

# Earning Professional Legitimacy: Challenges Faced by Women, Underrepresented Minority, and Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

KERRYANN O'MEARA

*University of Maryland, College Park*

LINDSEY TEMPLETON

*University of Maryland, College Park*

GUUDRUN NYUNT

*Northern Illinois University, DeKalb*

**Background and Context:** *Little research has focused on how legitimacy is understood and conveyed through interactions between faculty colleagues, despite its importance to faculty careers. Not all faculty experience an even playing field in trying to access professional legitimacy. This is especially true for women, underrepresented minority (URM), and non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty. These groups experience common dilemmas in their pursuit of professional legitimacy in research university environments, though each group also faces distinct challenges of its own. An ideal place to understand experiences of faculty trying to earn professional legitimacy are faculty learning communities.*

**Purpose:** *The purpose of this study was to analyze how women, URM, and NTT faculty understand and describe professional legitimacy in one research university. We sought to understand the challenges these groups experienced in trying to obtain legitimacy from colleagues that they attributed to their gender, race, or appointment type. Through this study, we hope to provide an understanding of and recommendations for creating inclusive academic work environments for all three groups.*

**Setting:** *The study took place at Land Grant University (LGU), a research-intensive institution. LGU received a National Science Foundation ADVANCE grant to focus on issues of equity in the retention and advancement of women and URM faculty. Out of recognition that the institution faced challenges in retaining and/or advancing women, URM, and NTT faculty, LGU's ADVANCE program created faculty learning communities.*

**Research Design:** *A qualitative case study approach was used to understand how women, URM, and NTT faculty interpreted institutional scripts of legitimacy within their academic departments.*

**Data Collection and Analysis:** Data were collected using semistructured participant observations of five faculty learning communities, which were formed to support the retention and advancement of women, URM, and NTT faculty over five years.

**Findings/Results:** Women, URM, and NTT faculty participating in faculty learning communities understood professional legitimacy as associated with belonging, merit, autonomy, and voice in decision making. Participants described multiple ways in which they felt their gender, race, and/or appointment type constrained their ability to achieve legitimacy.

**Conclusions and Recommendations:** In this study, we used our findings to “mark” how inequality is maintained through professional interactions with colleagues. Implicit bias influenced several of the inequalities and barriers to earning legitimacy noted in the study. One recommendation, therefore, is to raise awareness of implicit bias and provide department-wide trainings on how to address it. This study also supports the use of faculty learning communities as a place of restoration for faculty seeking professional legitimacy and as a tool to create inclusive academic environments.

Legitimacy, and the pursuit of it, is an important element of faculty careers. For the purpose of this study, legitimacy is defined as a “condition reflecting cultural alignment, normative support or consonance with relevant rules or laws” (Scott, 1995, p. 45). Legitimacy serves as a cultural and instrumental resource in career advancement (Gonzales, 2012, 2013; Morphew, 2009). Faculty pursue legitimacy throughout their career; the process of legitimation is ongoing and iterative and cannot be completed or achieved with a sense of finality (Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; O’Meara, 2011a). Obtaining legitimacy is a critical aspect of professional growth (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007) and the main reward in academic reward systems (Fairweather, 1996; O’Meara, 2011b; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Legitimacy is also closely related to issues of equity in academe. Witham, Malcom-Piqueux, Dowd, and Bensimon (2015) observed that equity is “proportional representation” in “experiences and activities that build . . . academic and cultural capital” (p. 1). One of the most important forms of capital in academe is legitimacy (Gonzales, 2013; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; Morphew, 2000; Rusch & Wilbur, 2007). Given its centrality in faculty careers, earning legitimacy is a high-stakes activity and an important area for study. However, little research has focused on how legitimacy is understood and conveyed through interactions between faculty colleagues. Our study seeks to fill this void.

There are different forms of legitimacy. In this study, we focus on the pursuit of professional legitimacy (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Gonzales (2014) noted that “institutionalized scripts for legitimacy” are transferred as endorsements from one set of colleagues to another (p. 199). Such scripts set up norms that embody what should be endorsed, or what is considered acceptable and appropriate. Faculty navigate academic environments and

absorb these institutionalized scripts. They may try to change themselves or their work to more closely align with scripts for legitimate academic careers, resist such scripts, or try to negotiate with them (Gonzales, 2012, 2014; O'Meara, 2015; Rhoades, Marquez Kiyama, McCormick, & Quiroz, 2007; Rusch & Wilbur, 2007).

Institutional scripts for legitimacy affect all academics (Gonzales, 2013; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; Morphey, 2000; Rusch & Wilbur, 2007). For the purposes of this study, we focused on the pursuit of legitimacy by tenure-track women and underrepresented minority (URM) faculty, and non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty in the research university environment. Research on the lived experiences of tenure-track women, URM, and NTT faculty shows that these groups still have to navigate gendered, racialized, and rankist academic work environments despite efforts to create more inclusive work environments for all faculty (Aguirre, 1994; August & Waltman, 2004; Jayakumar, Howard, Allen, & Han, 2009; Kezar, 2013; Maranto & Griffin, 2011; Stanley, 2006; Sullivan, Riger, Raja, & Stokes, 1997). Women and URM faculty report feeling isolated in the workplace and receiving less recognition for their scholarship (Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey, & Hazelwood, 2011; Kemelgor & Etkowitz, 2001; J. W. Smith & Calasanti, 2005; Turner & Myers, 2000). NTT faculty experience rankism (Fuller, 2009, 2015), wherein they are treated as second-class citizens and not provided the same opportunities, recognition, or networks as tenure-track faculty due to their lower status (House Committee on Education and the Workforce, 2014; Kezar, 2012, 2013; Levin & Hernandez, 2014; The New Faculty Majority, 2014). Faculty from each of these three groups are likely to experience distinct and similar challenges in seeking legitimacy in research universities because of implicit bias and structured sexism, racism, and rankism (Acker, 2006; Baez, 2000; Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Griffin et al., 2011; O'Meara, 2011a, 2011b, 2014; Padilla, 1994; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009; Stout, Staiger, & Jennings, 2007; Turner & Myers, 2000). Although the experiences of each group have been studied separately, our study seeks to understand similarities between women, URM, and NTT faculty as they relate to the pursuit of professional legitimacy. We aim to provide an understanding of and recommendations for creating inclusive academic work environments for all three groups.

Scholars who examine inequality and equity from feminist perspectives, critical race perspectives, and the perspective of what facilitates "rankist" work environments have noted common "sites" where inequality between groups is reproduced. Such sites include institutional policies and practices, access to and distribution of resources, and professional and personal interactions (Bird, 2011; Kezar, 2012; Martin, 1994; Roos & Gatta, 2009). Based on their research, scholars have considered policies and

practices that might aid in the recruitment, retention, and advancement of women and URM faculty and improve satisfaction for NTT faculty. Less research and fewer recommendations have focused on the area of personal and professional interactions, particularly the interactional process of earning professional legitimacy from colleagues. Little is known about specific barriers faced by women, URM, and NTT faculty in this process and how to overcome these barriers. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) observed that social-relational contexts in organizations, or “any situation in which individuals define themselves in relation to others in order to act” (p. 511), are strategic sites where inequality is most likely to be reproduced. Such spaces are vulnerable to bias and unequal treatment because they are least “bureaucratically scripted” and “more open to subjective interpretation and spontaneous response” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 525). Thus, designing equitable and inclusive academic environments requires “marking” where and how inequality is reproduced in specific aspects of faculty careers, especially in high-stakes areas with little administrative oversight (Acker, 1990, 2006; Roos & Gatta, 2009; Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey, & Skaggs, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to analyze how women, URM, and NTT faculty understand and describe professional legitimacy in one research university. We further sought to understand the challenges these groups experienced in trying to obtain legitimacy from colleagues that they attributed to their gender, race, or appointment type. To do so, we used semi-structured participant observations of five faculty learning communities, which were formed to support the retention and advancement of women, URM, and NTT faculty over five years. Created in part to address the negative effects of gendered, racist, and rankist work environments, these faculty learning communities served as safe spaces where faculty from similar identity groups felt comfortable discussing challenges they faced in regard to obtaining legitimacy. Thus, the faculty learning communities provided both a site of inquiry and a unique space where faculty shared how they felt their gender, race, and appointment type shaped the process of earning professional legitimacy.

