The Sport of Oppression: An Analysis of Barriers Affecting Retention of Black Faculty in Sport and Leisure Studies Academic Programs

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Research demonstrates the value of racial diversity in the classroom (Allen, Epps, Guilloiry, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000). Many institutions of higher learning are motivated to increase their diversity of faculty to reflect the diverse student population (Toliver, Moore, & Redcross, 2015). This activity indicates a growing importance of not only recruiting diverse faculty, but also finding effective ways to retain them. However, with the increased importance of retaining diverse faculty, sport academe confronts the problem of retaining Black faculty (Jones, Brooks, & Mak, 2008). There is currently poor representation of faculty of color at predominantly White higher education institutions (Burden, Harrison, & Hodge, 2005), particularly in the realm of sport and leisure studies (Jones et al., 2008). The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in 2015 only 6% of faculty members at degree-granting post-secondary institutions were Black. In comparison to the 77% of faculty that is White, the presence of Black faculty is sparse.

Scholars have pushed for an emphasis on recruitment and retention of more minority faculty of color (Burden et al., 2005). Several qualitative studies discovered barriers to retaining faculty of color in academia (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Toliver et al., 2015). The extant literature on retention of Black faculty revealed several barriers such as racism and stereotypes, social isolation, and uneven workloads (Harley, 2008) as well as the publishing and tenure process, and mentorship (Gregory, 2001), which affect the career longevity of this particular population.

Significant value exists in closing the gap between recruiting and retaining more faculty of color in sport and leisure studies in order to create truly diverse teams and to better support students in this field. Yet few studies have assessed this in the field of sport management (Burden et al., 2005; Mahony, Mondello, Hums, & Judd, 2004). This study will bridge the gap in research literature by specifically exploring the experiences of Black faculty in sport and leisure studies at predominantly White institutions (PWIs).

The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework of the barriers affecting the retention of African American sport and leisure studies faculty at PWIs, highlight the possible facilitators that aid in retention, and offer a plan for maintaining diversity in sport and leisure studies departments at PWIs. This study will answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are common barriers to entry and retention of Black faculty in sport and leisure studies at PWIs?

RQ2. What factors facilitate retention of Black faculty in sport and leisure studies at PWIs?

RQ3. What actions can sport and leisure departments take to address recruitment and retention issues at PWIs?

This study will use qualitative data collection and analysis to address the research purpose and research questions (Patton, 2002). Data will be collected from current and former Black faculty in sport and leisure studies departments (Burden et al., 2005). Study participants must meet the following criteria: (a) currently work or have worked in a sport and leisure studies department and (b) have a willingness to share their insights regarding recruitment and retention of Black faculty members within these departments (Burden et al., 2005). These individuals will be identified through purposive and snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013), starting with an initial five faculty members meeting the specified criteria. This approach will allow the researcher to first interview individuals who can address the research purpose and questions and then help in identifying additional study participants (Burden et al., 2005).
Those who agree to participate in the study will receive and respond to semi-structured interview questions. The interviews will focus on documenting: the participant’s (a) academic background, (b) perceived barriers to recruitment and retention of Black faculty members in sport and leisure studies departments, and (c) perceived factors facilitating recruitment and retention of Black faculty members in these departments.

Interview questions will derive from previous research addressing recruitment and retention of minority faculty members within academic environments (Burden et al., 2005). Semi-structured interview questions will include the following: As an African American, how comfortable are you in your current faculty position among colleagues? What aspects of your academic job do you enjoy? What aspects of your job make it difficult to complete tasks? What about your position motivates you to stay in your current role? What factors motivated you to leave your current position? In addition to these open-ended questions, participants will respond to demographic questions (i.e., age, tenure status, number of years in current role, number of years in the academy). This information will be used in conjunction with the interview questions to identify potential similarities and differences in responses based on demographic and other factors.

The researcher will conduct one interview with each study participant. Each interview should take approximately 30 to 60 minutes to complete. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher will use these interview transcripts to complete the data analysis.

Constant comparative analysis will be used for the data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach will allow the researcher to move the interview data from description to categorization to theme development. First, the researcher will use open coding to organize and arrange the data to reflect the research concepts of factors related to recruitment and retention. This will start the process of comparing and contrasting interview responses among the interview participants and aid in finding emergent themes in the data (Glaser & Strauss; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Next, the researcher will use axial coding to organize the categories into themes and ensure the findings are grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss).

These findings, including their theoretical and practical implications, will be presented. The study should reveal barriers aligning with previous research regarding barriers to retention of Black faculty in other fields (Diggs et al., 2009; Stanley, 2006). The information gathered in this study should help support future research regarding retention of Black faculty in sport and leisure studies as well as provide insights for academic departments seeking to recruit and retain a diverse faculty.