Race and Gender Oppression in the Classroom: The Experiences of Women Faculty of Color with White Male Students

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Abstract

Research shows that an oppressive classroom environment impairs learning and academic performance for students with oppressed identities. Less research examines faculty perceptions of their classroom, but such research could reveal whether an oppressive environment impairs teaching effectiveness. Although the literature shows that women faculty of color spend a disproportionate amount of time teaching, researchers have not systematically examined their classroom experiences. My study relies on transcripts of 17 in-depth interviews with women faculty of color at a large, predominantly white research institution. Despite their legitimate authority as professors, these women describe gendered racism in their classroom interactions with students. Specifically, they depict white male students as challenging their authority, teaching competency, and scholarly expertise, as well as offering subtle and not so subtle threats to their persons and their careers.

Keywords

race, gender, oppression, women faculty of color, higher education

In courses on social oppression, sociologists help their students examine racial/ethnic disparities in health care, gendered wage differences, sexual orientation rights, religious persecution, and so forth. We use external, real-world examples to illustrate structural, cultural, and interpersonal social oppression, yet our classrooms undoubtedly reflect the oppression of society. For example, the oppressive classroom environment for women students and students of color discussed by Freire (1970) has been demonstrated by researchers such as Astin (1993); Chesler, Wilson, and Malani (1993); Hall and Sandler (1982); Hurtado et al. (1998); Rankin and Reason (2005); D. G. Smith, Wolf, and Morrison (1995); and Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000). Given this research, I hypothesized that faculty from oppressed groups could be equally vulnerable to classroom oppression and that such oppression could undermine faculty teaching effectiveness and emotional well-being.

This has troubling implications for both learning outcomes and faculty retention; reports in the literature indicate that institutional faculty diversity increases positive learning outcomes for all students (e.g., Gurin et al. 2002; Milem 2003; Terenzini et al. 2001). To foster faculty diversity and effectiveness, classroom environments should

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be supportive of, or at the least not hostile to, faculty who are women or of color. Understanding how faculty perceive the current classroom environment could promote the retention of a diverse faculty. Therefore, I use an intersectional oppression framework like that used by Collins (2000) to explore faculty perceptions of classroom space, with a focus on the experiences of female faculty of color.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: OPPRESSION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Oppression refers to both the system of obstacles and the individual acts that maintain the privilege and authority of the dominant group (Bankston 2000; Jaggar and Young 2000; Johnson 2000; Roth 2005). While women faculty of color may have discrete experiences of racial and gender discrimination, the resultant oppression is cumulative and widespread. Marilyn Frye (1983:4-5) likens these key aspects of oppression to a birdcage:

> If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. . . . [Y]ou could look at that one wire . . . and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere. . . . There is no physical property of any one wire . . . that will reveal how a bird could be inhibited or harmed by it except in the most accidental way. It is only when you step back . . . and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. . . . It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon.

The small number of women faculty of color recruited, retained, or promoted in higher education reflects the "cage"—the cumulative and systematic effects of gender and race oppression.

Gendered racism (or racist sexism) is a unique form of oppression experienced by women of color due to their position at the intersection of race and gender in Collins' (2000) matrix of domination. The resultant oppression should not be thought of as either additive or multiplicative (e.g., "doubled," as asserted by B. Smith 1977). While manifestations of both forms of oppression are clearly facets of their lives, the experiences of women faculty of color cannot be reduced to either racism or sexism alone. Spelman (1988: 122) expands upon this point:

> It is highly misleading to say, without further explanation, that Black women experience one form of oppression, as Blacks (the same thing Black men experience) and that they experience another form of oppression, as women (the same thing white women experience). While it is true that . . . institutions that are described as sexist affect both Black and white women, they are affected in different ways, depending upon the extent to which they are affected by other forms of oppression.

Following this insight, I examine how women faculty of color perceive their classroom experiences at the intersection of gender and race oppression. As you will see, the women of color in my study are acutely aware that (1) their classroom experiences are shaped by gendered racism and (2) their white male students, consciously or unconsciously, use their own position in the matrix of domination at the intersection of white and male privilege to undermine the authority of women of color faculty.