Our study makes a distinct contribution to research on academic careers, legitimacy, and the pursuit of more inclusive work environments by revealing what is meant by and associated with professional legitimacy in faculty careers. We “mark” inequalities experienced by women, URM, and NTT faculty in their pursuit of professional legitimacy that they attribute to gender, race, and/or appointment type. This study offers strength in research design by (a) creating a comprehensive database of observations over five years, allowing for saturation of themes, and (b) considering similarities in experience among three groups typically studied separately—women, URM, and NTT faculty.

## GUIDING PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

We were guided by new institutionalism (NI) theory (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Scott, 1995) and application of NI theory to faculty careers (Gonzales, 2012, 2013, 2014; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016). We also considered work on interactional processes that produce inequality in organizations (Acker, 1990, 2006; Bensimon, 2012; Bird, 2011; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Roos & Gatta, 2009; Stainbeck et al., 2010).

## UNDERSTANDING LEGITIMACY

NI theory explains the nature and structure of legitimacy in organizations. NI theorists observe that higher education operates primarily as a cultural field; therefore, organizations are predominantly assessed on the legitimacy, prestige, and status that they attract and retain (Bowman & Bastedo, 2011; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Gonzales, 2013, 2015; Morphew, 2009; Toma, 2012). Organizational actors are likely to seek out different kinds of legitimacy. Deephouse and Suchman (2008) outlined four schemas to understand these various types: cognitive, technical/legal, moral/normative, and professional. Gonzales and Terosky (2016) applied this schema to the experiences of faculty seeking legitimacy in different institutional types and found that faculty were most cognizant of seeking professional and normative legitimacy. As noted, we were interested in faculty experiences related to their attempts to earn professional legitimacy, or an “endorsement unique to a professional field made or withheld exclusively by one’s professional colleagues” (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008, p. 53). Although both disciplines/fields and institutional environments shape faculty careers (Hermanowicz, 2007, 2009), our focus was on faculty experiences of trying to earn professional legitimacy with their colleagues at the institution where they were employed.

Professional legitimacy is relevant only within the boundaries or context of a professional community. Faculty can obtain legitimacy by following implicit and/or explicit rules and expectations for behavior (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Gonzales, 2015; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016). Other faculty and administrators assess whether someone is meeting expectations and doing what they “should” be doing. If the person is deemed to be in line with expectations and rules, he or she is endorsed as legitimate (Gonzales & Terosky, 2016). For example, when individuals witness their colleagues acquiring accolades also held by highly esteemed members of the profession, they often endorse them as legitimate. A senior faculty member may praise a colleague for a new publication at a meeting, which may lead to other faculty congratulating the colleague. Alternatively, faculty members

may find another colleague's subject of research repugnant because it does not conform to standard views in the field. Consequently, they may not encourage students in their academic program to take classes with this colleague. Faculty members whose research is perceived as legitimate may also receive more funding for conference travel than a colleague whose research is not seen as legitimate. Individuals—faculty and their colleagues alike—therefore engage in behavior that shapes legitimation. Throughout faculty members' careers, their colleagues' views regarding the legitimacy of their work may change, given that the process of legitimation is dynamic.

Although “institutionalized scripts for legitimacy” (Gonzales, 2014, p. 199) can differ by institutional type and disciplinary field, Gonzales and Terosky (2016) found that faculty hold relatively consistent conceptions of legitimacy across institutional types and across the academic profession. Institutional scripts for legitimacy often originate at research universities, the setting of this study. Most higher education faculty receive their doctoral degrees in research and doctoral universities, where they are socialized into sets of assumptions about legitimate academic work that shape their perspective throughout their career (Austin, 2002; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Lawrence, Celis, & Ott, 2014; Posselt, 2015; Rhoades et al., 2007).

## THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

As we reviewed the literature on the academic profession and identified elements or scripts of legitimacy, we found four themes. First, legitimacy for faculty in research universities is associated with a high level of research performance and productivity (Fairweather, 2005; O'Meara, 2011b; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). To be legitimate means to produce valuable research, a criterion that is assessed through the outlets where work is published and the amount of work completed. Second, legitimacy for faculty in research universities is associated with a high level of commitment to the profession that can benefit some while excluding others. For example, Sallee (2013) found that academic parents struggled with colleagues' expectations of giving 100% devotion to faculty positions. Because they needed to balance work and family commitments, academic parents found that they could not emulate or resemble this characteristic and thus struggled to obtain professional legitimacy (Sallee, 2013; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2012).

Third, legitimacy in a research university is associated with high standing, location, and rank within existing academic hierarchies. For example, faculty are expected to strive for placement at a research university if they

are at a comprehensive institution (Gardner & Veliz, 2014; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006), to try and move from lesser to better ranked academic programs (O'Meara, 2007), and to acquire the highest academic rank possible (Rhoades et al., 2007; Sallee, 2013; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996).

Fourth, a strong value and expectation within the academic profession links legitimacy to perceptions of merit (Hermanowicz, 2007, 2009). Although expectations are not always clearly defined, informal language used in admissions, peer review, promotion and tenure, and hiring processes indicates that it is illegitimate for individuals to advance in their career because of favoritism, cronyism, or bias (Lawrence et al., 2014; Posselt, 2015; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Tierney & Rhoads, 1993; Trower, 2009). The assumption is that one must be recognized based on the quality of one's work, whether that work is research, teaching, or shared governance (Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, & Carducci, 2010). The very nature of "blind" peer review processes reinforces this value. In blind peer review, it is assumed that if scholarship is good (i.e., legitimate), a group of peers will advance the work for publication regardless of the identity of the authors or reviewers (Lamont, 2009).

#### SOCIAL CAPITAL, IMPLICIT BIAS, AND INEQUITY

When colleagues view a faculty member as legitimate, this individual acquires social capital that further enhances his or her professional legitimacy. For example, Gonzales, Martinez, and Ordu (2014) found that faculty deemed by colleagues as "resource generators" (p. 1111) acquire social capital that is often rewarded with greater autonomy. When colleagues see the autonomy granted to a faculty member by colleagues and supervisors, they assume this individual must be legitimate, which further enhances the individual's professional legitimacy. Alternatively, those who do not meet professional expectations, and therefore lack legitimacy, are treated with additional surveillance, which suggests that autonomy is another indicator of legitimacy (Deepphouse & Suchman, 2008). Likewise, the voice of those deemed legitimate is heard and valued in meetings and important decision-making matters in professional groups (Bourdieu, 1988). Having symbolic power in a group indicates to others that one is legitimate, thus further enhancing his or her professional legitimacy. These examples show how faculty who earn legitimacy experience a cumulative advantage.

A substantial body of literature examines legitimacy in organizations overall (Bitektine, 2011; Deepphouse & Suchman, 2008; Johnson, 2004; Scott, 1995). Much qualitative research has also focused on faculty work-life (Daly & Dee, 2006; Rosser, 2005; Xu, 2008) and experiences of faculty

trying to develop professional relationships with colleagues on the tenure track (Lawrence et al., 2014; Lindholm, 2003; Ponjuan, Conley, & Trower, 2011). However, little work has focused on the ways in which faculty provide and receive endorsements through interactions with colleagues that contribute to their sense of legitimacy. This is an important area to study further because, other than awards and formal moments of career advancement (e.g., contract renewal for NTT faculty, tenure and promotion for tenure-track faculty), professional interactions are the main way faculty know if they have acquired the legitimacy they seek.

