Intersectionality and women's advancement in the discipline and across the academy

Wendy G. Smooth

Published online: 25 Apr 2016.

Submit your article to this journal ⧉

Article views: 30

View related articles ⧉

View Crossmark data ⧉

Citing articles: 4 View citing articles ⧉

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

DIALOGUE: DIVERSITY IN THE DISCIPLINE

Intersectionality and women's advancement in the discipline and across the academy

Wendy G. Smooth

Department of Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies Columbus, The Ohio State University, Ohio, United States

ABSTRACT

In this article I explore the experiences of women of color in the academy through the lens of intersectionality. I use three major lessons of intersectionality research to frame the experiences of women of color in the academy and in particular how identity matters for women of color's experiences in fields such as political science where their numbers are quite small. Beyond offering an overview of their experiences, I follow with a critical conversation of the supports and intervention strategies necessary to have women of color not only survive to tenure but build sustainable careers. The strategies and interventions rely on a "both/and" strategy, using strategies that are common in the academy coupled with strategies that are uniquely situated for women of color. These strategies and interventions require department heads, deans, and other senior university leaders to act as allies supporting the career-sustaining decisions women of color make that may deviate from the norm. These allies are also critical partners in creating the types of workplace cultures that allow women of color to thrive in their fields.

Introduction

The scholarship on intersectionality has long embraced the complexities of identity and how that complexity interacts with institutions. Increasingly, as understandings of intersectionality circulate more widely, it is transforming debates on the politics of difference, forcing us to enact greater specificity in our treatment of social identity categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability. Intersectionality encourages us to think about the ways in which social identities are interconnected and operate simultaneously to produce experiences of both privilege and marginalization. It forces scholars to engage complexity by recognizing the differences that exist *within* groups – a recognition that moves beyond simply the differences *between* groups. As a body of scholarship and a social justice paradigm, it helps us to identify and understand societal power hierarchies.[1]

At the same time that intersectionality helps to make sense of the experiences of people who find themselves living at the intersections of social identities, intersectionality also is concerned with the systems that give meaning to the categories of race, gender, class, sexual identity, among others. In other words, at the societal level intersectionality seeks

to make visible the systems of oppression that maintain power hierarchies that organize society while also providing a means to theorize experience at the individual level. Intellectually and politically, intersectionality is grounded in critical theory and is focused on social justice outcomes. Its concern for social justice makes it especially relevant to discussions of increasing opportunities and creating more democratic practices within the discipline of political science and the academy more broadly.

Those of us who experience our academic careers at the intersections are rare. Our anomaly in status in political science is the result of overcoming a host of cumulative structural obstacles that begin as early as the undergraduate level and persist throughout our careers (Alexander-Floyd 2008). Several scholars studying the numbers of women of color in political science, from graduate students to full professor, aptly describe the system as a leaky pipeline with leaks occurring at every progressive career stage (Lopez 2004; Alexander-Floyd 2008; Lavariega Monforti and Michelson 2008). The data are clear on the scarcity of women of color at every rung along the career ladder and especially their severe scarcity at the upper rungs of the career ladder in political science and across the academy.

In this article, I draw on the lessons of intersectionality scholarship to articulate the complexities associated with advancing women of color in political science and across the academy. I give voice to the nuances of women of color's experiences in the academy across the career span, and I articulate some ways of navigating academic careers given the realities of life at the intersection. Because intersectionality is concerned with individual-level experience as well as transforming the systems that produce marginalization, my discussion is directed toward institutional change, which, I also recognize, requires allies committed to institutional reform. Such reform ultimately benefits universities as well as all those who labor there. With institutional transformation in mind, my discussion is very much aimed at further informing our existing allies and cultivating potential allies who are positioned as department chairs, search committee members and chairs, deans, and other administrators who play a role in evaluating our professional performances and supporting our careers.

The career building and coping strategies I offer women of color embrace our existence at the intersection of multiple politically salient identity groups. Broadly, the strategies encourage building coalitions and social networks across a range of groups and anchoring deeply with those groups that best reflect our identities and generate a sense of personal, professional, and political solidarity. In addition, I encourage women of color to build networks across a variety of groups. Such "both/and" approaches to building networks can potentially enhance one's reach within political science and across the academy. The strategies I advocate here in some ways mirror many traditional, mainstream approaches to academic career advancement such as participating in national organizations, attending conferences, and networking with colleagues; however, I argue that women of color will find the most benefit when these traditional strategies are coupled with tools tailored to reflect their experiences living and working at the intersection of multiple groups. For example, it matters which conferences women of color use their limited resources to attend, so we must be clear on which are most applicable to strengthening our careers and our overall well-being. Even more so, it matters to have deans, chairs, and other senior colleagues who understand the value of attending both mainstream disciplinary conferences and conferences that affirm one's personal and professional identity and

one's interests in the often marginalized scholarship on race, gender, class, and sexuality. To be clear, by value I mean providing the institutional supports and resources necessary for attending multiple conferences. The approaches I suggest require delicate balancing and incorporating multiple modes of professionalization and skill development. Successfully employing this type of delicate balancing between traditional career advancement strategies and those paths that speak to our unique experiences as women of color requires allies who are willing to support our decisions and use their influence to help others better understand and appreciate our choices and decisions.