Whereas higher education literature often describes structural inequality, I am interested in detailing how structural inequality exhibits itself in interpersonal interactions. Given that teaching is a major part of the lives of women faculty of color, we should know more about their classroom experiences. However, very little research has focused explicitly on their teaching experiences. Thus, my study fills a gap by focusing on their accounts of classroom interactions and giving voice to the narratives of women faculty of color who simultaneously experience their classrooms with powerful institutional statuses and powerless societal statuses. These women's narratives provide compelling evidence of sexist racism for women faculty of color in their interactions with white male students.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

The literature on women faculty of color establishes that they experience structural and interpersonal race and gender oppression in academe. The literature also illustrates that both gender and race affect how students evaluate them. Although sparse, the few studies on the classroom experiences of specifically black women faculty provide evidence of oppressive interactions with white students.

Gender, Race, and Academe: Institutions

Women, and women of color in particular, are underrepresented in the number of full-time faculty in the United States. Black, Asian, Latina, and white women are, respectively, 2.33 percent (10,879), 2.34 percent (10,944), 1.20 percent (5,606), and 28.9 percent (135,158) of full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty (467,325) in the United States (*Chronicle Almanac 2007–2008*, 2008). The distribution of women faculty of color across types of institutions further reflects gender and race inequality; women faculty of color are most often employed by two-year institutions, community colleges, and minority-serving institutions (Antonio 2002; Gregory 2001; Turner 2003) and generally hold the less powerful and less valued positions of the professoriate in U.S. colleges and universities (Bonner and Thomas 2001; Gregory 2001; Medina and Luna 2000; Nieves-Squire 1991; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001; Turner 2003). They are also concentrated in the lower ranks as instructors, lecturers, and assistant professors (*Chronicle Almanac 2007–2008*, 2008; Hamilton 2004).

Gender, Race, and Academe: Departments

The current literature on women faculty of color also reveals patterns of racial and gender inequality in their treatment within institutions of higher education (Aguirre 2000; Allen et al. 2002; Gregory 2001). One manifestation of gendered racism is that women faculty of color often have heavier teaching loads than male faculty or white female faculty (Allen et al. 2002; Johnson et al. 2005) because departments hire women faculty of color to teach full loads, often including new preparations and large introductory courses (Martinez Aleman and Renn 2002). According to women faculty of color, one consequence of such heavy teaching loads is a high level of stress (Thomas and Hollenshead 2001; Turner 2003) and increased isolation (Agathangelou and Ling 2002).

In addition to heavy teaching loads, women of color are expected to conform to gendered role expectations, like taking on many more "nurturing" service responsibilities than male faculty (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 1990; Thorne and Hochschild 1997). Department chairs also expect women faculty of color to serve on a multitude of race-related committees (Aguirre 2000; Brayboy 2003; Medina and Luna 2000; Moses 1997; Turner 2001).

Gender, Race, and Academe: Relationships with Colleagues

White women and women of color describe their academic environments as isolating (Hall and Sandler 1982; Hune 1998; Moses 1997; Nieves-Squires 1991). Women faculty of color face exclusion based on both race and gender; they are excluded from networks by white men based on race and gender, by white women based on race, and by men of color based on gender (Agathangelou and Ling 2002; Balderrama, Teixeira, and Valdez 2004; J. W. Smith and Calasanti 2005; Meyers 2002; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001).

While all women faculty experience sexism in their interactions with male colleagues, especially if they express a feminist perspective (Ropers-Huilman and Shackelford 2003), women of color report dealing with both gender and racial oppression in their peer interactions. Specifically, black women negotiate the mothering-yet-obedient "mammy" stereotype (Moses 1997; TuSmith and Reddy 2002), Latinas deal with the presumption that they prefer to focus on home and family (Nieves-Squires 1991), and Asian and Asian American women grapple with the stereotype of being passive (Hune 1998). Women faculty of color must also contend with their white peers' assumption that they are affirmative action hires (Agathangelou et al. 2002; Balderrama et al. 2004; J. W. Smith and Calasanti 2005; Medina and Luna 2000; Moses 1997) and, thus, not legitimate scholars and teachers.