Not all faculty face an even playing field in trying to access professional legitimacy. Much social science research has shown that academics, like the general population, are socialized from a young age to be biased toward each other and to place others into in-groups or out-groups based on characteristics such as gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation (Corrine et al., 2012; Yudkin, Rothmund, Twardawski, Thalla, & Van Bavel, 2016). Implicit bias can influence, for example, how colleagues evaluate a woman's work in coauthored publications, with colleagues devaluing a woman's contribution when she works with men (Sarsons, 2015). Implicit bias shapes which prospective graduate student emails faculty respond to, with faculty being less likely to respond to candidates with non-White-sounding names (Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2015). Scholars have also frequently observed implicit bias in hiring processes. When given two resumes with the exact same information but different first names, scholars tended to hire male scientists over their female counterparts because of an implicit association between men and scientific merit (Corinne et al., 2012; Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritzke, 1999). In academe, this bias appears not only based on gender and race or ethnicity but also on rankism (Fuller, 2009, 2015). Research universities are hierarchical places where status matters; rank is associated with expertise, competence, and authority (Fuller, 2009), which can lead to bias against those in lower ranked positions.

Clearly, women, URM, and NTT faculty face distinct challenges. Intersections of identities among these three and with other faculty subgroups—such as being a woman in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), an assistant professor of color, or a male NTT professor—also influence individuals' experiences (Griffin et al., 2011; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012). For example, in some disciplines, women have critical mass; in some departments, there are more NTT faculty than tenure-track faculty. By studying these three groups together, we do not dismiss the distinct challenges faced by each of these groups or the intersectionality of experiences. However, when it comes to the pursuit of professional legitimacy in research university environments, all three groups face common dilemmas.

First, social science research on implicit bias based on gender and race, and research on rankism in organizations, suggests that all three groups are likely to experience some disadvantage in pursuing professional legitimacy. The disadvantage we focus on here is not based on the quality of work, but on the perception of faculty identity or role within the organization, where faculty “out-group” status is compared to some dominant norm. Second, all three groups will presumably be looking for endorsements from the same group—faculty in their departments and colleges. Third, if endorsements are withheld, each group will face uncertainty as to whether the withholding is based on their work or their identity or role. Given these three commonalities, and their centrality to our research questions, we wanted to study the experiences of these three groups together rather than separately, as has been done in previous research.

## FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITIES

An ideal place to understand experiences of faculty trying to earn professional legitimacy are faculty learning communities. By faculty learning communities, we refer to bringing together a group of faculty (such as women associate professors or NTT faculty) on a regular basis (such as once a month for several hours) for knowledge sharing, peer mentoring, and support (Cox, 2013; Desrochers, 2010). Faculty learning communities initially emerged on most campuses to assist faculty with teaching roles (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013). Research has shown that faculty learning communities now address many needs and topics, ranging from teaching and technology to service-learning and work in diversity and inclusion (Fleming et al., 2015; O’Meara & Stromquist, 2015; Terosky, O’Meara, & Campbell, 2014). Faculty learning communities have been successful in developing strong ties between faculty when participants have frequent interactions and when there is mutual confiding and sharing of information (Kezar, 2014; Kilduff & Krackhardt, 2008; Tenkasi & Chesmore, 2003). This is particularly true when faculty learning communities are formed around certain identity groups and faculty roles (Bilimoria, Joy, & Liang, 2008; Cantor, 2011; O’Meara & Stromquist, 2015; Sturm, 2006).

Faculty learning communities formed to support women, URM, and NTT faculty have the potential to serve as restorative, safe spaces where faculty can find relief from being the “only” woman, URM faculty member, or NTT faculty member in a department or college (Núñez, Murakami, & Gonzales, 2015; O’Meara & Stromquist, 2015; Terosky et al., 2014). As cross-campus safe spaces, such groups are designed to have no evaluative components or competition. Instead, they have the ability to be liberatory because they provide a place to talk about struggles on the way toward advancement (Cantor, 2011; O’Meara & Stromquist, 2015).

## RESEARCH DESIGN

We used a qualitative case study approach to understand the institutional scripts of legitimacy that women, URM, and NTT faculty interpreted within their academic departments. We wanted to know the specific challenges faculty faced while trying to acquire professional legitimacy that they attributed to their gender, race, or appointment type. Conducting a qualitative case study allowed us to gain an “in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

### THE CASE

We conducted this study at Land Grant University (hereafter LGU, pseudonym), a large research-intensive institution with a budget of over \$500 million in research funds and a student population of over 38,000. LGU received a National Science Foundation (NSF) ADVANCE grant to focus on issues of equity in the retention and advancement of women and URM faculty. Before the start of LGU’s NSF ADVANCE program, institutional research was collected that showed significant differences between the career experiences of men and women faculty. LGU women assistant professors were less likely than men to be retained through tenure year. There was a longer time to advancement from associate to full professor for women than men. Women were also underrepresented in full professor roles, among recipients of distinguished research awards, and in department chair and research director positions. LGU institutional research also revealed a lower representation of URM faculty on campus than 10 years before. An institutional survey showed NTT faculty dissatisfaction with opportunities for professional growth and advancement, mentoring, and voice in shared governance.

During the first year of its existence, LGU’s ADVANCE program conducted a faculty work environment survey. Women, URM, and NTT faculty were significantly more likely than their male, White, and tenure-track peers, respectively, to note, “I have to work harder than colleagues to be considered a legitimate scholar” in their academic department.

Out of recognition that the institution faced serious challenges in retaining and/or advancing women, URM, and NTT faculty, LGU’s ADVANCE program decided to create faculty learning communities in partnership with the Provost’s Office and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. The ADVANCE program first initiated faculty learning communities to support women assistant, associate, and full professors, followed by communities for URM women and men assistant and associate professors, and, soon thereafter, a group for full-time NTT faculty (see Table 1). Participants

were recruited through an open call and voluntarily chose to join the learning community for one academic year. We collected data on the pursuit of legitimacy by studying the participants' experiences in these five faculty learning communities at LGU.

**Table 1. Detailed Description of Faculty Learning Communities**

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**Keeping Our Faculties (KOF)**

This faculty learning community brought together pretenure assistant professor women faculty with a facilitator to gain knowledge and skills that will aid them in their career advancement. Key areas of focus were preparation of the tenure dossier and personal narrative, networking, external funding, managing large classes and research labs, work-life balance, time management, managing service obligations, strategic communications training, and personal branding.

**Advancing Together**

This faculty learning community brought together associate professor women faculty with a facilitator to gain knowledge and skills that could help them advance to full professor. Key areas of focus were preparation of the tenure dossier and personal narrative, networking, ramping up external funding, managing large classes and research labs, work-life balance, time management, managing service obligations, strategic communications training, and personal branding.

**ADVANCE Professors**

This faculty learning community brought together full professor women faculty who agreed to mentor assistant and associate women faculty in their college. There was also a professional development aspect for the women full professors themselves. They worked together as a cohort to transform college and university structures and cultures to better retain and advance women faculty. Key areas of focus were mentoring, workload, recognition, teaching, research and publishing, work-life policies and awareness, implicit bias, and management of conflict and service responsibilities.

**Advancing Faculty Diversity (AFD)**

This faculty learning community brought together assistant and associate men and women faculty of color with two facilitators. Key areas of focus were preparation of the tenure dossier and personal narrative, networking, ramping up external funding, managing large classes and research labs, work-life balance, time management, managing service obligations, strategic communications training, and personal branding, with a particular focus on challenges faced in these areas for faculty of color.

**Advancing Professional Track Faculty (APTF)**

This faculty learning community brought together full-time non-tenure-track faculty with a senior non-tenure-track faculty member and administrator from the Office of Faculty Affairs. Professional development sessions centered on preparation of materials for promotion within the non-tenure-track faculty ranks, networking, external funding, managing large classes and research labs, work-life balance, time management, managing service obligations, strategic communications training, and personal branding, with a particular focus on challenges faced in these areas for non-tenure-track faculty.