Women of color in political science are writing our visions and suggesting interventions to create a more inclusive discipline (Garcia Bedolla 2014; Alexander-Floyd 2015; Sinclair-Chapman 2015; McClain et al., 2016). I add my voice to these scholars who are contributing to an evolving discussion through the Gendering Political Science effort led by Denise Walsh and Carol Mershon (http://genderingpoliticalscience.weebly.com/; cf. Mershon and Walsh 2014, 2015, 2016). For our allies and supporters, I hope opening this discussion will foster greater understanding of the choices and decisions that women of color make and the activities in which we participate that are often career-sustaining for us, but may appear counter to the hegemonic norms surrounding career advancement.

Throughout this discussion, I draw largely on intersectionality scholarship as a framework; however, much of the article draws on my own personal experiences as a woman of color building her career and the experiences of other women of color who share their personal failures and victories in protected spaces where women of color speak candidly. Not surprisingly, our experiences in political science are not unlike women of color across the academy. The literature on women of color in the academy overwhelmingly asserts that we experience the academy more often as a hostile environment. We are more likely to perceive that we are undervalued; suffer from isolation; have our classroom authority challenged; and be perceived as generally less competent than our colleagues (see Thomas and Hollenshead 2001; Turner 2002; Constantine et al. 2008; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2008). The literature affirms the whispers, collective head nodding, and knowing glances shared among women of color when we discuss our workplaces.

I find three tenets from the research on intersectionality especially useful in giving voice to women of color's experiences in the academy and these tenets also inform the strategies that help address many of the barriers. First, intersectionality scholars emphasize that the experiences of women of color cannot be simplified as emanating from a singular "ism" but are the product of multiple "isms." Second, intersectionality allows us to understand that while race, gender, and class are leading determinants of power and marginality, actually determining which group identities are privileged or marginalized at any given time, in any given location is a matter of understanding the context. Finally, the coexistence of privilege and marginality is a reality for women of color and for some of our allies, and intersectionality scholars encourage us to appreciate that reality in both how we theorize our own experiences and how we create thoughtful and strategic alliances.

Lesson I: the inadequacies of single-axis organizing

Perhaps the most popularized and simplistic lesson of intersectionality scholarship is that categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality do not operate as singular axes of power. Instead, categories of identity are best understood as co-constitutive, intersecting

categories. They are not parallel, interchangeable, or identical. Social categories such as race, gender, and class have different organizing logics such that race, for example, works differently than gender, class, or sexuality. Power associated with these categories is not configured in the same ways; nor do these categories share the same histories. Therefore, they cannot be treated identically (Phoenix and Pattynama. 2006), which is particularly critical for attempts to engage in political change activities that seek to reallocate power.

Issues that face those at the intersections cannot be addressed through the lens of gender alone or race alone. Moreover, we cannot make assumptions that attending to any one category of marginalization will address the others. Political strategies based upon singular axes of oppression are woefully inadequate since they, as Wilson (2013, 4) argues, "are built upon inaccurate maps of power or, at least ones lacking indications of potential pitfalls or opportunities for allegiances and collaboration."

In organizing as "women" focused on changing political science, we are susceptible to the pitfalls Wilson suggests and to producing forms of what Cohen (1999) terms secondary marginalization. Cohen's work teaches that secondary marginalization occurs when issues are defined based upon the needs of the more privileged of a group and not in the interests of those who are impacted by multiple systems of oppression or who suffer forms of oppression that are deemed beyond the parameters of particular communities. In *Affirmative Advocacy*, Dara Strolovich (2007) shows how this secondary marginalization process happens among advocacy groups that purport to represent complex identities often marginalized in US politics. Despite the groups' claims of representing the totality of their constituents, advocacy groups representing marginalized groups seldom represent their constituents who are intersectionally marginalized – even among the most well-intentioned groups. Organizing along a singular axis such as gender fails to capture the complexities at the core of intersectionality. Intersectionality scholarship warns of identity caucuses and movements that attempt to represent the category "women" as the question, "which women" the group stands to represent goes unexamined (Smooth 2011). Asserting the primacy of gender treats it as a primary category of analysis and returns to understandings of gender and patriarchy as the primary systems of oppression, the very work that intersectionality from its inception works against.

A singular axis approach that centers gender as the sole category for organizing works against the intersectional approach, but it remains an open question how to best build solidarity groups that address issues of marginalization and oppression in spaces like political science departments that have long thrived on a concentration of white male power. Intersectionality studies frequently confront the question of which identities are most salient for understanding the circulation of power and privilege and articulating routes to change. Scholars turn to examining the context for clues as to how particular identities are impacted by power structures.

Lesson II: understanding the institutional context

Understanding which groups are marginalized and which occupy points of privilege in any given situation requires a critical examination of the institutional context. Intersectionality places great emphasis on how power is configured, and establishes power as dynamic and shifting rather than static and fixed. As such, we cannot assume that

power operates in the same ways across contexts of time and location. Depending upon the context, those who are marginalized and those who have power differ. Therefore, we cannot evaluate oppression and marginalization without a sense of history and without a sense of the social, political, and economic opportunities available to various groups at any given time or place. The systems of power that dictate whether a social identity is a marker of privilege or marginalization change according to the institutional context of our focus.

