentors within and preferably outside of their own units too. While those within the unit are more likely to be familiar with procedures and norms in the unit which can be helpful, external mentors and advocates will have experience with academic processes broadly and be knowledgeable about issues and options across colleges and at the university level. In an effort to make this possible, the Susan Bulkeley Center for Leadership Excellence will make available a coaching and resource network (CRN) for women assistants and associate professors starting in spring 2019.

The CRN will be diverse and include women and men faculty members. A professional development workshop on coaching will be offered through the Butler Center to those in the CRN. Thereafter, the CRN members will meet twice a semester to discuss concerns and share suggestions. Any woman assistant or associate professor at Purdue may select a maximum of two 'coaches' from the network to work with. The 'coaches' are expected to meet regularly (monthly basis at least) to discuss issues that the woman assistant or associate professor is confronting. The Butler Center will provide some discretionary funds to faculty members who serve on the CRN in recognition of their work and time.

At the <u>institutional level</u>, inclusionary practices are central to everyday interactions amongst all constituencies on campus. These practices are also structured by the processes the university puts in place and so closely examining processes and structures is key for enabling a diverse and inclusive campus community. Such scrutiny must be intentional – an intentionality that entails purposeful strategies combined with evidence-based research on how to avoid falling back into the status quo; and understanding <u>why the process did not end as intended</u>. It is about disrupting the usual practices in ways that compels the campus community to focus on the inclusion goal. It requires leaders (unit heads and administrators) to take bold initiatives rather than refrain from 'rocking the boat.'

Over a period of time, institutional mechanisms addressing both structure and process in policy can influence efforts at inclusion. For instance, we need closer examination of hiring *processes* to determine why we do not have diverse pools or fail to hire women of color; after all hires by units are approved at a higher administrative level. There is an urgent need for scrutiny and greater transparency in processes for resource distribution – ranging from teaching or research assistants (assignment of research assistants may vary across disciplines), course releases (other than through a grant or sabbatical), and criteria for merit raises especially as salary disparities based on gender persist.

Educational and Actionable Strategies
In less diverse (gender and color) institutions, there is an urgent need to educate leaders and ensure their commitment to recognize and understand difference – unit heads, deans, and other administrators - and then hold them accountable. In the past 6-8 months, I have encountered administrators who have shown their willingness to learn and understand issues of difference, privilege, and what it means to be a woman of color in a predominantly 'white' institution. The traditional educational strategy is <u>workshops</u> which can include relevant topics in depth such as gender, colorism, difference, and equality. The content of the workshop requires careful thought particularly as we lapse into conventional categories of difference such as gender and race without incorporating concerns of colorism. All influencers – unit heads and senior level administrators – must be invited to attend and complete the workshop. They set the tone for how women faculty of color are supported, valued, and integrated so that they can thrive. A well-wisher once commented to me, "you survived the system and are a full professor." We do not want to merely survive, we want to thrive in this system and have an impact (make a difference), and perhaps that is why we set high standards for ourselves and others.

As discussed above, women of color faculty are more likely to be vulnerable when they lack support from unit heads (department and college). While many unit heads claim they 'know' (or study) about gender, race, and colorism, they severely lack the understanding of experiences and concerns of women of color and particularly the complexities of what they encounter. (The 2015 and 2018 COACHE clearly show women and women of color faculty concerns with the immediate – department – environment/climate.) Merely appointing a woman as a head of a unit does not address concerns of gender and colorism and so all unit heads must be exposed to workshops. Extending the point made above about professional development workshops, I suggest emphasis on content about difference, colorism, and conflict resolution for unit heads. Having external agencies conduct such workshops will be worth the investment. Possibilities include *The Privilege Institute* or even individual scholars who offer such workshops. Investing

in preventing and mitigating concerns related to colorism and conflicts that may arise would contribute to saving scarce resources – money, time, and stress. One option is to make available workshops on conflict resolution (negotiation and compromise). The Butler Center has already begun exploring options for such workshops to be offered in 2019 but costs are a concern.