Gender, Race, and Academe: Classroom Experiences

Most of the research on gender and/or race in the classroom has focused on course evaluations. These studies illustrate that women faculty

(Boggs 1995; Miller and Chamberlin 2000; Ruzich 1995) and faculty of color (DiPietro and Faye 2005; D. L. Rubin 2001; Hamermesh and Parker 2005; Vargas 2002) receive more negative evaluations than white male faculty. Student evaluations of faculty who are both women and racial group minorities are even less favorable than their evaluations of white women or men of color (Dukes and Victoria 1989; Fries and McNinch 2003; Hamermesh and Parker 2005). Several studies report that students rate women of color faculty as less credible and less intelligent (D. L. Rubin 2001; Hendrix 1998; Williams et al. 1999). My study extends this work on classroom dynamics by (1) exploring those dynamics from the faculty perspective and (2) using a qualitative approach to provide a more in-depth perspective. My study also contributes by increasing the body of research examining faculty oppressed by both race and gender, since most previous research has focused on either one or the other.

There are very few studies that examine how women faculty perceive their classroom experiences. The women faculty in Heckert's (1999) study felt that students failed to recognize their authority because of their gender. For example, students did not address them as "Dr.," although they used "Dr." when addressing male faculty. Additional studies illustrate that women faculty frequently experience sexual harassment from their male students (Martinez Aleman and Renn 2002; McKinney 1990). As the women in these studies were all—or nearly all (i.e., 90 percent)—white, it is difficult to know whether women of color faculty have similar classroom experiences.

There is even less systematic research focusing on the perceptions women faculty of color have of their classroom experiences. There are, however, two studies on black women's classroom experiences that reveal similar themes. For example, McGowan (2000) revealed three patterns in the accounts of black women faculty regarding classroom interactions with white students: (1) critiques of teaching effectiveness, (2) challenges to faculty authority, and (3) lack of respect from students. Similar patterns are found in Harlow's (2003) research on faculty emotion management in the undergraduate classroom, where black women faculty report that white students often question both their competency and their authority. Harlow (2003:357) reports that this challenging occurs to a greater degree than in white women's classrooms because black women have to negotiate "femaleness and Blackness"—stereotypes of the nurturing mammy or the black bitch. Kardia and Wright's (2004) study also evidenced a distinctive experience of race and gender oppression. Their quantitative analysis found that when women taught identity-related content, women faculty of color were twice as likely as white women faculty to be challenged by students.

My research expands the work of Harlow (2003) and McGowan (2000), which only included black women, by including women from various oppressed racial groups and revealing similar patterns in their experiences. My study moves beyond the scope of past research by allowing faculty to describe a broader range of their classroom experiences in comparison to Harlow's study, which was narrowly focused on classroom emotion management. I employ a larger sample of women faculty of color and gather more detailed qualitative data to allow me to identify patterns in their experiences more fully than was possible in the Kardia and Wright (2004) study.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Despite the fact that women faculty of color spend more time in the classroom than other faculty (Baez 1998; Creamer 1998; Gregory 2001; Moses 1997), we know very little about their experiences there, although the relevant literature suggests that women faculty of color will experience both race and gender oppression in their classrooms, much as they do elsewhere in higher education. My study aims to fill that gap by examining faculty perceptions of the classroom environment; I ask, "What types of experiences do women faculty of color have in their classroom interactions with students? Do women faculty of color experience racial and gender oppression in their classroom interactions with students? If so, what does it look like?"

METHOD

Participants

The data I use are part of a larger sample ($N = 46$), collected by a team of researchers between 1999 and 2004. Initial faculty members were identified by university awards as demonstrating excellence in teaching and/or diversity service to the university community. Additional faculty were selected by snowball sampling from this original group. The

data were drawn from a large, predominantly white yet relatively diverse (i.e., 66.3 percent white, 26.9 percent students of color, 6.8 percent unspecified) Midwestern research institution. At this institution, white women constitute 19.4 percent (i.e., 400) of all full-time, tenured or track faculty. Women of color made up 6.5 percent (i.e., 157) of all full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty (i.e., 2,400). Thus, the female faculty of this institution was comprised of 33.7 percent women of color and 66.7 percent white women. Interviews of the participants were structured, in-depth interviews as described in the following. Of the total sample of 46 faculty interviewed, the principal investigator only granted me access to the transcripts of the 17 faculty who fit the selection criteria for my study as women of color. This group consisted of eight black women, three Latinas, and six Asian women. The small number of women faculty of color at this institution makes them easily identifiable. To protect their identities, I present only aggregate descriptive information (see appendix) instead of their individual departments and ranks. These women faculty of color, with the exception of one, are all tenure-track academics. In accordance with national trends, they are disproportionately concentrated at lower academic ranks—most are assistant and associate professors. They represent the range of ages, disciplines, and schools (e.g., social sciences, natural sciences, humanities) found at the research site.