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## FACULTY LEARNING COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

Each faculty learning community was set up as a yearlong professional development program. Throughout the year, participants attended monthly two-hour sessions on every part of the faculty career, from teaching to research productivity, self-promotion, networking, and time management. As participants entered the room for each session, they saw that coffee, bagels, and fruit or lunch and drinks were provided. Tables and chairs in the room were set up in a circle. Place cards showed names but not formal titles. We observed that participants learned each other's names early in the first semester. After the first few sessions, participants entered the room with smiles on their faces, greeted each other, and helped themselves to coffee or lunch. Body language and discourse in greeting suggested that participants wanted to be there and looked forward to sessions. For example, participants said in greeting each other, "It is so good to be here, I have been waiting for this all week," or "It is great to take a break and focus on me for a while." When it was time to start the session, participants put away cell phones, leaned back in their chairs, and directed their attention to the facilitator of the meeting.

A facilitator, who was of the same identity group or appointment type as participants (woman, URM, or NTT) but more advanced in his or her career than most participants (full professor woman or URM faculty member, senior lecturer) led each faculty learning community. The first hour of each session typically featured guest speakers who held expertise on the professional development topic. When possible, facilitators invited faculty of the same rank or gender, or URM faculty to be guest speakers. In the second hour, facilitators engaged the faculty participants in discussion about assigned readings and used case studies or other short exercises to help participants move forward in the professional development area discussed that day.

## PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

The primary method of data collection in this study was participant observations. The first author had unique access to study and attend faculty learning community meetings as part of an administrative and social science team connected to the ADVANCE program. The third author likewise conducted observations as a research assistant working on the social science study team. The second author acted as a critical friend and then researcher, analyzing participant observation data collected by the other two authors. Collectively, the authors engaged in participant observations of five faculty learning communities at one research university for

five years (see Table 1). Neither the first author nor the third author served in a leadership role at the faculty learning community meetings where they observed. Participants granted permission to observe meetings and report out results in aggregate for research purposes as part of an informed consent process for each faculty learning community, with university IRB approval.

In participant observation, the researcher takes part in activities of a group to learn about members' lives and cultures from their perspective (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). A strength of this method is that "observations put researchers right where the action is" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 29–30). We observed learning community meetings where faculty discussed their own career experiences on different topics—such as time management, self-promotion, negotiation, and work–life balance—while finding resonance with others having similar experiences. We took both descriptive and reflective notes using a semistructured observation protocol (Creswell, 2007). This protocol cued us to listen for the experiences faculty shared related to pursuing legitimacy in their home departments, including the challenges they faced in achieving recognition, legitimacy, and approval from professional colleagues. We also noted interactions between participants, and between the faculty members and facilitators or guest speakers. Our literature review and the kinds of "institutionalized scripts for legitimacy" (Gonzales, 2014, p. 199) that previous research found present in research university cultures informed our note taking. However, our protocol was open-ended enough to allow us to record other themes that emerged from discussions as well. For example, our literature review cued our attention to how autonomy is assumed to be both a contributor to and a product of legitimacy (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Gonzales, 2013, 2015; Gonzales et al., 2014). We had not, however, considered the ways in which a department chair asking faculty members to change their teaching style might signal to the faculty members that they lacked legitimacy in their department (one example of a note taken during observations). Thus, our protocol allowed us to make observations related to our research questions, while also being open to data emerging in ways we had not anticipated (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

A drawback of observations is the potential for misinterpreted comments. Observations are, therefore, best used alongside other data sources from the same participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In an effort to achieve this balance, we conducted focus groups with each of the faculty learning communities during the last session each spring. In these focus group sessions, we asked faculty about their experiences in their home departments and the faculty learning communities. In addition, we shared initial findings from our research with participants to get their reactions

and feedback. Our study database included not only (a) what we, as participant observers, noted based on conversations we heard and interactions we witnessed during meetings, but also (b) what participants themselves shared during focus groups about their experiences in regard to pursuing legitimacy (see Table 2 for a description of all data sources).

**Table 2. Faculty Learning Community Descriptions and Data Collected**

Cohort	Number of Participants	Number of Observations	Focus Groups
Keeping Our Faculties program description: Yearlong network of pretenure assistant professor women created to enhance agency in career advancement (meets monthly for 2 hours).			
2011–2012	11	5 of 8 meetings	
2012–2013	18	7 of 10 meetings	
2013–2014	16	8 of 10 meetings	5 focus groups
2014–2015	24	6 of 9 meetings	
2015–2016	20	5 of 9 meetings	
Advancing Together program description: Two-day workshop for women associate professors created to enhance agency in career advancement to full professor.			
Winter, 2012	16		
2013	12		
2014	12	All the workshops, for all	5 focus groups
2015	18	4 runs of the program	
2016	20		
ADVANCE Professors program description: Yearlong network of women full professors created to enhance their agency as college leaders and mentors as well as provide a set of mentors for junior faculty.			
Spring, 2011	13	5 of 5 meetings	
2011–2012	13	6 of 9 meetings	
2012–2013	13	6 of 9 meetings	
2013–2014	10	7 of 9 meetings	6 focus groups
2014–2015	11	10 of 10 meetings	
2015–2016	11	9 of 10 meetings	
Advancing Faculty Diversity program description: Yearlong network of assistant faculty of color (men and women) created to enhance agency in career advancement.			
2013–2014	21	9 of 9 meetings	
2014–2015	14	7 of 9 meetings	3 focus groups
2015–2016	12	6 of 9 meetings	
Advancing Professional Track Faculty program description: Yearlong learning community of full-time non-tenure-track (men and women) created to enhance agency in career advancement.			
2014–2015	24	7 of 9 meetings	1 focus group
2015–2016	25	6 of 9 meetings	2 focus groups
2016–2017	22	5 of 9 meetings	1 focus group

## DATA ANALYSIS

The coding process for the analysis of participant observations was iterative and involved “thematic memoing” on the research question topics (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Consistent with norms of qualitative inquiry, we began by reading and rereading all the transcripts and focus group data. We then began to code these documents where there were data corresponding to the research questions. For example, we marked places on all transcripts where participants noted endorsements made or kept by colleagues (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). We then looked for any natural themes or groupings among these instances and categorized the comments about legitimacy into four categories. Participants in faculty learning communities experienced legitimacy as having your professional colleagues (a) act as if you belong among them; (b) recognize the merit of your research or scholarship; (c) provide you autonomy in teaching, research, and advising and; (d) seek out and value your voice in decision making. Next, we went through all the same excerpts we had coded into the four categories and marked those where participants stated they were challenged in obtaining that form of legitimacy based on their gender, race and ethnicity, or NTT appointment type. Table 3 provides examples of illustrative quotes from all three rounds of coding.

Trustworthiness was strengthened by collecting data from multiple sources (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), being transparent with participants about the purposes and reporting of results (Maxwell, 2012), and having each of the three authors separately analyze data to develop themes before joining to compare conclusions. We engaged in member checking by providing participants with a summary of themes from participant observations during end-of-year focus groups. We invited participants to confirm or correct themes presented in the summary. We further provided all participants anonymity and masked their identity by not pairing discipline and program name within the text. Collecting data over five years and including multiple cohorts of several faculty learning communities and a high number of participant observations increased our ability to achieve saturation in key themes (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