The context provides the parameters for understanding which categories are most salient for our analysis. Gender may or may not act as the defining salient category for organizing. Instead, we must take account of the issues under consideration, and the existing political opportunity structure. The salience of identity categorizations shifts and evolves particularly as the categories interact with institutions, structures, and movements. For example, what it means to be a woman, a woman of color, a lesbian, a theorist, and/or an international relations scholar in a department shifts according to the particular politics of that department space, that university, and even the publishing trends of the discipline. Whether these categories have meaning at all or produce marginalization or privilege is dependent on the context. Those interested in greater equity in any discipline must envision gender as one of many possible social cleavages that interact with social identities like race and sexuality, as well as other identity markers that are imbued with power dynamics such as rank and subfield. Whether gender is the most salient of the categories that give meaning to one's experience is a matter of critically understanding the context. In devising solutions to advancing women in all their diversity, we must be mindful of and accept the shifts in the salience of categories as the contexts change. Strategies must be fluid enough to adjust to the local context and times in which organizing takes place. In political science departments, this could mean foregoing organizing explicitly on gender issues altogether for several distinct reasons; for example, there might be too few women, the women present might not be tenured, or women of color might find their issues map more onto field specialization issues. Therefore, the local context could dictate organizing strategies that begin with categories beyond gender.

Lesson III: coexistence of privilege and marginalization

The understanding that privilege occurs in the midst of persistent marginalization is another significant point to recall in thinking through the lives of women of color academics. While we most often treat privilege and marginalization as mutually exclusive, for those living at the intersections the reality is that these two contradictory statuses coexist, and we are often confronted with reconciling these two dimensions in our day to day lives.

Working in the academy, for example, provides women of color a type of privilege and occupational prestige that are less common within communities of color. The academy for the most part offers at least the illusion of a set of unique working conditions that few American workers continue to experience in today's labor market and to which even fewer people of color have ever had access (Jacobe and Curtis 2006; Jacobe 2011). The working conditions most commonly associated with the academy – academic freedom; the appearance of great flexibility; due process; relative job security; economic stability and the semblance of autonomy – set it apart as an enterprise with working amenities

people of color so rarely see and experience in the labor market (Glenn 2002). Though we recognize that women of color academics enjoy varying levels of access to these work amenities, among people of color even some level of access to these types of working conditions marks a significant point of relative privilege. For tenured women of color, the long-term job security elevates our status relative to other workers of color, which in turn further sets us apart from many in our communities of origin marking us as privileged (Martinez Alemán 1995).

Despite the many markers of occupational prestige and privilege we experience in relation to our communities, within our disciplines and across the academy we experience distinct reminders of marginalization that go beyond our multiple social identity categories such as race, gender, class of origin, and sexuality, and extend to the fields we study, which often reflect our social identities. As an African American woman studying African American politics, my scholarship is situated on the margins of the discipline's current trajectories (APSA 2011) and as McClain et al. in this symposium note, the marginalization of race as a content area has long historical roots in the discipline.

Scholarship on intersectionality – through its focus on power across categories, its analysis of multiple forms of power in relation to one another, and its understanding that power is not equal across these categories – aids us in processing the complexity of privilege and its coexistence with persistent marginalization. Drawing on a systems approach to understanding intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) argues that social identity categories operate as interlocking systems that create an overarching "matrix of domination" in which actors can be victimized by power, but can also exercise power over others. Collins highlights the contradictory nature of oppression suggesting that few "pure victims" or "pure oppressors" exist. Penalty and privilege are distributed among individuals and groups within the matrix of domination such that none are exclusively marked by one or the other.

For women of color in the academy, the coexistence of power and privilege can generate a number of challenges including what I call "silent stressors," which are exacerbated when coupled with isolation. The unique nature of one's experience and oddity of one's working conditions inside the academy set women of color apart from their peers outside the academy, even those who share their class position (Tokarczyk and Fay 1993). Likewise the perceived stellar working conditions suggest that women of color academics have "nothing to complain about" and easily prompt a "Your blues ain't like mine" response among community members.[2]

The conflicting statuses of privileged yet marginalized locate us outside familiar, collective community narratives regarding the nature of oppression. We become illegible to members of our communities, creating a silencing that further exacerbates existing stressors. Women of color academics all too often stress in silence, even in those community spaces that otherwise act as sources of refuge.[3] The isolation familiar within the academy as the only one who teaches "those" classes and talks about _____ (fill in the blank e.g., race, gender, sexuality, trade unions, sexual trafficking) is carried over into home life. Both the silent stressors and isolation at work and at home reflect one way privilege and marginalization coexist for women of color academics. Writing about her experience as a woman of color in the academy working closely with students on equity issues and support networks, yet needing her own reprieve from isolation, Roe Bubar concludes, "We create circles of support for students and others, yet our isolation within the

academy keeps us from creating that same support for ourselves as a collective" (Holling, Fu, and Bubar 2012). Bubar and others chose to break through their isolation by documenting their experiences in the edited volume, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (2012). Similarly, organizers and attendees of the 2013 and 2015 Mini-Conference on Women of Color in Political Science centered several discussions on the need to build affirming spaces in which the complexity of our identities is both recognized and understood. Affirming spaces do more than further careers; they offer women of color a means of coping with the distinct conditions of laboring and living in the intersections.

