Career-Life Balance for Women of Color in Science and Engineering Academia

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Women of Color in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

- Because of their race and gender, women of color who pursue advancement through the STEM fields are caught in a "double bind"(Malcom, Hall & Brown 1976)
- Persistently low numbers of women of color in STEM (NSF 2019)
- Potential human resource crisis (National Academies 2006) and raises a serious social justice issue in the U.S. (Brown, 2000; Ong, et al., 2018)
- *How do race/ethnicity, gender, and other factors affect the experiences of women of color encountering career-life balance issues in STEM?*

Ideal Worker Norm in U.S. STEM

- Commitment to the job
  - Long hours and unbroken trajectories
  - Constant visibility and availability
- Assumed gendered separation of paid work and family life
- *"Successful women will need to be the most ideal of ideal workers."* (Drago et al., 2006, p. 1225)

Sources: Acker, 1990; Britton, 2013; Drago, et al., 2006; Jones, 2012; Mason, et al., 2013; Terosky, et al., 2014; Williams & Ceci, 2012; Wonch Hill et al., 2013.

Cumulative Disadvantage for Women of Color in U.S. STEM

- Women of color work under conditions of institutional tokenism and structural inequality:
  - More visible, more isolated, more often excluded, more exposed to racial/gender inequities (Rubin, 1998; Turner et al., 2011, Ong, 2010)
- Small differences in treatment can pile up, resulting in large disparities (Valian, 1998)
- *"Those who differ from the norm encounter a cycle of cumulative disadvantage, while those who fit the norm experience a cycle of advantage."* (Turner, 2002, pp. 76-77)

School- and Work-Life Balance

- Perceptions of non-stop work due to competitive environment, unrealistic expectations
- Dearth of role models, mentors, culturally competent advisory support in STEM academia
- Concern about having the time to pursue interests outside of STEM
- Implicit discouragement of use of family leave policies
- Belief that national labs or industry would offer more balance

Source: Kachchaf, Ko, Hodari & Ong, 2015

School- and Work-Life Balance

"I will not be excellent in teaching, excellent in research, excellent in life all at once because it's not possible and I don't want to put that constraint on my system. . . . I had a miserable life [in graduate school]. . . . I'm not going to do anything close to that again."

—Laura, Latina graduate student, physics

in Kachchaf, et al., 2015

School- and Work-Life Balance

"If I were a White male, for the work that I've done, the things I've accomplished… I'd be an endowed chair professor by now…. I know that I would be—by the academic standards—further along. So it's been a long path, and it's still going but we'll see."

— Yvette, Black associate professor, engineering
in Kachchaf, et al, 2015

Recommendations

- Change the cultural norms of the ideal worker
- Implement training for culturally competent mentoring
- Fully honor family leave policies
- Enforce strict policy against discrimination, harassment
- Sponsor more research on women of color and career-life balance in STEM workplaces

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