**Table 3. Illustrative Quotes From Coding Rounds**

Theme	Illustrative quote
1st round of coding	
Endorsement made by colleagues of faculty	<p>“[The faculty learning community] was also wonderful to have the opportunity to network with other women faculty and to be able to share and discuss in a friendly, nonjudgmental setting.”</p> <p>“It’s freeing when you talk about issues of microaggressions among people of color because you get the support—with others, you are concerned you won’t get the support.”</p>
Endorsement not made by colleagues of faculty	<p>“We live in a culture of not enough. And I feel like I am doing concrete things to move forward but when I meet with my research mentor they’re asking me each time what have you published, how is your research, it makes me feel this big.”</p> <p>A full professor shared with other senior women that she was frustrated she constantly gets asked to be on committees, but “just to keep the seat warm.” Her opinion was not valued and was “shut down.”</p>
2nd round of coding	
Colleagues do not act as if you belong among them	<p>A participant from the faculty learning community for senior professors shared that she would eat with fellow colleagues who would open up their lunches and say, “Oh, I wonder what my wife packed for me today.” As the only woman at the table, with a working husband, she was unable to relate to this shared experience.</p>
Colleagues do not recognize the merit of your research/ scholarship	<p>A female faculty member of color shared that she and a White male colleague were both up for a fellowship. When she received the fellowship, he said to her, “They must have been looking for a woman.”</p>
Colleagues do not provide you autonomy in teaching, research, and advising	<p>A department chair asked one faculty member of color to “adjust her teaching style” because White students were complaining that they felt uncomfortable in her class, which discussed issues of race.</p>
Colleagues do not seek out or value your opinion and voice in decision making	<p>A non-tenure-track faculty member described a curricular decision made by the tenure-track faculty and dean in their college without non-tenure-track faculty participation, even though the decision disproportionately affected non-tenure-track faculty.</p>
3rd round of coding	
Challenges in obtaining legitimacy based on gender, race and ethnicity, or appointment type	<p>“It is subtle but real; there is an assumption that because the [federal agency] director is African American, my X amount in grants was because ‘we were buddies.’”</p> <p>A non-tenure-track faculty member shared, “There are things that are done at [Land Grant University] that make you feel like a second-class citizen.”</p> <p>Senior women professors shared that when they tried to highlight sexist practices in their department, they were “framed as troublemakers.” One participant shared, “I don’t want to become toxic— as if you say the environment is toxic, you will become toxic in others’ eyes.”</p>

## FINDINGS

Faculty participants in learning communities shared strong, common understandings of professional legitimacy. To be legitimate in their departments and colleges was to be included and to belong, to have earned one's position based on merit, to be granted autonomy by supervisors and senior colleagues, and to have a say in decision-making in the organization. Women, URM, and NTT faculty participants expressed frustration about how hard it was to acquire legitimacy from colleagues at LGU. Participants described multiple ways in which they felt their gender, race, and/or appointment type got in the way of achieving legitimacy.

### INCLUSION AND BELONGING

*Women, URM, and NTT faculty understood professional legitimacy as being included by, and belonging among, colleagues.* Participants in faculty learning communities experienced legitimacy as being a valued member of a guild or tribe, ensconced organizationally in a department. Yet repeatedly, women, URM, and NTT faculty shared experiences of how they felt excluded and dismissed by department colleagues. In most cases, such experiences stemmed from a lack of critical mass of women, URM, or NTT faculty. This created a sense that our faculty participants were "other" by virtue of not being from a dominant group or rank.

The feeling of being the "only" woman or URM faculty member in departments was common and contributed to a sense of not belonging among colleagues. One senior professor woman told the story of feeling different when department colleagues would eat lunch together. She would sit down to eat with colleagues who would open up their lunches and say "Oh, I wonder what my wife packed for me today." As the only woman at the table, with a working husband, she was unable to relate to this shared experience. Likewise, another senior professor told her faculty learning community about her experience of being the only woman in a meeting where a new program that might be initiated was discussed. The senior professor shared that her colleagues, all men, said that the program was not needed by "us" but rather by "them." In this context, "them" meant women and URM faculty who might not be "making it." Among our participants, URM women were especially conscious of feeling different from other members in their departments. A woman of color faculty member shared that she would often look around at department meetings and other department events and not see anyone who looked like her. "I'm the only person of color," she explained, "or at least the only person that you can see is a person of color." Being in the minority, she was often uncomfortable speaking up, but later she would get angry with herself for not participating.

NTT faculty felt isolation in an extreme way. At the first meeting of the faculty learning community meeting for NTT faculty, two participants, who were sitting next to each other, realized that they were actually in different divisions of the same department. Despite working on campus for two years, they had never met. The department they worked in was compartmentalized, and the division of labor in the college kept faculty isolated. Faculty said that not knowing others who were NTT faculty and had similar job responsibilities made them feel disconnected from the department community. One NTT participant said she sought opportunities “to interact with people like [her]” within her department, but there were no other NTT faculty there. As a result, she also “struggled to find good mentors,” thus perpetuating feelings of isolation and preventing a sense of inclusion in the department community. NTT faculty also shared that they felt different from tenure-track department colleagues by virtue of having different levels of job security and opportunities for professional development.

Layered into the desire to feel included was faculty interest in obtaining an “average” level of visibility among colleagues. Participants said they observed faculty colleagues in dominant groups who were widely considered legitimate. They did not experience these colleagues as either invisible or hypervisible. Yet our participants felt as if their gender, race, or appointment type fostered both invisibility and hypervisibility in their social interactions with colleagues. For example, one member of the faculty learning community for assistant and associate URM faculty missed a department meeting and said she immediately received condemnation from colleagues—from faculty to administrators and staff. She shared that she was told this incident caused a “crack in others’ perceptions of me,” suggesting that her credibility was now in question. “I am already female, young, [name of race and ethnicity] . . . and vulnerable in every way.” She said that White attendees absent from those meetings did not seem to face the same level of scrutiny; they could miss meetings and no one noticed. Of course, our participant was only privy to how she was treated, not others. However, such experiences prevented her from feeling like one of the group, as she believed that different standards governed her behavior when compared to others. With this perception came additional pressure. She said, “You just feel like you have to be good all of the time.” As she shared this story, other participants nodded their heads, expressed agreement, and then began to tell similar stories from their departments.

In all these examples, our participants described themselves as “the only one” and felt colleagues categorized them as the “other.” Participants reported feeling both invisible and hypervisible at the same time, which led them to question whether they belonged in their departments and colleges. Faculty felt that interactions of exclusions and others identifying them as different thwarted their efforts to obtain career legitimacy.

## MERIT

*Women, URM, and NTT faculty understood professional legitimacy as obtaining recognition, positions, and advancement based on merit.* An assumption embedded in learning community discussions was that a key way to advance in one's career and obtain legitimacy is to make significant contributions in teaching, research, and service. For example, at the beginning of a meeting, after a faculty member had shared a new paper or grant, the facilitator or a peer in the room would often say, "Well, that will help with getting tenure." Others would smile and nod in agreement that this new accolade would help the faculty member advance. Faculty participants also expressed the widely held assumption in academe (Lawrence et al., 2014; Tierney & Rhoads, 2004), as well as in much of American society (Ayree, Chen, & Budhwar, 2004; Rubin, 2007), that it is considered illegitimate, even wrong, to obtain recognition or career advancement based on preferential treatment. Yet, our faculty participants felt colleagues believed that they received positions or noteworthy achievements for reasons other than merit. Faculty experienced these "suspicions" as lessening the credibility of their accolades, and thus their legitimacy.

Women and URM faculty members described many situations in which colleagues questioned whether their achievements were based on the merit of their work. For example, a woman faculty member of color said that she and a White male colleague both applied for a fellowship. She shared that when she received the fellowship, she told a group of colleagues standing near a water cooler. The colleague who told our participant that he had also applied for the fellowship said to her, "They must have been looking for a woman." The woman faculty member was shocked. She said to fellow participants that she later realized that she would have needed twice the accomplishments for him not to think that. She also had the distinct feeling that her colleague was thinking not just about her gender, but also about her race. It was not the first time her accomplishments were tied to her race or gender, but what appeared to stun her most was that her colleague made the comment to her face. She said, "The fact that he said that—he must have thought that was okay." Likewise, a URM man shared an experience of receiving a large federal grant in a very competitive review process. He said colleagues in his department similarly discredited his grant success to his face: "It is subtle but real; there is an assumption that because the [federal agency] director is African American, my [X amount] in grants was because 'we were buddies.'" This URM faculty member went on to say how frustrating it was to have achieved something so difficult and have it dismissed by someone who assumed he was friends with all reviewers—which, of course, was impossible. As participants listened

to these stories, there was visible disbelief. They had open mouths, shook their heads, sighed, and looked frustrated.