The effects of the coexistence of privilege and marginalization weigh heaviest once women of color become tenured. We must navigate the pitfalls of existing as one of the few, if not the only, woman of color in a leadership position in our departments, colleges, or universities. Given our current representation in political science and the academy more generally, the few women of color who advance in the profession become "leaders" simply by attaining tenure. Among black women in 2012 in political science departments only 139 held an appointment above the assistant professor rank and of those only 51 were full professors (American Political Science Association 2015).[4] Immediately after tenure, we are looked to fill the sizeable void emanating from our limited representation.

By virtue of our limited numbers alone, women of color easily become positioned as token leaders and are faced with reconciling power and privilege, all the while addressing the persistence of marginality. As leaders, women of color (like most women in the academy) are susceptible to what Monroe et al. (2008) refer to as "gender devaluation" in which we continue to experience discrimination even as we move into leadership positions, because women are not generally afforded the same power and status traditionally associated with the leadership positions they occupy as Lynne Ford also argues in this symposium.

When women of color advance into leadership roles our already complex identities intersect with our roles as leaders, producing new meanings. Each informs the other, and taken together, they produce a way of experiencing the world at the individual level as sometimes oppressed and marginalized and sometimes privileged and advantaged. As I have argued in my own work on African American women state legislators, the convergence of multiple identity categories such as race and gender creates experiences that are qualitatively and significantly different (Smooth 2008, 2013). As well, the intersection of race and gender mediates or transforms the power associated with leadership positions, changing the norms and traditional operating procedures. For example, what it means to be an African American woman committee chair in a state legislature differs substantially from others' experiences in that position. Women of color leaders have long articulated that traditional norms and customs associated with their leadership roles are often renegotiated when they intersect with race and gender. At one extreme, the traditional power extended to those in leadership positions is undermined when women of color occupy such positions (Hawkesworth 2003; Smooth 2008, 2013). At the other extreme, their token status creates a perversion of power as the power to represent multiple groups of the underrepresented results in a concentration of power and influence in the hands of a few. The rarity of women of color leaders can produce an overextension of any one individual's power.

In the context of the academy, what it means to operate as a full professor (or even simply a tenured professor) is transformed as it intersects with race and gender. This can translate into creating multiple venues of power and influence, for example serving as the lone voice of authority on women's issues *and* racial issues on a campus. Conversely, and most often, it means the limited number of women of color leaders are extensively strained by exhaustive mentoring demands, university service demands, limitless requests to review for tenure and promotion cases, and discipline-wide representation-based requests. As Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2008) argue, underrepresented faculty are often subject to a "cultural tax" that includes mentoring, and service of others from one's background, but that service is rarely recognized, valued, or compensated in accounts of faculty workloads. The American Political Science Association (APSA) Task Force Report on Political Science in the 21st Century (2011) cites burdensome service expectations as a significant barrier to successful career advancement for underrepresented faculty and in particular, the report argues that women of color's mentoring service work can place them at risk for being cast more as nurturers than rigorous scholars. Unfortunately, these demands begin at once for newly tenured women of color, often far above the reasonable demands for an associate professor, which can prolong their promotion to full professor (Evans 2007).

In the following sections, I outline interventions and strategies that can attend to many of the issues women of color face in the academy. The strategies are thought not only to help us "survive to tenure," but also to build solid foundations and networks that will sustain us in healthy lives once we advance into leadership roles. All these strategies are enriched when accompanied by the support of influential, informed allies.

Creating paths to career advancement and sustainable careers for women of color

If intersectionality teaches us that the experiences of those at the intersections are at times qualitatively different, then it follows that the paths that produce rewards and success will likewise differ. The pathways women of color find valuable may differ considerably from those chosen by hegemonic groups. When traditional paths for career advancement are either unavailable or even fail to yield the desired outcomes, women of color and other marginalized groups are confronted with devising alternative strategies to improve our status and realize greater institutional equality for ourselves and those who come after us.

Clearly, taking into account an intersectional approach suggests that a one-size-fits-all model of career building is counterproductive. Instead, by recognizing that difference produces varied opportunities, we must then move toward offering support for those steps that enable women of color to reach our desired goals, recognizing that those goals as well as the paths we pursue may differ from those of our counterparts. In many cases, women of color adopt "both/and" strategies to career building. In other words, we are likely to engage in the traditional routes while also engaging in practices that are reflective of our identities. This both/and approach requires allies who recognize, value, and support these strategies. I put forth practical strategies that include a joint appointment process that is inclusive of all appointing units, and the negotiating candidate and administered by deans and provosts. I suggest chairs and deans encourage and financially underwrite women of color attending multiple national meetings that reflect both their research

subfields and their social identities. Similarly, I suggest that interdisciplinary conferences and meetings aimed at supporting women of color faculty are easily employed interventions to enhance their professional development. All of these strategies require chairs, deans, provosts, and other academic leaders to play roles in enabling women of color to utilize the strategies that best fit for their careers. As well, those of us who find ourselves in positions to speak on behalf of the career choices women of color make have to diligently engage in that work whenever the opportunities present, including in those simple mundane one-on-one conversations we have with our colleagues and in those more high-stakes moments such as promotion and tenure deliberations. The point I make is that all those who are interested in diversifying the professorate have an active role to play in contributing to the career advancement of women of color.