Procedure

My data focus on responses to interview questions about faculty's diversity-related classroom experiences. I used NVIVO to conduct a cross-case analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994) on the interview transcripts. I isolated the response to the same question for each participant's transcript and reviewed these transcripts line by line (Coffey and Atkinson 1996; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Silverman 1993) taking notes on the following: (1) What are the salient points, issues, words, or phrases related to the women faculty of color's accounts of their classroom experiences with students? (2) Is there evidence of race and gender oppression in their narrative accounts of classroom experiences comparable to their experiences in nonclassroom contexts of higher education? I used these notes and the transcripts to develop case-ordered, then theme-ordered, descriptive matrices (Creswell 1998; H. J. Rubin and Rubin 1995; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Miles and Huberman 1994). The results that follow integrate the findings in my notes and matrices[1] on women faculty of color's perceptions of race and gender oppression in their classroom interactions with white male students.

RESULTS

My data show that women faculty of color report challenges almost exclusively from their white male students; the faculty in my study rarely described the behavior of students of color or female students as challenging to them. Faculty of color described students of color as knowledgeable and aware of racial bias, active participants in discussions, and so on. While there was some infrequent mention of raced classroom dynamics between students of color and white students, only two faculty members mentioned being challenged by students of color. It is important to note that women faculty of color were asked about their experiences with *all* students. It is illustrative of the way in which their classroom experiences are shaped by gendered racism that they report challenges almost exclusively from white male students.[2]

Four major themes emerged in the narratives women faculty of color gave of their classroom interactions with white students, and white male students in particular. Three of these themes echo observations in previous research (Harlow 2003; McGowan 2000). Like the participants in those studies, women faculty of color in my study report that white male students (1) challenged their authority, (2) questioned their teaching competency, and (3) disrespected their scholarly expertise. In addition, the women faculty of color in my study report that white male students engaged in behavior that was threatening and intimidating. Intersectional oppression theory reveals that it is not possible to separate the effects of race from the effects of gender in the experiences women of color because they experience these identities simultaneously, as discussed in the work of Collins (2000) and Spelman (1988). The findings that follow illustrate the gendered racism women faculty of color described as experiencing in their classroom interactions with white male students.

Challenging Authority

Interviewers asked faculty if there were things they could not get away with because of their

race and gender identities. Cathy, a black woman, noted without hesitation that she perceived authority as an issue in her classroom:

> Authority issues, although I think that I'm gaining more skills to deal with that. But, I think what's hardest for me is still not knowing what my options are as a professional here, because I feel like the day will come when whatever skills I have, I'm in a situation where if I want help, just what am I supposed to do?

In the previous quote, Cathy describes her efforts to develop skills to deal with her perception of *not* receiving the authority normally associated with the title of "faculty." Other participants also perceived challenges to their authority. The awareness of gendered racism affected women faculty of color on a daily basis. As Emily, a Latina, states,

> As a woman of color, I have to . . . be very careful about how I behave in the classroom . . . because of the issues of authority . . . I cannot be too friendly. . . . I can be sensitive as a human being, but I can't open up totally.

Emily does not refer only to her race or her gender, but to both identities—as a "woman of color" she perceives threats to her authority and, as a result, is guarded about her classroom behavior.

Participants described a range of behaviors that they viewed white students used, particularly the male students, to resist the authority of women faculty of color. The gendered and raced aspects of this oppression are evident in that these faculty do not report white women or, for the most part, male students of color as challenging their authority. Alice, a black woman, describes the following:

> White males will open my door to my office without knocking. . . . Why, again only white males, choose to just open my door. No one else just opens up my door. They're snide, they'll sit with their arms crossed and they doodle and they sit right up in the front so that is definite passive-aggressive behavior. The tone sometimes in the e-mails they send, and it's kind of

funny because it's the kind of things you don't even know how to express to other people. But you're like, if I was a white male you wouldn't dare write to me in that tone.

