Socializing Mammies? Examining Graduate Student Engagement of Black Women Graduate Instructors

Katherine I. E. Wheatle
Allison BrckaLorenz

Socialization of Graduate Students

• Austin and Daniels (2006):
  1. “What am I supposed to look like and act like in my professional field?”
  2. “What do I, as a professional, look like to other professionals as I perform my new roles?”
• “Involvement” (Gardner and Barnes, 2007)

Mammies of the Academy?

• Patricia Hill Collins (2000) asserts the controlling image of mammy “represents the normative yardstick used to evaluate all Black women’s behavior” (p. 72)
• Pertains not only to Whites expectations of Black women, but also to economic exploitation of Black women in the labor market (e.g., wage gap)
• I contend that this imagery and ideology has direct implications for Black women graduate student instructors

Check-In

What challenges are you facing on your campus related to the socialization of Black/African American women graduate students?

Socialization (con’t)

• Teaching and service activities are less valued than activities linked to research (Austin and McDaniels, 2006; Davidson and Foster-Johnson, 2001; Davis, 2008; Tierney and Bensimon, 1996; Tierney and Rhoads, 1994)
• Greater involvement in teaching and service serve as barriers to promotion (McPherson and Schapiro, 1999)

Purpose

• To explore self-perceptions of teaching experiences of Black or African American women graduate students who teach, or graduate student instructors (GSIs)
• Contribute to knowledge about Black or African American women GSIs, their teaching experiences, and occupational goals
Research Questions

1. What teaching roles do Black or African American women GSIs hold compared to their counterparts?
2. What are Black or African American women GSIs’ perception of their control of courses they teach?
3. How much time do Black or African American women GSIs spend on instructor- and non-instructor-related activities?
4. What are the occupational goals of African American women GSIs?

Data

- 2014 administration of the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement for Graduate Student Instructors (FSSE-G)
- Designed to complement the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) by measuring
  - GSIs’ perceptions and expectations of undergraduate engagement in educationally purposeful activities
  - The extent to which GSIs promote learning and development in the courses they teach
  - The extent of their interaction with students
  - How they allocate their time
- GSIs who taught or assisted with an undergraduate course during the 2013-2014 school year

Sample

- 2,560 GSIs
- 8 research universities
- 78% working toward a doctoral degree
- Average of 3 years in current degree program
- Largest disciplines:
  - 27% Arts & Humanities
  - 18% Physical Sciences, Mathematics, & Computer Science
  - 16% Social Sciences

- Average age of 29
- 42% Man, 54% Women
- 81% US citizen
- Racial/ethnic identity
  - 70% White
  - 13% Asian, Native Hawaiian, other Pacific Islander
  - 3% Black or African American
  - 3% Hispanic or Latino
  - 6% other
- 3% Black or African American women (n=45)

Measures

- How much do you control the following:
  (Very much, Quite a bit, Some, Very little)
  - Purpose and goals
  - Content
  - Instructional materials
  - Instructional activities
  - Assessment

- What is your teaching role for this course?
  (Select all that apply.)
  - Course instructor
  - Lab instructor
  - Lecture or discussion instructor
  - Reader or grader
  - Tutor
  - Other

Measures (con’t)

- In a typical 7-day week, about how many hours do you spend on each of the following?
  - Teaching activities
  - Research, creative, or scholarly activities
  - Your course work

- In a typical 7-day week, about how many hours do you spend on each of the following instructor-related activities?
  - Preparing class sessions
  - Teaching class sessions
  - Grading assignments and exams
  - Meeting with students outside of class
  - Course administration
  - Working to improve your teaching

Measures (con’t)

- Which of the following best describes your occupational goal?
  (Select all that apply.)
  - College or university professor or instructor
  - Clinical research in private sector
  - Research in nonprofit/government sector
  - University research
  - College administrator
  - Precollege teaching position
  - Other

- What is your racial or ethnic identification?
  (Select all that apply.)
  - American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; White; Other
  - I prefer not to respond

- What is your gender identity?
  - Man; Woman; Another gender identity; I prefer not to respond

June 1, 2015

2015 NCORE
FINDINGS

June 1, 2015

Table 1: Course Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Black or African American Women</th>
<th>Other GSIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Instructor</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lab Instructor</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture or discussion</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Reader or grader</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question #1

Compared to their peers, what percentage of Black/African American women GSIs do you think indicated they were a course instructor?

Question #2

On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being “very little” and 4 being “very much,” how much control do you think Black/African American women GSIs reported having over the courses they taught?

Question #3

Compared to their peers, do you think Black/African American women GSIs spent more or less time on instruction-related activities?
Preparing
Teaching
Grading
Meeting w/ students
Course administration
Working to improve teaching

Question #4

Compared to their peers, what non-instruction-related activity do you think Black/African American women GSIs spend the least amount of time in a typical week?

Final Question

To what career trajectory do you think Black/African American women GSIs reported aspiring most?

Summary of Findings

• Black/African American women GSIs lead classrooms as course instructors, but are underrepresented in other instructional roles
• GSIs overall reported less control over courses they teach, but Black/ African American women GSIs reported slightly less control over the majority of activities related to course instruction
Black/African American women GSIs spent comparable amounts of time on instructional activities, but reported spending more time:
1. Grading,
2. Meeting with students,
3. Course administration, and

Black/African American women GSIs reported spending fewer hours per week on research than their peers
Yet, majority reported seeking the professoriate as their occupational goal

Results from survey responses support contextual evidence from qualitative studies on Black women academicians (i.e., graduate students and faculty)
Despite indicating intentions for the professoriate, Black/African American GSIs reported spending less time on research, an activity that would make them more competitive on the academic market
Having less control over their courses but serving so heavily as course instructors likely has negative impacts on instructors’ confidence and psyche

What part(s) of their socialization experiences are drawing women in this study to spend more time on instruction-related activities?
What are institutions doing to help facilitate Black women graduate students into research and publishing opportunities?

Small sample size limited our statistical analyses
Future research:
- Include multiple administrations to increase # of Black women GSIs
- Disaggregation and within group comparisons of engagement
- FSSE/FSSE-G comparisons of Black women

Considering your campus context, how might the results look different? In what areas do you expect them to be similar?
What did these results make you think about that you hadn’t considered before?
How might you begin an investigation on the status of graduate instructors with intersecting identities at your institution?
Thank you.
Presentation and more information about FSSE-G at fsse.iub.edu
kiwheatl@indiana.edu
abrckalo@indiana.edu