Much of the work on intersectionality focuses on intersectional *disadvantage* produced by multiple identities. Such disadvantages are produced through compounded marginalization; however, there is space for understanding complex identities as giving way to intersectional *opportunities* (Fraga et al. 2008; Nash 2008; Smooth 2013). The strategies I discuss here draw largely from this concept of *intersectional opportunities*. By and large, I focus on opportunities to capitalize on the multiple ways women of color are capable of moving across university spaces expanding our networks – crossing and challenging the rigidity of disciplinary boundaries including creating sustainable joint appointments, attending conferences beyond those familiar or central to one's discipline, and participating in identity-based organizations that affirm one's identity and research agenda. Likewise, I highlight the ways our multiple belongings create opportunities to build deep networks that foster engaged relationships that advance our careers, and holistically sustain us as human beings.

Joint appointments

Joint appointments are often considered the recipe of doom for faculty whose scholarship crosses disciplines or research particular identity groups, be that women, African Americans, and/or Latina/os. Joint appointments are regarded with disdain because many fear the mandate to "serve multiple masters." Jointly appointed faculty often find that they are held to dual and often conflicting publishing expectations; saddled with oppressive committee loads; and expected to fulfill expectations to maintain face time in multiple departments. I argue it is not the joint appointment itself that has failed so many. Instead, chairs and deans engage in counterproductive practices that undermine the success of such appointments. When chairs and deans enact processes that lack transparency around expectations, joint appointments are likely to create unreasonable expectations for all parties including the joint appointees. Joint appointments are especially susceptible to failure when all units involved and the jointly appointed faculty member have not collaborated and committed to work conditions that best support the faculty member's long-term success. As well, when deans, chairs, and promotion and tenure committees create and uphold cultures that are unsupportive of interdisciplinary scholarship, joint appointments become untenable. Overall, the absence of thoughtful and effective institutional practices around negotiating joint appointments explain why they fall short of their potential as desirable appointments for women of color scholars.[5]

Joint appointments have great potential for scholars with complex interests to build community across university spaces. Such appointments also are opportunities for universities to fulfill their desires to engage adequately in interdisciplinary studies that students today desire (Simmons and Nelson 2011). Well-designed joint appointments have the potential to add to scholars' communities, provide an alternative to hostile "home" departments, enhance the rigor of one's scholarship, and allow scholars to build networks across the academy. Therefore, such appointments can create win-win situations, rather than the all too familiar doomsday scenarios. A well-designed joint appointment requires department chairs who are willing to invest in building relationships across departments and college administrators who facilitate departments' efforts to craft good relationships. College administrators who require solid and clear memoranda of understanding that articulate the college's expectations around research, teaching, and service create the necessary conditions for women of color and other jointly appointed scholars to successfully work across intellectual communities. This requires activist leadership from our allies who have jurisdiction across departments in the same college. When strong, clear joint appointments are constructed with transparent expectations backed up by enforceable memoranda of understandings, they allow scholars at the intersections to exercise their coalitional sensibilities beyond a single discipline or department while deepening their scholarly networks and mentor opportunities. Such processes written into university policy can undergo reviews in two to three year increments, allowing the jointly appointed faculty member's input, as well as that of the appointing units. Joint appointments can achieve the goals we imagine for them when chairs, deans, provosts, and promotion and tenure committees invest in these more thoughtful practices.

Again, joint appointments are not only career building, but life sustaining. For instance, Michelle Holling, despite not having the type of supportive working conditions fostered by thoughtful joint appointment practices, found a sense of solidarity in a joint appointment within an ethnic studies department which supported her scholarly investments in race scholarship in ways not found in other academic spaces. Most significantly, the configuration in part alleviated the need to constantly justify her claims:

> The joint appointment offered a sense of solidarity and home that felt immediate. These intangibles are conducive to thriving in the academy due to the shared affinities. Absent was the need to explain why race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality must be taken into account in academic work. (Holling, Fu, and Bubar 2012, 258)

National organizations

Participation in national scholarly organizations that are supportive of one's research agenda and provide a place for political solidarity is essential for women of color to cultivate the leadership skills needed to advance in the discipline and comfortably assume post-tenure leadership roles. Participating in the discipline's national organization – in the case of political science, the APSA – is necessary, but often not sufficient to address our needs. Within the APSA, women of color may find common purpose with the activities of the Women's Caucus, or one of the organized sections that reflect their research interests; however many conclude that participation in APSA alone is insufficient to address career goals, serve as an adequate outlet for their scholarship, and address mentoring needs. Across disciplines, more specialized scholarly organizations like the National

Conference of Black Political Scientists (NCOBPS) were organized to fill the voids that people of color identified with national organizations like the APSA. The NCOBPS enhances professionalization and prospects for building a scholarly community among like-minded scholars.

NCOBPS has served as that leadership skills building space, and as an intellectually affirming space that provides a sense of political solidarity and friendship for me and scores of black men and women in political science. Established in 1969, NCOBPS was organized to

> study, enhance, and promote the political aspirations of people of African descent in the United States and throughout the world. It aims to contribute to the resolution of the many challenges that black people confront. Our organization promotes research in and critical analysis of topics usually overlooked and/or marginalized in political science scholarship. We believe that our scholarship must address wide-ranging "real world" issues and not the narrow, and often manufactured, concerns of the discipline. (NCOBPS Mission Statement)

In unapologetic terms, NCOBPS centers the study of black political engagement across the diaspora as important research. In doing so, it also celebrates, mentors, and advances the scholarship of its members.