These perceived challenges to authority from white men were common in the narratives women faculty of color offered of their classroom interactions with students. Some described white men as addressing and approaching them inappropriately and as engaging in passive-aggressive nonverbal behaviors (e.g., rolling their eyes) in class. Kate says:

> I think students are very, very careful not to reveal their source of domination . . . they may not be aware that they're feeling more comfortable attacking me because I'm, say, Asian or immigrant or a woman. . . . I definitely feel I can't empirically show it because students are not going to come to you and say, "Hey, you know . . . I'm bashing you because you're Asian or you're a woman. I think women as a whole, in women faculty, and *women of color faculty* [italics added], it seems to me . . . are easier targets. . . . It's a socialization process . . . in a situation where there are male faculty and female faculty, a student may call male faculty Dr. So-and-So . . . and . . . and, yeah, and then we're [women faculty of color] . . . we try to not be called by our first name. Well, I get a lot of email, . . . "Hi," . . . "My name is so-and-so. [Kate], Dr. So-and-So suggested that I talk to you."

In this interaction, the white student refers to a male faculty member as *Dr.*, yet addresses Kate by her first name. The inability to name the cause of their perceived oppression (i.e., Is it my race? Is it my gender? Is it both?) is but another source of stress for women faculty of color. Nonetheless, Kate clearly feels that the combination of oppressed race and gender identities make women of color more vulnerable to challenges to their authority.

Colleges and universities designate faculty as the legitimate authority in the classroom; thus, it would be reasonable to expect students to respect their authority. However, the women faculty of

color in my study, like women in other professional roles (Fox and Hesse-Biber 1984), do not believe they are given that authority. Instead, women faculty of color report challenges to their classroom authority from white male students, students they perceive as asserting the authority of their dominant position in broader society (e.g., Hollander and Howard 2000; Jackman 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 1999).

Questioning Teaching Competency

The women faculty of color in my study reported that white male students questioned their competency as professors. For example, Carin, a black woman professor, told of accidentally referring to Franklin Delano Roosevelt in class as Theodore Roosevelt, then immediately correcting herself, and of the response this engendered from one white male student:

> This white guy sends me this long email message saying . . . I have some teaching experience, too, as an undergraduate and one of the things I know is that if you make a mistake, then you're supposed to spend time really correcting it in class, and the fact that you didn't do that really demonstrates to me that this is not a class that I really need to be in.

Although his teaching experience consisted of teaching two courses to sixth graders, Carin noted his apparent assumption that "as a white male, he's automatically my peer." Again, Carin does not speak of the student's privilege "as a male" or "as a white person." Rather, she points to the intersection of both identities as the source of his disrespect. Other women faculty of color described similar incidents. For example, Jan, an Asian American woman, told this story:

> They had taken a midterm exam, and . . . the majority of people did pretty badly . . . this one student who was a white male, and very vocal in this class on minority literatures said . . . he felt that . . . I was expecting too much on the essay. . . . And he felt like I didn't . . . make him aware of what I was asking for in the essay. . . . I think there was a sense of him being a little bit . . .

disappointed in himself, but . . . he wanted to . . . blame me . . . [because] he didn't understand what was expected.

In this account, Jan perceives the white male student as criticizing her effectiveness as a teacher by (1) questioning the performance standards she sets for her students and (2) accusing her of failing to inform students of what those standards were.

Similarly, Kimberly, an Asian American woman, felt fearful and angry when an enraged white student accused her of not providing a safe space for white students in her classroom. This student and his white classmates then complained to her department chair. Although she does not identify the gender of the students involved, Kimberly attributes their decision to report her to the chair to her intersectional identity as an Asian American woman. The fact that no same-race challenges were reported supports the conclusion that it was the women's position at the intersection of two vectors of oppression—race and gender—that provoked the incidents, rather than the influence of either identity on its own.