Women and URM faculty also mentioned being told by colleagues to make sure they did not look like they had “hitched their wagon” to a specific colleague with similar identity characteristics. Women and URM faculty said they did not believe the same caution was given to White or male colleagues. They interpreted the perceived differential warning to mean their own abilities were more suspect than those of their colleagues. In preparing a list of potential reviewers, one URM faculty member mentioned being encouraged not to submit names of other URM reviewers even though several of the best reviewers in that disciplinary area were URM faculty. Other URM faculty in the room confirmed that the same advice had been given to them, signaling a different level of trust or surveillance over their promotion and tenure process. Although these faculty were not privy to other cases, they had not heard of White faculty being encouraged to make sure there were not too many White faculty on reviewer lists.

The question of whether participants had acquired merit in appropriate ways was most prevalent for women and URM participants in faculty learning communities. NTT faculty also struggled with perceptions of merit, but in a different way. On multiple occasions, NTT faculty shared stories of not being allowed to compete for large research awards because there was an assumption by colleagues that their proposal would not be as good as proposals of tenure-track colleagues. NTT faculty shared that they were encouraged not to “waste their time” applying. Our NTT participants further shared that when they received a grant, their achievement was not celebrated and made visible like those of their tenure-track colleagues, even when of the same level of prestige.

The NTT faculty participants in our learning community seemed to feel as if the fact that they were in a NTT position alone suggested to tenure-track faculty that they had failed to achieve a higher position by merit. Several participants indicated to each other that they *could* have obtained a tenure-track position, given that they write more than enough, but they chose this path “intentionally.” It was clear that NTT faculty felt the need to legitimize their expertise and decision to pursue NTT roles to the group. At the same time, during the first meetings of the learning community for NTT faculty, there was a pattern in the introductions where participants would say, “I am JUST . . . a lecturer, or researcher.” NTT faculty had clearly been socialized to understand their NTT status meant “less accomplished than” tenure-track status. They wanted to clarify that they were not claiming to be anything more than what they were. The facilitator interrupted this pattern by noting they were not “just” anything,

but important members of the university community doing vital work. We observed that in response to the facilitator's comment, participants smiled, shared embarrassed looks, and showed signs of relief.

In sum, women and URM faculty said they often felt that their achievements were dismissed because others seemed to believe they benefitted from preferential treatment. This resulted in two outcomes: (a) it diminished the sense of accomplishment faculty felt in their achievements, and (b) faculty felt it made it harder for them to earn legitimacy among colleagues. NTT faculty experienced the very nature of their position type as shaping colleagues' perception of them and any accolades they acquired. The lack of recognition of their accomplishments and professional contributions left NTT faculty feeling as if they were at a disadvantage in trying to earn professional legitimacy in departments.

## AUTONOMY

*Women, URM, and NTT faculty understood professional legitimacy as being granted autonomy and discretion over their work.* Participants shared stories of faculty in their departments whom they saw as very successful. These colleagues were considered good teachers, recognized as "star" scholars, and considered highly productive. In describing one such colleague, a faculty member in the learning community for assistant professor women said, "Oh, he does whatever he wants. He is given a wide berth because he is a 'star.'" Faculty associated legitimacy and career success with autonomy. This was both an observation about the rewards of earning legitimacy and a reflection on how the system worked. In other words, legitimacy explained who received autonomy. In the mentioned case, the participants were discussing workload and why a senior colleague might not be asked to serve in an administrative role. Our woman assistant professor, on the other hand, was asked to serve in this administrative role. She experienced the request as reflective of her status in the hierarchy of her department and the relative lack of autonomy (and thereby legitimacy) she held. A common theme in our findings was that women, URM, and NTT faculty felt that colleagues did not respect their work and that they held lower positions in the status hierarchy of their departments. This experience of lower levels of legitimacy was associated with perceived scrutiny and oversight of their work.

Faculty learning community participants shared many experiences wherein they felt that their work was not respected. They attributed this lack of respect to their gender, race, or appointment type. For example, one woman assistant professor said, "We live in a culture of not enough. And I feel like I am doing concrete things to move forward but when I

meet with my research mentor, [he] is asking me each time what have you published, how is your research. It makes me feel this big.” The research mentor here may have had good intentions in asking the participant about her work. In fact, asking such questions could be considered part of the mentor role. However, the dynamic of the senior person asking the junior person each time they met what she had produced seemed to suggest to the junior person that she had failed or not done enough if she did not have multiple publications to report. The woman assistant professor further explained that she would have preferred the “benefit of the doubt.” She wanted the senior faculty member to assume that she was working hard and producing good work and to not ask her about output. Rather, she would have preferred to discuss her ideas. She, and other faculty in all three groups, experienced legitimacy as involving an assumption of good work and productivity rather than surveillance or the need to prove oneself. Our woman assistant professor shared that she felt the implication of the question was that she was not doing “enough”—yet she did not know what “enough” was. She and other participants wanted the discretion and autonomy to decide on their own what was enough and not be asked to justify it to others.

Legitimacy was connected to autonomy for our participants in other ways as well. For example, a department chair asked one participant of the URM faculty learning community to “adjust her teaching style.” She told colleagues that her department chair said White students were complaining that they felt uncomfortable when she discussed issues of race in her class. As the URM faculty member told this story, she appeared deflated and frustrated. She said she was concerned that her students were resisting important discussions about race as it related to the content of the class. She was an expert in this area and well prepared to respond to biases students brought to the classroom. What was more stressful for our participant was the department chair’s reaction to student complaints. She would have preferred that he trust her expertise as a teacher with experience in discussing sensitive issues of race in the classroom. Instead, she experienced his request, which came without any discussion, as calling her existing practice “wrong” or illegitimate and in need of change. This action seemed to encroach on her autonomy to design her classroom space. Our participant also felt it disrespected her legitimacy as a scholar and teacher in this area. Another faculty member in the room responded by saying, “That is terrible, he should have had your back.” Another participant likewise empathized and tried to help the participant strategize next steps with the department chair.

NTT faculty felt that their lack of job security limited their autonomy and discretion over their work. For example, during a faculty learning

community meeting, a NTT faculty participant shared, “[I constantly felt like I] had to watch my back . . . because tenure-track jobs are protected but in budget cuts we [NTT faculty] are expendable.” This left her feeling that she had to say yes to everything she was asked to do, which left her little ability to set her own priorities or have autonomy in how to shape her career. Others in the group showed that this predicament resonated with them by nodding and contributing to these comments with similar ones of their own.

For NTT faculty, autonomy was also linked to recognition for research. NTT faculty research scientists noted research accomplishments that they felt were not recognized. For example, one NTT faculty member shared that she had sent notice of a new publication to her associate chair more than five times. The associate chair refused to share her accomplishment with the department, despite doing so for tenure-track faculty members’ “good news.” Colleagues in the learning community nodded and indicated that the same thing had happened to them. Another participant noted that department funding for conferences was given to tenure-track faculty over NTT faculty, even if both were presenting research. In this way, NTT faculty experienced recognition and autonomy as linked. If they could not get credit for their research from colleagues, it was harder to obtain resources to present it at conferences. Presenting at conferences was important for recognition of the work in their departments, thus creating a cycle of disadvantage.

NTT faculty often mentioned situations in which they felt that tenure-track faculty members were prioritized in the distribution of department resources and opportunities. One participant of the NTT faculty learning community shared, “There are people like me, who have so many skills, but opportunities come up and it is like we are invisible.” Another NTT participant said that this lack of support and recognition makes NTT faculty “feel like a second-class citizen.” It also limited their ability to have discretion over their work, set their own priorities, and be engaged in work of interest to them.

Overall, we found that faculty experienced a lack of respect for their work, perceived scrutiny, a lack of recognition of their accomplishments, and a lack of resources. Participants shared that this made them feel as if they were not legitimate members of their departments. Faculty often felt that the lack of autonomy and discretion granted to them was related to their gender, race and ethnicity, and/or appointment type. Participants felt colleagues and supervisors made assumptions about their ability to legitimately contribute important work based on social identity groups and ranks.