The NCOBPS' annual meetings provide a rigorous, yet nurturing environment for the advancement of scholarship and the cultivation of professional mentors and friendships. Members can as easily be heard debating the contours of the new black politics, as well as inquiring about the status of one's family members. In that space of shared goodwill, one can learn the dynamics of organizational design, how to successfully facilitate a meeting, organize a conference program, and extend one's networks across the discipline. As the organization's immediate past president, I stand in a long line of women political scientists who have led the organization including former APSA President, Dianne Pinderhughes; former Southern Political Science Association President and current Midwest Political Science Association President, Paula McClain; and the first African American woman to earn a doctoral degree in political science, the late Jewel Limar Prestage.

In addition to the leadership skills NCOBPS provides its members through the annual meetings and governance opportunities, NCOBPS also publishes *The National Political Science Review*, which serves as a critical outlet for publishing on race and racial politics, often excluded in the major journals of the discipline (Ávalos 1991; Aoki and Takeda 2004; Alexander-Floyd 2008). The severity of limited publishing opportunities in the discipline is exacerbated when we include scholarship on gender (Kelly and Fisher 1993; Bruening and Sanders 2007). Allies of women of color must be aware of organizations like the NCOBPS and understand its role in professionalizing scholars of color. Supporting women of color scholars' decisions to present their research through such venues and publish in the journals of these organizations is essential.

Creating sistah spaces: networking and gathering opportunities within the discipline

Alexander-Floyd (2008) details that black women political scientists and women of color in the discipline suffer from the scant availability of women of color mentors. The dearth of potential women of color mentors in the discipline is a structural reality given the

extensively limited pipeline of women of color in positions to provide mentorship. In 2012, according to data from the APSA, nationwide only139 Black women faculty reported a rank above assistant professor of which 51 reported a rank of full professor. For Latinas, 84 reported a rank above assistant professor and of those 32 reported the rank of full professor. Similarly among Asian American women, 99 reported an appointment above assistant professor and of those 36 reported the rank of full professor. These numbers underscore the limited availability of senior women of color mentors to adequately meet the needs of women of color in the field (American Political Science Association 2015).

Women of color scholars have stepped up to address this paucity of available mentors by creating spaces of collective mentoring through conferences to talk about issues facing women of color across the ranks. While this approach does not supplant one-to-one long-term mentoring relationships, it offers critical opportunities for professionalization. Reflecting on their own experiences of limited mentorship and the need to build stronger networks for peer-to-peer mentoring among senior women of color in the discipline, a group of women of color in 2013 organized an APSA pre-conference for women of color to act as a mentoring hub and source of professionalization. Their work toward collective mentoring and community engagement draws on strong traditions of an ethics of care for one another and the next generation of scholars (Collins 1991). One significant feature of the APSA Mini-Conference on Women of Color was an intergenerational mentoring luncheon in which more senior women were seated with a table of women at differing stages of their careers from early graduate students to those employed in their first years of their first academic post. Women could see the embodiment of the next step along their career path seated across from them. This pre-APSA convening continued in 2015 with similar success.

Black women in political science have created the Association for the Study of Black Women in Political Science (ASBWP) to not only speak to the mentoring needs of black women, but also to serve as an institutional home for the study of black women in politics. Its founders, Nikol Alexander-Floyd and Rose Harris, describe it as

> an organization designed to complement existing professional political science organizations by serving as a vehicle for promoting research on Black women in politics in the United States and across the globe. In addition, the ASBWP, while cognizant of the challenges people of color, women and other women of color face, recognizes the specific issues and concerns that are unique to Black women in the academy in general and within the political science profession in particular. As such the ASBWP is also committed to recruiting and mentoring women of African descent in political science. (www.asbwp.org)

ASBWP, which now functions as an identity caucus within the NCOBPS, further reflects the intersectional realities of women of color who experience the academy even differently from men of color. ASBWP is actively building a space that affirms that reality.

Interdisciplinary national conferences for women of color

Critical and necessary to the advancement of women of color in the discipline is seeing other women of color who have mastered the strategies of survival across the academy. Several national convenings over the years have created forums for women across disciplines and across universities to reflect on their roles in the academy and advance strategies for achieving their own personal goals. Such conferences as *Black Women in the*

Academy, a conference first organized by Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1994 and later at Howard University, and subsequent conferences such as the *2009 Black Women Academics in the Ivory Tower* sponsored by Rutgers University and the annual *Inclusive Illinois*: *Women of Color in the Academy*, have all become critical spaces for mentorship, renewal, and exhaling in the collective comfort of women who are all too familiar with the often troublesome experiences of life in the academy as women of color. These conferences produce priceless interactions and introductions to legendary women of color in and across the disciplines and offer a glimmer into their toolboxes for surviving and thriving in the academy. These are particularly important for women of color in fields like political science, which have more limited opportunities to see senior women, and in particular women of color, who have assumed leadership roles in the discipline or who have moved to advanced leadership positions across their universities.

