

Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0316

Tue 07 Dec 2021

13:10 - 13:30

What Could Be: A Phenomenological Examination of Faculty of Color Leader Identity Development

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Research Domain: Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract: Most research on leadership diversity examines current/former leaders, but we know less about the experiences of prospective leaders of Color. This study examines the experiences of 31 newly-tenured faculty of Color in the US. In particular, the study investigates how racialized organizational contexts and social networks and structure shape leader identity development. Results complicate existing leader identity theory and conclude with implications for further research and practice.

Paper:

Introduction

According to the American Council on Education's (ACE, 2017) latest president study, 8% of presidents identified as African American, 4% as Hispanic, 2% as Asian American, and about 1% identified as American Indian/Alaska Native, Middle Eastern, and Multiracial, respectively. Higher education researchers must further understand the unequal causes of the underrepresentation of leaders of Color. One of the ways to investigate this pipeline issue is to understand how faculty of Color develops a leader identity – or not.

Leader Identity Theory

Using both personal and social identity theoretical perspectives, DeRue and Ashford (2010) define LIT as a “process of claiming and granting whereby individuals co-create reciprocal and mutually reinforcing identities as leaders and followers, and through this process, develop a leader-follower relationship” (p. 628). The claiming and granting dance occurs through interactions between organizational actors are embedded amongst the individual, interpersonal relationships with others (dyadic), and within groups/teams.

Methods

Research Questions

Because of a lack of scholarship and a desire for newer practical interventions, this study examines *how leader identity development of newly-tenured faculty of Color is influenced by*

racialized organizational contexts? In particular, how do formal organizational structures (e.g., tenure process, committee appointments) and informal/formal networks (e.g., relationships and interactions with colleagues, leaders, mentors.) influence leader identity?

Methodology

In order to gain an understanding and of the “essence” of lived experiences, I utilize a type of phenomenological methodology, called interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) which seeks to understand how individuals make meaning of their everyday life experiences within context (Smith et al., 2012). All 31 participants interviewed for ~2 hours were: 1) employed as a tenured faculty member at the time of the interview at a research-intensive university site; 2) obtained promotion and tenure within 36 months of the interview; 3) self-identified as a “person of Color”; and 4) had experience in the US prior to their faculty role (for participant demographics see Table 1).

Results

After interviewing participants and analyzing data a few initial themes emerged:

Academic Leadership Isn't Academic

Unfortunately taking on service roles and formal leadership roles were seen as not only potential time deterrents but became an antithesis of being seen as “scholarly.” This is particularly important and impactful for FOC because they often have to work harder to prove themselves as an intellectual due to racist and White supremacist prototypes of what it means to be a “scholar” and “leader.” a Black man medical academic staff said:

"Because I've seen ... people in leadership positions that people don't really respect because they're like, 'What have you done?' And I just don't want that to be me... Like I don't want to ever be in a position where someone thinks that I got that position because I'm Black.

“Why Give, When All They Do Is Take”

Participants often mentioned the tension between wanting to make change for students and colleagues, yet also did not want to provide additional labor for an organization that did not value their contributions. One Black Woman professional school faculty member said:

"It makes sense that there are few women of Color because we're now in an awakening. ...if we haven't honestly decoded what this institution is, honestly, faced up to the fact that it is an institution that agenda's supports and celebrates White supremacy... - we won't be able to fix anything."

Leadership Granting is Complicated

Participants mentioned how they were asked to serve on or lead a diversity-related committee/initiative, but not invited to collaborative research projects as their majority peers were. This type of tokenization often meant faculty did not feel as if they were “granted” a leader identity – yet interestingly – some still wanted to pursue a leadership role. This leads to implications about mechanisms FOC use to “claim” a leader identity without being “granted” from their social context.

Discussion

Scholarship about leader identity and higher education leadership (McCurtis et al., 2009) is largely void of discussions of race and underrepresentation. This work shows specific organizational structures and networks that influence leader identity development for FOC that are potential academic leaders. In addition, there are theoretical implications for incorporating race into leader identity development. Lastly, there are also cross-national implications for how both US and UK institutions could learn how best to foster leader identity development in FOC.

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Table 1 Participant Table (Institution)

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Area of Study	Institution	Years Post-	Interviewed During
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					Tenure	COVID
Bill	Latinx	Man	Professional	GGU	1	
Cinque	Black	Man	Medical	GGU	6 Months	
David	East Asian	Man	Medical	GGU	2	
Dithu	SE Asian	Man	STEM	GGU	6 Months	
Harris	Black	Man	STEM	GGU	2	
Jerlando	Black	Man	STEM	GGU	2	
Lissa	Black	Man	Medical	GGU	2	
Nandan	SE Asian	Man	Arts & Humanities	GGU	6 Months	X
Nathan	East Asian	Man	Arts & Humanities	GGU	6 Months	X
Nicholas	Black	Man	Arts & Humanities	GGU	6 Months	
Robert	Black	Man	Arts & Humanities (Social Science)	GGU	6 Months	
Sathya	SE Asian	Man	Medical	GGU	6 Months	
Taman	SE Asian	Man	Professional	GGU	1	
Tony	Multiracial/ POC	Man	STEM	GGU	2	
Youngjun	East Asian	Man	Arts &	GGU	1	

			Humanities			
Yukiko	East Asian	Woman	Social Science	GGU	6 Months	
Xiaoyang	East Asian	Man	Medical	GGU	6 Months	
Amina	Black	Woman	Professional	BU	6 Months	X
Ashley	East Asian/ Multiracial	Woman	Arts & Humanities	BU	2	
Gordon	Black	Man	STEM	BU	2	
Jyotsna	SE Asian	Woman	Arts & Humanities	BU	1	
Kenny	SE Asian/ Multiracial	Man	Professional	BU	2	X
Nadeem	SE Asian	Man	STEM	BU	6 Months	X
Raúl	Latinx	Man	Medical	BU	1	
Vanessa	SE Asian	Woman	Medical (Social Science)	BU	1	
Aurora	Latinx	Woman	Professional	PSU	3	
Philip	Black	Man	Social Science	PSU	6 Months	X
Richard	Multiracial	Man	Professional	PSU	6 Months	X
Rishi	SE Asian	Man	STEM	PSU	6 Months	X

Turtle	Black	Man	Social Science	PSU	6 Months	X
Winn	East Asian	Man	Arts & Humanities	PSU	6 Months	X