In addition, assessing the impact of the workshops can provide key insights into how they make a difference or not. These impact assessments must be designed, conducted, and analyzed systematically by faculty who have methodological expertise and knowledge of needed tools. It does not end here. The assessment must be used to inform modification of the workshop or even action needed on the part of the institution at different levels (unit, college, university).

Education can occur through other mechanisms as well. For instance, individuals in positions of authority should carefully consider concerns with colorism and gender irrespective of status. The assumptions that professorial rank alone confers power flies in the face of understanding the effects of intersections of gender and colorism on everyday experiences of women of color with faculty colleagues, staff, and students. As noted by Barres (2006), "Academic leadership has a particular responsibility to speak out, but we all share this responsibility. It takes minimal effort to send a brief message to the relevant authority when you note a lack of diversity in an organization or an act of discrimination" (p. 136). This also implies that leaders must "be color conscious, not color blind" (Niemann 2012: 453). Accountability of those in leadership positions should be at the center of these efforts.

Education is possible through daily interactions if there is greater diversity at various levels within a university. So, enhancing leadership diversity can provide a substantially broader point of view, with more sensitivity and respect for different perspectives which is invaluable to any organization, including a university. Resources and support are a must to enable the leader to function and thrive – support not merely in words but in terms of translating interventions into practice. I want to reiterate here the point I included above, "...the price that women of color pay may get heavier with increasing visibility, authority, and power within the institution" (Niemann 2012: 450). Supporting women of color as they move to positions of power can be key and critical for change because if attacked they are most likely to refrain from working toward the much-needed goal of respect of difference and inclusion. In addition, recognizing and rewarding those who do the 'work' – emotional labor – and spend time supporting and advising women of color can go a long way in enabling change.

Involving the university community to raise awareness and suggest mechanisms for addressing colorism can be powerful. While there are a wide variety of interest groups and committees on campus, women of color who do not fall into the conventional racial category of under-represented minorities lack the space or forum at which they can share their experiences, be understood, and expect action. There is a need for concerted effort to bring these 'voices' into forums and committees for conversations as well. I believe an intentional goal should be to involve women and women of color faculty (including URM) in the entire process and decision-making related to initiatives that are intended to address the concerns of women faculty. They should be included not only to provide input as a committee member but perhaps as co-chairs of committees or as members that shape initiatives, implement them, assess their impact, and develop recommendations. This will allow for not only representation of women of color but a

sense of power and ownership of initiatives. I suggest such a partnership between administrators and faculty of color to create a meaningful dialogue that will represent transparency and foster success.

Conclusion

In this essay, I reflect on my experiences and those of others in relation to mine to draw attention to the intersections of colorism and gender that shape experiences of women of color in universities. These experiences are well-documented in scholarship (cf. the book *Presumed Incompetent*). Discussing 'difference' beyond demographic characteristics to include 'cultural' meanings associated with speech and expression that are markers of difference, I argue that such differences are often viewed, interpreted, and judged as deviating from the normative standards of niceness. Such differences can work to the advantage/disadvantage of some over others. The resulting conflicts and complaints are scrutinized using normative standards leading to censoring, silencing, and isolating those who differ. More importantly, the experiences significantly impact their productivity because they may have less access to resources or even reduced energy and motivation to even survive. For the institution that has invested in hiring women of color, retention and success of all women and women of color must be a priority.

The strategies I suggest above emphasize the institutional level rather than the individual level only. That is because institutional transformation is longer lasting than merely addressing the concerns of any one or more individuals. The system and structure need to be fixed, not the individual. And it is not about survival, but about making it possible for everyone to thrive in this system. Institutional responsibility to address the concerns of women means <u>doing</u> what is necessary. If not, the value of their contributions is diminished and the conflicts that arise over non-conformance can be destructive.

Future research should rely on systematic data, quantitatively and/or qualitatively, to examine the hypotheses I have derived. Qualitative data from carefully designed research can provide key insights into the propositions raised above and perhaps offer additional suggestions and strategies for consideration by universities. In addition, discerning the ways in which in-group differences - difference based on nationality - which is not discernible by skin color alone - and disciplinary differences that I have left unexplored would require examination.

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