In these accounts, it can be interpreted that white students—usually males—felt entitled to tell women faculty of color what they should look for on exams, when and how they should manage student interactions in class, and how they should deal with misstatements. The women faculty of color viewed these white students as inappropriately questioning their teaching skill and experience. The ubiquity of men in academe—what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) refer to as hegemonic masculinity—and men who are most often white (Bonilla-Silva 2003) results in a normative image of college professors as white men. A nonwhite woman professor violates this image of normalcy. White male students may be interpreted as questioning the teaching competence of women faculty of color to reassert their dominance and restore the normative status quo.

Disrespecting Scholarly Expertise

Many women faculty of color reported their assessment that white students, males in particular, did not recognize or respect their expertise as scholars. This view of lack of respect for

women faculty of color's expertise was described in two interrelated ways. First, the respondents reported that white male students directly and overtly questioned their knowledge of mainstream scholarship. Second, they reported that white male students did not recognize scholarly expertise on issues of race and gender as "real" scholarship. As Beth, a black woman, describes:

> Now I can't prove that these are racial events, OK. But I have some supposition that they may be racially motivated . . . the occurrence of . . . white males . . . much more predominantly white males, are coming into my class and questioning my expertise . . . whereas I don't believe, and I can't prove this, but I don't believe that they go into their chemistry class and challenge their chemistry white male, . . . now that may be gender as well as race. Because I just don't think that they'd go to some of their other classes and question or challenge their professors in ways that I've been questioned or challenged.

In this account, Beth attributes the fact that white males question her scholarly expertise to the combined effect of her race and gender. Her inability to offer definitive proof of the cause of her oppression poses an added burden.

Jan reports an incident when a white male student implies that race scholarship is not "real" scholarship:

> . . . a white male student who [was] . . . resistant, who . . . at the end of the class, we watched *Blade Runner* . . . the whole term, he . . . [had not] been engaged. . . . And he said, "Oh, I really like what we're studying." . . . He confessed . . . "I didn't like that we were studying . . . [a minority story]. But this is something I really like. And I'm glad that you included it in the class." . . . I think what he was conveying to me was, this is real stuff, right? The other stuff is just what you want me to know.

Blade Runner has a violent, hyper-masculine plot based in a white-dominated society while the minority story focuses on an African American community with female lead characters. From

Jan's assessment, it appears that the white male student's perspective is that *Blade Runner* is real scholarship while the minority story is not valuable. In her account, the student explicitly questions the raced and gendered course material, though Jan continues to say that she believes her race and gender identities were at play as well.

In another incident, Carin has a similar interpretation of the behavior of white male students:

> There are certain things that will be automatically presumed about other people based on their race and their gender that I'll never be able to take for granted. . . . I don't walk into a classroom expecting that—especially my white students, and particularly my white male students will automatically accept that I'm a scholar in my area . . . my white colleagues can do that. Students come in expecting that, you know, "Oh, a black professor. I'm not going to learn that much, and not going to learn that much about anything that's real." . . . My white colleagues can teach about lettuce heads for like a whole semester, and that ain't got nothing to do with what they're supposed to be teaching, and it's automatically assumed that, really the knowledge is there, but this may just be sort of an eccentric person.

Here, Carin is arguing that many white male students' valuation of course material is mediated by the faculty member's race and gender identity; anything white or male faculty teach is legitimate scholarship, whereas women faculty of color don't teach anything "real." Thus, these women faculty of color perceive white male students as challenging not only the scholarship of race and gender in which they specialize, but even their status as scholars, due to their oppressed identities as women and people of color. Kimberly also recalls an incident of a white male challenging her scholarly expertise in class:

> There's always . . . always one male student, at least white male student that I have, at least one in the class who always wants to challenge me. . . . This term, there was a [white male] student . . . that was . . . very resistant. . . . I think he didn't trust me enough to . . . go where I was

going to go. And so I realized that it wasn't about maybe my knowledge, right? He wasn't questioning the level of my knowledge . . . . He didn't trust me as a person to guide him through. . . . He felt like maybe he knew more than I did. Or something. But it wasn't about the fact that I didn't know more than him, but, you know, it was like he perceived me that way.

As Kimberly describes, the challenges had nothing to do with her scholarly knowledge in an objective manner. Instead, to her, it had everything to do with the student's perception that as a white male, he knew more than a woman of color. As a result of the gender and race privilege associated with white men as the purveyors of truth and knowledge, Kimberly reports that this white male student did not trust her ability to teach him. Both gender and race oppression are implicated in that none of the women faculty of color's accounts of this type of challenge involved white women or male students.