## DECISION MAKING

*Women, URM, and NTT faculty understood professional legitimacy as having valued opinions and a voice in decision making.* Faculty participants talked about social interactions and clout in their departments frequently. It was clear to them that certain faculty members' opinions mattered more in their departments. These individuals were, not surprisingly, also the faculty our participants strongly associated with legitimacy, prestige, and stature.

Women and URM faculty often said that they felt excluded from decision-making processes or that their opinions were valued less than those of their peers. For example, a member of the faculty learning community for assistant and associate URM faculty shared that she was often asked to serve on department or college committees to "keep the seat warm." She said that other committee members did not value her opinions and frequently "shut down" her suggestions. Other faculty learning community participants reported similar symbolic but not authentic participation in decision making. In this way, participants felt that they were receiving signals that their views were not valuable. At times, assistant professor women and URM faculty questioned whether this disregard for their views was due to their being new or young, but they frequently reverted to feeling that it was related to their gender and race instead.

Women in the full professor learning community were less likely to mention exclusion from overall department decision making. However, senior women professors shared that they often felt silenced when they raised gender equity concerns. Women senior professors said that when they tried to highlight sexist practices in their department, they were "framed as troublemakers." One participant shared, "I don't want to become toxic—as if you say the environment is toxic, you will become toxic in others' eyes." Many of these women cared deeply about improving department and college work environments for women faculty. They had years of experience as mentors. Yet they said they often felt their experience was untapped and unwanted.

Participants also discussed tenure as a way to earn "a seat at the table" of decision making in programs with tenure-track faculty. NTT faculty shared that they felt their appointment type limited their ability to have a voice on committees or a vote in department decisions. For example, one NTT member said that when he suggested changing the course schedule in a department meeting, colleagues did not listen to his view because he was "just" a NTT faculty member. At another faculty learning community meeting, a NTT faculty member described a curricular decision made by the tenure-track faculty and dean in their college without NTT faculty participation, even though the decision disproportionately

affected NTT faculty. A different NTT faculty member had experienced similar situations of not having her voice heard when important issues were discussed. This NTT faculty member said, “We are facing a situation where we are working against a culture that views us only as NTT, against the backdrop of tenure track.” In this culture, NTT faculty participants felt incapable of having their voices heard or being involved in decisions that affected them.

Overall, we found that women, URM, and NTT faculty felt that their inability to have their voice heard was related to their gender, race, and appointment type. Faculty who felt silenced, excluded, or otherwise invisible during decision-making processes did not see how they could participate in the life of the department.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Women, URM, and NTT faculty participating in faculty learning communities understood professional legitimacy as associated with belonging, merit, autonomy, and voice in decision making. Faculty described efforts to achieve professional legitimacy by following implicit and explicit rules of behavior (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). They looked to colleagues for endorsements and signals as they went about both unusual and everyday kinds of activities. For example, faculty described winning competitive awards and grants, serving on search committees, and eating lunch with colleagues. As they engaged in such activities, faculty participants described situations where the normal rules of behavior, or those for legitimation, did not seem to apply to them. This left faculty wondering if colleague endorsements were withheld because they had done something wrong in pursuing professional legitimacy. Yet in most cases, participants concluded that endorsements were withheld and legitimation did not occur because of their gender, race, or appointment type. Participants perceived that their status as an out-group member to a dominant group (e.g., dominant groups were male, White, and/or tenure-track faculty within their departments or colleges) constrained their ability to achieve professional legitimacy.

Faculty had a strong sense that professional legitimacy involved belonging and inclusion. Two sides exist to this aspect of professional legitimacy. Faculty looked for cues, signals, and interactions from colleagues that suggested they belonged in the department community—that they were “one of them.” However, participants also expressed professional legitimacy as an internal feeling. Participants made their own assessments of “fit” and belonging based on interactions with colleagues. Unfortunately, women, URM, and NTT faculty reported that they were often described as “them”

rather than as “us” by colleagues, and they faced issues of invisibility as well as hypervisibility. For example, a senior woman faculty member noted sitting with colleagues who openly referred to “us” versus “them,” where “us” did not include her. In another example, NTT faculty described being the only person in such an appointment type in their department. NTT faculty described being told by tenure-track colleagues that their experiences were different because they did not have to live with the reality of the traditional tenure system. As participants shared these experiences in learning community meetings, it was clear that they reinforced a sense of isolation and a lack of belonging, as evidenced by the nodding, sighing in empathy, and follow-up comments of other participants in the room.

Faculty also understood that one way to earn professional legitimacy was to obtain fellowships, awards, or grants. Typically these accolades were competitive and peer reviewed. Thus, obtaining them would be one way to establish high-quality work. Such behavior conforms to expectations of merit and prestige found in previous work (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Gonzales & Rincones, 2012; Gonzales & Terosky, 2016). However, URM and women faculty described instances in which colleagues seemed to associate their grants and awards with a kind of affirmative action or favoritism by gender or race. In one example, a woman of color was awarded a prominent fellowship and said that a White male colleague commented that the awards committee must have been looking for a woman. Because White male identity is considered a normative faculty identity, it was not likely that colleagues would doubt the merit of the same awards when received by White male colleagues (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012).

Faculty also understood professional legitimacy as associated with autonomy and voice in decision making. Consistent with previous research, faculty felt that those who had less professional legitimacy within their departments and colleges experienced more surveillance of their activities and had less say in decisions over resources (Bourdieu, 1988; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). Women, URM, and NTT faculty members described interactions with colleagues and department chairs that diminished their autonomy and limited their voice and power in decision making. For example, a NTT faculty member said that he was not allowed to have a voice in curricular matters that impacted him. In another case, a woman faculty member felt she was asked to sit on a search committee to keep the “seat warm” rather than for her contributions. In each of these cases, faculty felt that their identity and rank shaped these interactions and prevented them from accessing these aspects of professional legitimacy.

Admittedly, the experiences reported in our study come only from one perspective—that of women, URM, and NTT faculty trying to earn professional legitimacy. However, these experiences are consistent with what

has been found in many experimental studies in social psychology: that implicit biases, especially by gender and race, often shape perceptions of faculty accomplishments, identification of individuals as competent, and professional interactions (Corinne et al., 2012; Grunspan et al., 2016; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Kang et al., 2016; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2013; Moss-Racusin et al., 2016; Steinpreis et al., 1999). Although less experimental work has been done to establish the prevalence of rankist bias against NTT faculty in higher education institutions, research in organizational settings has shown that implicit bias is often “selective” and “hierarchical.” People in lower prestige or lower rank positions are more vulnerable to implicit bias and exclusionary behavior because people are less likely to fear retaliation or negative consequences for acting with bias (Ashburn-Nardo, Blanchar, Peterson, Morris, & Goodwin, 2014; Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013; Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015). Our findings are consistent with previous studies showing NTT faculty often feel like they are treated as second-class citizens in American research universities (see for example Feldman & Turnley, 2001; Hart, 2011; Kezar & Maxey, 2016; Purcell, 2007).

Recent research has marked inequalities experienced by women and URM faculty in hiring processes (Moss-Racusin et al., 2016; Sheltzer & Smith, 2014; Steinpreis et al., 1999), women’s time spent on teaching and campus service (Misra, Lundquist, Holmes, & Agiomavritis, 2011; O’Meara, Kuvaeva, & Nyunt, 2017; Winslow, 2010), receipt of grants (Jagsi, Motomura, Griffith, Rangarajan, & Ubel, 2009; Ley & Hamilton, 2008), and nonblind peer review of research (Budden et al., 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2013). In this study, we “mark” how inequality can be maintained through professional interactions with colleagues. As was evident in the experiences of our participants, most of these professional interactions were “unscripted” or open to subjective interpretation and spontaneous responses (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 525). Yet, it was in these moments of sharing good news, serving on search committees, eating lunch with colleagues, and feeling hypervisible or invisible in department meetings that faculty were trying to earn, and interpret, their professional legitimacy. Colleagues who refused or withheld endorsements likely did not realize that they had done so. Likewise, department colleagues were likely unaware that by identifying the faculty member as “other” by way of gender, race, or rank, they signaled a lack of belonging. Yet, these improvised, unscripted moments constrained faculty sense of career agency.

