

¡PUNTO FINAL!

COALITIONS, ISOLATION, AND RECIPROCAL EMPOWERMENT



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Minority groups often work independently and, occasionally, even at cross purposes. Isolated academics are less able to speak up or take effective action in support of other minority group members. This inability derives in part from our small numbers, lack of critical mass, and dispersion throughout our campuses among academic and administrative ranks. Yet our unified support is critical to the success of the few diverse leaders at executive levels who seek to bring about true diversity change.

In our book *Are the Walls Really Down? Behavioral and Organizational Barriers to Faculty and Staff Diversity*, we document the slow progress of minority faculty and staff as a whole toward equitable representation. U.S. Department of Education figures (2003) reveal that minority women are 6.5 percent of the full-time faculty work force; White women, 31.9 percent. Hispanics ranked full professor were 2.1 percent in 1991 and 3.2 percent in 2003. Hispanic faculty remain underrepresented in public research universities, at 2.2 percent (versus 3.2 percent in all institutions). Minority women are 9.6 percent of all full-time administrators; White women, 40.7 percent. The representation of Hispanic women in administration was a bare 0.13 percent in 1979 and 2.2 percent in 2003.

Just as startling are the experiences of minority and female faculty and staff once they enter our institutions. In our recent book, we share research that identifies the presence of subtle behavioral and organizational barriers in the workplace, including marginalization, tokenism, isolation, lack of support, absence of mentoring, stereotyping, double standards, subjection to greater scrutiny, and questioning of competence. These exact a substantial physiological and psychological toll upon minorities and all women.

Leonard Valverde in *Leaders of Color in Higher Education: Unrecognized Triumphs in Harsh Institutions* (2003) indicates that Latino leaders are subject to four dilemmas in higher education: basic understanding, flawed expectations, overwhelming undervalue, and quickness to become expendable. Scholars such as María de la Luz Reyes and John Halcon in *Racial & Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education* (1996) describe the range of responses that Chicana/os, like other minority academics, have found to cope with racism and barriers in higher education – from giving in, to giving up, moving on, and fighting back.

Relatively few institutions recognize or respond to these barriers and move beyond affirmative action hiring strategies to comprehensive

approaches to inclusion. Systematic institutional approaches are needed not only to address subtle 21st-century workplace discrimination but to promote organizational learning that incorporates diversity as a valued and essential element.

What is the antidote to these deeply ingrained forms of systemic discrimination? We propose the dynamic model of reciprocal empowerment, a concept introduced by Lev Gonick and Isaac Prilleltensky (1994) in *Human Diversity: Perspectives on People in Context*, as the framework for understanding and action.

Reciprocal empowerment is a values-based approach that juxtaposes three pillars of self-determination, distributive justice, and collaboration and democratic participation to the concepts of power, subordination, and domination. It recognizes the value to dominant groups themselves of sharing power and distributing resources equitably in terms of actualization of leadership roles and ethical and moral principles. It emphasizes the two-way nature of mutual engagement needed to build respect and foster recognition. It addresses the fundamental quality of interaction in the higher education workplace.

The formation of coalitions of minorities and women supports the practical insight of the great African-American abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, that power will not concede anything without a demand. As a reality-based approach, coalitions have the potential and even the power to present a demand through their strength, unity, and voice. Without a concerted approach, fragmentation will thwart the attainment of reciprocal empowerment for all minority groups.

Minorities and women can also empower each other. Coalitions among minorities and women that bridge ethnic, racial, and cultural divides and recognize the value of working together against contemporary forms of discrimination can move institutional mountains through the force of unity. This consolidated voice is needed to overcome inertia, eliminate invisibility, ensure accountability, and stimulate meaningful institutional diversity change.

From our perspective as human resource practitioners in higher education, leveraging the power of coalitions represents an important and proactive force in eliminating injustice and building a culture of reciprocal empowerment.

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