One of the main ways whites and men maintain dominance over people of color and women is through their control of hegemonic ideology and knowledge (e.g., Jackman 1994). That is, due to white males' location in the social and power hierarchy, they usually have the power to deem what is and what is not knowledge. Therefore, it is not surprising that white male students were perceived as frequently contesting the ability of women faculty of color to have, create, and share knowledge. In line with this view on the importance of ideology and knowledge to dominance, these professors perceived that the intersection of their race and gender identities resulted in white male students' devaluing their scholarly achievements and expertise. Despite the importance of multicultural content to students' experiences, here we see that there are multilayered challenges. Many of the faculty felt their white male students rejected both the multicultural content they presented and their outsider identities, using each as an excuse to reject the validity of the other. That is, women faculty of color perceived that white male students questioned their knowledge as scholars and/or the validity and substance of the multicultural content of their courses.

Threatening and Intimidation

Directness and aggressiveness are characteristics of the behaviors described previously. This aggressiveness is consistent with white male privilege. That is, white men often use aggressiveness to assert their dominance over people of color and women (Hollander and Howard 2000; Jackman 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). In addition to this undercurrent of aggressiveness, these women's accounts revealed an independent theme of feeling threatened or at risk. Women faculty of color described experiencing intimidating incidents in their interactions with white students in general and white male students in particular. These subtle or overt threats were viewed as directed at both their persons and their careers. When asked about experiencing strong emotions resulting from classroom incidents, women faculty of color almost exclusively refer to interactions with white males. Several women faculty of color talked about low course evaluation ratings from race- and gender-privileged students and expressed their fear of how these might affect their departmental merit reviews. Their fear is validated by research demonstrating that women faculty of color do indeed receive lower course evaluations from students compared to white faculty and male faculty of color (Dukes and Gay 1989; Fries and McNinch 2003; Hamermesh and Parker 2005).

In addition to concerns about their evaluations, participating women faculty of color also described intimidating interactions with white male students. For example, Jan recalls a white male student confronting her about his grade:

It made me angry. But it also made me nervous, that somebody could feel so . . . I mean . . . there was a kind of edge to him, like a kind of a threat almost like, you know, an edge to it that made me wonder.

Alice, too, shared a threatening interaction in which a white male student threw papers at her. And the most overt account of feeling at risk or threatened due to gendered racism also occurred in Alice's classroom. She described a white male student who dressed like a skinhead (i.e., shaved head and fatigues) and stated in class one day:

I know I'm a white male and I know I'm privileged, I got that. . . . I don't mean to be offensive, but this is the

reality. . . . "Black people are only ten percent of this country and if they want something they are going to have to fight because we're not giving it up and the reality is because they are only ten percent of the country, we would squash them."

Alice continued with her assessment of this incident. She made it clear that an environment in which whites and men feel comfortable and willing to justify oppression is dangerous. This "creates a space for [the privileged] to engage in other behaviors and more oppressive behaviors because they feel they are legitimate." The existence of women of color as faculty challenges white men's ownership of classroom space normally governed by male and white privilege. Dominant groups have historically used threats of or actual violence as a major strategy for subduing those with oppressed identities (Hollander and Howard 2000; Jackman 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 1999). To grapple with the contested classroom space, the white male students could be interpreted as engaging in very physically threatening stances toward women faculty of color to remind them of their subordinate race and gender identities. This is the described classroom environment in which these women faculty of color spend most of their time while teaching.

CONCLUSION

Using a sociological lens to examine the space faculty and students share, we see that these women faculty of color perceive their classroom environments as oppressive on the basis of race and gender. Instead of examining larger structures of inequality in higher education, my study focuses on how structural inequality can be viewed as existing in interpersonal interactions between women faculty of color and white students, particularly white males. These women perceived that their race and gender identities engendered patterns of disregard and disrespect in their classrooms. Findings from in-depth analysis of narratives of their teaching experiences reveal that gendered racism is a common and pervasive facet of their classroom accounts. White male students were perceived as challenging the authority of women faculty of color in passive-aggressive ways. Women faculty of color shared accounts in which white male students openly questioned their competence as teachers and their expertise as scholars. In more

aggressive interactions, women faculty of color described incidents in which they felt threatened and at risk in their interactions with white male students.