Conclusion: intersectionality and institutional change

As much as researchers categorize intersectionality as a descriptive framework or research paradigm, it is very much a political concept grounded in an emancipatory politics with social justice based outcomes as the goal (Smooth 2010). Intersectionality scholars remind us that the concept was first derived from efforts to change societal conditions that create and maintain oppressive power hierarchies (Jordan-Zachery 2007). In addition to recognizing the differences that exist among individuals and groups, intersectionality is invested in modes of institutional change and designed to remedy the effects of inequalities produced by interlocking systems of oppression. The first step of such institutional change begins with the recognition- on our part and on the part of our colleagues, departmental leaders and senior administrators – that women experience departments, universities, and the discipline differently according to their social location and the convergence of their many intersecting identities. These intersections produce both privilege and marginalization. To move toward institutional change, we must all be willing to accept the responsibilities that the unevenness of the system produces. As I have underscored throughout, women of color and our allies occupy points of privilege. We must be willing to recognize the contexts in which we are privileged in the system and be willing to use that privilege to speak and support those who are marginalized. Even in our efforts to engage in social change, we are most capable of organizing our energies toward alleviating our own oppressions, all the while overlooking the oppressions of the other (Collins 1991). Recognizing this and guarding against such tendencies is essential to the work of intersectionality-based organizing for social change.

Reforming academic institutions in the ways I suggest requires allies, advocates and intercessors working on behalf of increased justice for all academic laborers. In nearly every strategy discussed here, there is a significant role for supporters to play in affirming, assisting, and providing resources to enable women of color to adopt both/and career strategies that enable us to thrive in the academy. These strategies move us all toward the institutional transformations we long to see and create improved working conditions.

Notes

1. Intersectionality as a construct is constantly evolving. The fundamental tenants of intersectionality informing much of the approach I outline here are informed by Crenshaw (1989, 1991).

2. This phrase draws on the title of author Bebe Moore Campbell's (1995) novel that tackles questions of race and reconciliation across racial groups.
3. The APSA (2011) Task Force Report cites isolation as the justification that underrepresented groups cite for leaving the academy.
4. This data is from the APSA Database and represents a snap shot from May 2012 and April 2013. The data was compiled at the request of the APSA Committee on the Status Blacks in the Profession – who is currently working on a report based in part on these data.
5. Several universities offer models and best practices for units negotiating the joint appointment and there is near universal agreement that these arrangements work best when they are agreed upon by all parties including the jointly appointed faculty, chairs, and college deans. Best practices also underscore the need to revisit such memoranda across the life of the appointment. For examples see, Michigan State University's joint appointment guiding documents at http://www.hr.msu.edu/documents/facacadpolproc/JointAppts.htm#DocumentAdapted and University of Michigan's guidelines at http://www.provost.umich.edu/faculty/joint_appointments/Joint_Appts.html. The University of Rhode Island's guidelines reflect the university's acknowledgement of a greater need for interdisciplinarity and a means to manage such demands; see http://web.uri.edu/provost/files/Interdisciplinray_Work_Recommended_Principles_for_Interdisciplinary-.pdf.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

Alexander-Floyd, Nikol G. 2008. "Written, Published … Cross -Indexed, and Footnoted": Producing Black Female Ph.D.s and Black Women's and Gender Studies Scholarship in Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41 (4): 819–29.

Alexander-Floyd, Nikol G. 2015. "Women of Color, Space Invasion, and Political Science: Practical Strategies for Transforming Departmental Practices." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 48 (3): 464–468.

American Political Science Association. 2015. "Database Political Science Faculty of Color in APSA Database." Email to the author December 2015.

Aoki, Andrew L., and Okiyoshi Takeda. 2004. "Small Spaces for Different Faces: Political Science Scholarship on Asian Pacific Americans." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 37: 497–500.

APSA. 2011. *Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century*. Accessed July 1, 2014. http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/TF_21st%20Century_AllPages_online2.pdf

Ávalos, Manuel. 1991. "The Status of Latinos in the Profession: Problems in Recruitment and Retention." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24 (2): 241–46.

Bruening, Marijke, and Kate Sanders. 2007. "Gender and Journal Authorship in Eight Prestigious Political Science Journals." *PS: Political Science* 40 (2): 347–351.

Campbell, Bebe Moore. 1995. *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Cohen, Cathy. 1999. *The Boundaries of Blackness*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Constantine, M., L. Smith, R. M. Redington, and D. Owens. 2008. "Racial Microaggressions Against Black Counseling and Counseling Psychology Faculty: A Central Challenge in the Multicultural Counseling Movement." *Journal of Counseling and Development* 86: 348–355.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139: 139–67.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1241–1299.

Evans, Stephanie Y. 2007. "Women of Color in American Higher Education." *Thought & Action* 23: 131–138.

Fraga, Luis Ricardo, Valerie Martinez-Ebers, Linda Lopez, and Ricardo Ramirez. 2008. "Representing Gender and Ethnicity: Strategic Intersectionality." In *Legislative Women: Getting Elected, Getting Ahead*, edited by Beth Reingold, 157–174. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner Press.

Garcia Bedolla, Lisa. 2014. "How an Intersectional Approach Can Help to Transform the University." *Politics & Gender* 10: 447–455.

Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. 2002. *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. Cambridge: Harvard.

Hawkesworth, Mary. 2003. "Congressional Enactments of Race-Gender: Toward a Theory of Raced-Gendered Institutions." *American Politics Science Review* 97 (4): 529–550.

Holling, Michelle A., May C. Fu, and Roe Bubar. 2012. "Dis/Jointed Appointments: Solidarity Amidst Inequity, Tokenism, and Marginalization." In *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, edited by Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González, and Angela P. Harris, 250–265. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.

Jacobe, Monica. 2011. "Making It." *Academe: Bulletin of the AAUP* 96 (5): 19–23.

Jacobe, Monica, and John W. Curtis. 2006. "Consequences: An Increasingly Contingent Faculty." AAUP Contingent Faculty Index 2006 American Association of University Professors, December, 5–18.

Jordan-Zachery, Julia S. 2007. "Am I a Black Woman or a Woman Who is Black? A Few Thoughts on the Meaning of Intersectionality." *Politics & Gender* 3 (2): 254–263.

Kelly, Rita Mae, and Kimberly Fisher. 1993. "An Assessment of Articles about Women in the 'Top 15' Political Science Journals." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26 (3): 554–58.

Lavariega Monforti, Jessica, and Melissa Michelson. 2008. "Diagnosing the Leaky Pipeline: Continuing Barriers to the Retention of Latinas and Latinos in Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41 (1): 161–166.

Lopez, Linda. 2004. *Placement Experience by Citizenship, Gender, and Race/Ethnicity*. Washington, DC: APSA.

Martinez Alemán, Ana M. 1995. "Actuando." In *The Leaning Ivory Tower: Latino Professors in American Universities*, edited by Raymond V. Padilla and Rudolfo Chávez, 67–76. Albany: State University of New York Press.

McClain, Paula, Gloria Y. A. Ayee, Taneisha N. Means, Alicia Reyes-Barriéntez, and Nura Sediqe. 2016. "Race, Power, and Knowledge: Tracing the Roots of Exclusion in the Development of Political Science in the United States." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4 (3): 467–482. doi:10.1080/21565503.2016.1170704

Mershon, Carol, and Denise Walsh, eds. 2014. Critical Perspectives Symposium, "Advocating for Change in the Discipline." *Politics & Gender* 10 (3): 432–437.

Mershon, Carol, and Denise Walsh, eds. 2015. Symposium, "How Political Science Can Become More Diverse." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 48 (3): 441–444.

Mershon, Carol, and Denise Walsh. 2016. "Diversity in Political Science: Why it Matters and How to Get it." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 4 (3): 462–466. doi:10.1080/21565503.2016.1170703

Monroe, Kristen, Saba Ozyurt, Ted Wrigley, and Amy Alexander. 2008. "Gender Equality in Academia: News from the Trenches, and Some Possible Solutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 6 (2): 215–233.

Nash, Jennifer. 2008. "Re-Thinking Intersectionality." *Feminist Review* 89: 1–15.

National Conference of Black Political Scientists. *Mission Statement*. www.ncobps.org.

Phoenix, Ann, and Pamela Pattynama. 2006. "Intersectionality." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13 (3): 187–192.

Rockquemore, Kerry Ann, and Tracey Laszloffy. 2008. *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure without Losing Your Soul*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.

Simmons, Elizabeth H., and Michael P. Nelson. 2011. "Making Interdisciplinarity Possible." *Inside Higher Education*. Accessed August 19. http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2011/08/19/simmons_nelson_essay_on_memorandums_of_understanding_for_interdisciplinary_faculty_jobs

Sinclair-Chapman, Valeria. 2015. "Leveraging Diversity to Mobilize Resources for Change in Political Science." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 48 (3): 454–458.

Smooth, Wendy. 2008. "Gender, Race, and the Exercise of Power and Influence." In *Legislative Women: Getting Elected, Getting Ahead*, edited by Beth Reingold, 175–197. Boulder: Lynne Reiner Press.

Smooth, Wendy. 2010. "Intersectionality and Women's Leadership." In *Gender and Women's Leadership: A Sage Series Handbook*, edited by Karen O'Conner, 31–40. New York: Sage.

Smooth, Wendy. 2011. "Standing for Women-Which Women? The Substantive Representation of Women's Interests and the Research Imperative of Intersectionality." *Politics & Gender* 7: 436–441.

Smooth, Wendy. 2013. "African American Women and Electoral Politics: Translating Voting Power into Office-holding." In *Gender and Elections 2012*, edited by Susan J. Carroll and Richard L. Fox, 167–189. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Strolovich, Dara. 2007. *Affirmative Advocacy Race, Class and Gender in Interest Group Politics*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Thomas, G., and C. Hollenshead. 2001. "Resisting from the Margins: The Coping Strategies of Black Women and Other Women of Color Faculty Members at a Research University." *The Journal of Negro Education* 70: 166–175.

Turner, C. S. V. 2002. "Women of Color in Academe: Living with Multiple Marginality." *Journal of Higher Education* 73 (1): 74–93.

Tokarczyk, Michelle, and Elizabeth A. Fay. 1993. *Working Class Women in the Academy Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press.

Wilson, Angelia. 2013. *Situating Intersectionality: Politics Policy and Power*. New York: Palgrave.