



Almost No Blacks in Academic Psychology: Does the Pipeline Defense Hold Water?

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❑ **Almost No Blacks in Academic Psychology:
Does the Pipeline Defense Hold Water?**

A chair of the psychology department at a leading university recently said that over the past several years he had been unable to find even one black psychologist qualified for a teaching position at his university. JBHE asked three leading black psychologists to comment.

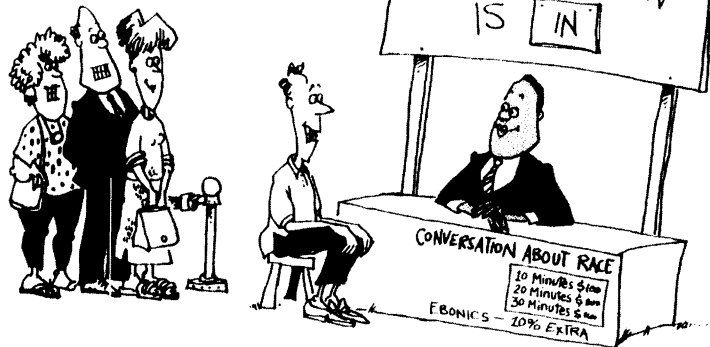
The latest figures from the National Science Foundation show that in the year 2000, 193 African Americans earned a Ph.D. in psychology. They made up 6 percent of all Americans who earned a Ph.D. in psychology that year. Over the past decade, approximately 1,500 African Americans have earned a Ph.D. in the field.

Yet when we look at the faculty rosters of the psychology departments at the nation's highest-ranked universities we find very few blacks. According to the latest JBHE research, blacks make up 3.8 percent of all faculty in the psychology departments at our leading universities. At many high-ranked universities, including Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania, there are no blacks whatsoever in their psychology departments.

Recently, in response to a question by a student reporter as to why there are no black faculty members in his department, Henry Roediger, chair of the department of psychology at Washington University in St. Louis, said, "We have been beating the bushes but can't find candidates for most of our positions. Over the past few years we have not found a qualified black candidate to offer a position."

JBHE questioned if the academic pipeline problem is as severe as Dr. Roediger suggests. University administrators, deans of faculty, and department chairs often turn to the pipeline defense to explain the low level of racial diversity on their faculties. But given the large number of black Ph.D. graduates in the field of psychology, we questioned if, in fact, the traditional pipeline defense is valid in this case.

JBHE asked three black psychologists to address this issue. Specifically, we asked, "Is the pipeline problem as severe as Professor Roediger makes out? Or do we have in his comment an example of an academic excuse deflecting criticism



of the uninspired efforts to diversify their faculty ranks?" We received the following replies:

No Commitment to Faculty Diversity

Enrico E. Jones, professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley, believes efforts to diversify psychology faculties have been uninspired:

It has been very difficult to make a significant change in the historical underrepresentation of blacks in psychology departments. One reason is the increased divide between applied and academic or research psychology. Many of the 1,500 doctorates you mentioned likely received their degrees from professional schools of psychology, which train their graduates in psychological assessment, psychosocial intervention, forensics, community psychology, etc., but do not train research psychologists. This rules out an academic career for blacks trained in this professional track.

Even when black students enter academically oriented training programs, they tend to gravitate toward clinical or community psychology, rather than cognitive science or biological psychology. In my two and a half decades experience in teaching in an academic clinical psychology program, I have observed that most black

students want to be involved directly in the community, which usually means as clinicians, directors of mental health programs, etc. For obvious reasons, they find this more relevant and meaningful. They may use their research skills in these contexts, but they do not opt for a more purely research-oriented academic track. Many do not find an academic career appealing. It often requires heavy teaching loads, running after research grants, serving on too many university committees, and mediocre salaries, all in what is frequently a less than supportive environment.

In addition, many students have reservations about the relevance and validity of prevailing research models and methods for culturally different and ethnic minority populations. On the other hand, academic psychology has yet to proffer

Illustration: Signe, Cartoon and Writers Syndicate

authentic intellectual legitimacy and prestige to the kinds of problems black students are interested in conducting research on.

Finally, academic careers are built on relationships with mentors, networks with other researchers through professional societies and contacts with funding agencies. I think it is still difficult for many blacks to break into these networks and create and sustain the necessary relationships, which are not just professional, but also personal. The legacy of discrimination and exclusion, and the frequent absence of authentic mutuality in these professional and personal relationships continue to be a barrier in beginning a successful academic career.

I do agree that the academy's efforts to diversify its faculty has been uninspired. When you put that together with the factors I have tried to summarize, the result is very few black faculty in psychology departments.

Where Are All the Black Psychology Ph.D.s?

Valerie Maholmes, Harris Assistant Professor of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and director of policy at the Comer School Development Program of Yale University, believes more mentoring programs are needed:

I think you are right to be skeptical about the statement that there are no blacks in the academic pipeline. As a former admissions director, I think the question to ask is, where are the blacks who have earned Ph.D.s choosing to go and why? Many black psychologists prefer to work at institutions which have promising career opportunities, AND opportunities for social interaction, community involvement, and other activities outside the university. They may also be looking for appointments in universities that will allow them the freedom to challenge Eurocentric perspectives and to conduct research in non-traditional topics.

Others are choosing not to go to the Ivory towers, but rather they prefer to take their talents and skills back to the communities where they feel they can make a better contribution. I don't know the specific data on this issue, but from my observations there are more blacks who are choosing to work in the schools, community agencies, state policy-making agencies, etc. Because there is such a demand for blacks, I think the ball is in our court to make choices that are professionally, personally, and financially more rewarding to us.

The last point that I want to make is that universities that

are sincerely interested in hiring black faculty need to make a commitment to provide resources and support to develop the talents among prospective faculty while they are at the pre- and post-doctoral levels. I see pre- and post-doctoral applications from black students that meet the basic requirements for fellowship but lack publications, a clearly defined research agenda, and so on.

Universities need to develop programs and create opportunities to mentor young people who have a great deal of promise but need mentoring and support to maximize their potential. I often see lots of formal and informal mentoring of young people from other ethnic groups so that they can be prepared for an academic career after their training program. They are sometimes even recruited to join the faculty at the institution where they were trained.

Old White Boys Network Is Alive and Well

Vickie M. Mays, professor of psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles, believes the pipeline defense is used to justify an "old white boys" network:

The pipeline is often cited as a reason by top-ranked universities in support of their weak hiring record of black faculty. However, when examined more closely, pipeline doesn't just refer to available numbers of black faculty, but black faculty who graduate from specific universities that are highly ranked, faculty whose work may be more mainstream or characteristic of the areas that already exist within departments, or black faculty whose dissertation advisers and collaborators are well known for the type of students they produce. Pipeline can serve as a code word for selectivity that often is rooted in an "old white boys" network which few ethnic minority or women faculty are participants.

However, one problem faced by some departments is that new African-American Ph.D.s in psychology have had no or inefficient mentoring. Other black students in psychology have experienced racial discrimination in the university setting and therefore purposely have not chosen to prepare for an academic career. If those in the psychology profession want to rectify the problems associated with the dearth of African-American Ph.D.s on the market, they have to take seriously the need to provide culturally competent graduate training, strong mentoring, and to do away with a view of scholarship that is so narrow that it excludes the interest of many African Americans.