The women faculty of color represented in my study are of varying ages and different races, and they represent a range of academic disciplines and ranks. Thus, I expected to find subtle differences and complexities across their experiences. The findings, however, are consistent across black, Asian American, and Latina faculty. Although women faculty of color are concentrated in lower ranks, the few senior faculty interviewed also report experiencing threats, challenges to authority, and a lack of respect for their expertise from white students. Women faculty of color from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences relay similar experiences with white students, particularly white men. The participants in my study are different from one another professionally and demographically, but what they have in common is crucial to their teaching experiences. When we listen closely to what women faculty of color tell us, we hear them describe similar incidents of oppression by white men in the classroom.

The classroom interactions with white male students, as described by women faculty of color, are congruent with gendered racism elsewhere in higher education and U.S. society. The women in my study were acutely aware of their raced, sexed location in the matrix of domination (Collins 2000). That is, as the previous quotes reveal, the faculty in my study were explicit that their experiences with students were shaped by their intersectional identity as women of color. This awareness includes an acute awareness that white male students are viewed as the main classroom challengers to their authority, competence, expertise, and safety. Most faculty would not normally expect to be harassed by students. However, the women faculty of color interviewed for my study described interactions in which they felt devalued, challenged, and threatened by white male students. As Cathy says,

> I sense my own vulnerabilities. So, I mean, it's like a policewoman, right? Or a woman soldier, right? Oh, you're going to get raped, you know?

This poignant quote encapsulates her view of what it feels like to be a woman of color in higher education—to have an esteemed status (e.g., PhD or professorship) but not the safety and authority

that should come with it. That is, Cathy notes that being a professor should protect her from abuse from her white male students—yet she knows that this role cannot and does not protect her from the consequences of their gender and race privilege (i.e., being assaulted—raped; DeSouza and Fansler 2003; Messner 2000).

A negative racial and gender environment, lack of institutional support, and race and gender stereotyping have been shown to have harmful effects on the retention, achievement, and well-being of women students and students of color (Brainard, Laurich-McIntyre, and Carlin 1995; Hurtado and Ponjuan 2005; Rovai, Gallien, and Wighting 2005). Faculty, staff, and administrators have used this literature to argue for and develop strategies and policies to reduce the negative and differential experiences women students and students of color have in institutions of higher education. We may well wonder whether the similarly oppressive experiences of women faculty of color in higher education can account for their underrepresentation and qualified success.

A limitation of my study is that it does not have comparison groups. As such, it is not clear if the experiences of women faculty of color are the same for all women or men of color faculty. Parallel to retention research for students of color, institutions of higher education should conduct future research to better understand the teaching experiences of women faculty of color—specifically, their day-to-day experiences of oppression in the classroom. Until additional knowledge and strategies are developed to eliminate race and gender oppression in the classroom, universities must take action to acknowledge it and protect women faculty of color from the ramifications of this difficult environment. These steps are necessary to facilitate the equal participation and success of women faculty of color in academe and to support the overarching goals of institutions of higher education.

NOTES

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1. Additional details on the analytic procedure are available upon request.
2. Only two incidents did not involve white male students. These two incidents involved men of color (i.e., East Indian, Asian American) students

Appendix. Aggregate Descriptive Data on Subjects

Racial/ ethnic group	Field	Pseudonym	Age range
Black	Social sciences	Alice	30 to 39
	Social sciences	Beth	30 to 39
	Social sciences	Carin	30 to 39
	Social sciences	Daria	40 to 49
	Social sciences	Darcy	40 to 49
	Humanities	Briana	30 to 39
	Humanities	Cathy	
	Natural sciences	Ann	40 to 59
Latina	Social sciences	Emily	40 to 49
	Natural sciences	Ericka	40 to 49
	Humanities	Gina	40 to 49
Asian	Natural sciences	Greta	30 to 39
	Natural sciences	Heather	Information not available
	Natural sciences	Ingrid	50 to 59
	Social sciences	Kate	40 to 59
	Social sciences	Kimberly	Information not available
	Humanities	Jan	30 to 39

challenging the physical safety and intellectual authority of women in my study.

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