Professional interactions, and the role they play in recruitment, retention, and professional legitimation, are an important area for future research. In this study, we examined professional interactions as described by women, URM, and NTT faculty over five years. However, such work

should be complemented by experimental studies that “catch” biased professional interactions as they are happening in systematic ways. Two studies are illustrative of this style. Holleran, Whitehead, Schmader, and Mehl (2010) examined workplace conversations of female and male STEM faculty using an electronically activated recorder and found that women and men were less likely to discuss research with women colleagues in hallways and impromptu meetings. After video-recording 119 job talks for engineering faculty, Blair-Loy et al. (2017) found that women candidates were interrupted more than men candidates. Engaging with colleagues about their research is a sign of professional respect, whereas interrupting candidates while they are speaking can be taken as a sign of disrespect. Our findings, in concert with these studies, suggest that professional interactions are a critical place where professional legitimacy is earned, signaled, and diminished. It is therefore important to examine the informal, less scripted aspects of work life when looking to improve work environments and cultures (Roos & Gatta, 2009). A recent study underscores the importance of professional interactions for retention and satisfaction as well. Mackey (2017) conducted a survey study of associate professors from 50 universities and found that professional interactions in the work environment served as a key explanatory factor in faculty’s organizational commitment and satisfaction, as well as their intent to leave.

We identify several implications for practice. Over the five years we conducted observations, we heard very few instances in which participants recalled a colleague stepping in and trying to disrupt or mitigate a situation where perceived bias was occurring. Research has shown that colleagues who are aware of implicit bias and ways in which it can shape behavior can be powerful allies (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014). In fact, there will be less backlash if someone who is unaffected by the biased statement steps in to correct the situation, as compared with the targeted person responding (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). Because many of the professional interactions described occur without prior planning, it is extremely important to raise collective awareness of implicit bias and develop strategies to avoid or address it.

Implicit bias workshops for entire department faculties offer ways to create more inclusive work environments. Examples of such programs include bias workshops like those conducted at the University of Wisconsin (Carnes et al., 2015) and Montana State University (J. L. Smith, Handley, Zale, Rushing, & Potvin Smith, 2015), as well as ally programs like those at the University of Michigan (Stewart, La Vaque-Manty, & Malley, 2004), North Dakota State University (Bilen-Green, Birmingham, Burnett, & Green, 2010), and West Virginia University (DeFrank-Cole, Latimer, Reed, & Wheatly, 2014). In such programs, senior or midcareer majority faculty

are trained to recognize bias as it occurs in everyday professional interactions and to intervene to reduce its effects. Such actions move from awareness of biases to greater departmental accountability for removing bias from interactions between colleagues, distribution of resources, and performance evaluation processes.

A second implication relates to the cumulative short- and long-term consequences of working in academic environments where one perceives discrimination based on a marginalized identity. Hurtado, Eagan, Pryor, Whang, and Tran (2012) found that women are twice as likely as men to report experiencing stress due to subtle discrimination, and Black faculty are 2 1/2 times as likely. This work is the latest in a long line of studies to show that experiences of out-group discrimination over time cause health problems, dissatisfaction, and faculty departure (Gardner, 2012; Griffin et al., 2011; Stout et al., 2007; Thomas, O'Meara, & Espy-Wilson, 2014). Subtle discrimination is often more pernicious than overt expressions of racism, sexism, or rankism because such discrimination can be ambiguous, leaving the individual with self-doubt and wondering if the slight was based on his or her actual work performance or other characteristic such as gender, race, or appointment type (Sue et al., 2007). Although basic working conditions such as salary and job security have been the primary rallying calls of faculty unions, coalitions like The New Faculty Majority and more recent NTT organizing efforts have emphasized a need for greater professional legitimacy of NTT faculty and their career paths (Hoeller, 2014; Kezar & Maxey, 2016; The New Faculty Majority, 2014).

A third implication of our findings relates to the site of our research: faculty learning communities. Much like efforts to create blind orchestra auditions to reduce gender bias (Goldin & Rouse, 2000), or double-blind review to reduce bias in evaluation of scholarship (Budden et al., 2008), faculty learning communities were fashioned to create different kinds of spaces from the departments where our faculty participants worked. The structure of faculty learning communities and the internal dynamics within them created positive conditions for legitimation. For example, the faculty learning communities we studied were created with an acknowledgment of the marginalization of each group and thus were fashioned so members could be in the majority by gender, race, or appointment type. Being in the majority, even in just this one setting, seemed to add to participants' sense of belonging. Participants also seemed to wonder less frequently if others attributed their professional accomplishments to affirmative action or would dismiss their accomplishments because of rank. This was thanks to interactions with facilitators who shared identities and roles with them and were successful in their careers.

Though faculty learning communities provided alternative conditions for women, URM, and NTT faculty, they did not remove delegitimizing experiences in departments and colleges. On one hand, it could be argued that by providing safe spaces for faculty to recover from bias, faculty learning communities support the transformation of academic spaces to better include all faculty (Cantor, 2011; O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015). However, other than the faculty learning community for women full professors, where members of the faculty learning community also served as senior mentors in their colleges, faculty learning communities were not designed to enhance participant professional legitimacy in their department in any meaningful way. Faculty learning communities could not serve this purpose because the kind of professional legitimacy sought was, by definition, based on endorsements and approvals from other faculty in participants' departments. Department colleagues and supervisors were the primary individuals who could provide respect for their work, allow autonomy, and ask for their input. In this case, their department operated as a critical "valuing system" (O'Meara, 2011b). When faculty performance was underestimated or deemed to not be enough, and when faculty were excluded from a sense of belonging in their departments based on invisibility or hypervisibility, it meant that they could not access the legitimacy they sought. Faculty learning communities did not directly disrupt this culture. Therefore, although faculty learning communities can help marginalized groups overcome oppressive work environments as they seek legitimacy, they do not change the primary ecosystems where faculty earn legitimacy from their colleagues. Thus, to fully address issues of legitimation, faculty learning communities should be implemented alongside other institutional interventions, such as implicit bias awareness and bystander interventions (Carnes et al., 2015; O'Meara, 2015; Sturm, 2006).

Whether implemented on their own or in conjunction with other initiatives, faculty learning communities offer resonance and can be a place of restoration for faculty trying to earn professional legitimacy (Yudkin & Van Bavel, 2016). As such, they are an important resource in creating more inclusive academic environments.

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KERRYANN O'MEARA is a professor of higher education, director of the ADVANCE Program for Inclusive Excellence, and associate dean of faculty and graduate affairs at the University of Maryland, College Park. Dr. O'Meara received her B.A. in English literature from Loyola University in Maryland, her M.A. in higher education from The Ohio State University, and her Ph.D. in education policy from the University of Maryland. Dr. O'Meara researches organizational practices that facilitate the full participation of diverse faculty and the legitimacy of diverse scholarship in the academy. She studies organizational policies, practices, and cultures, with an eye toward changing them to be more inclusive, equitable, and agency enhancing for all faculty. All correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Dr. O'Meara at [komeara@umd.edu](mailto:komeara@umd.edu).

LINDSEY TEMPLETON is a Ph.D. student in the higher education concentration at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she also serves as a research assistant. Ms. Templeton received her B.S. in biochemistry and molecular biology from the University of Richmond and her M.A. in higher education from the University of Maryland, College Park. Her research interests focus on women's leadership development and advancement in the academic pathway.

GUDRUN NYUNT is a Visiting Assistant Professor in Higher Education at Northern Illinois University. She received her B.A. in journalism from the State University of New York at New Paltz, her master's in higher education and student affairs from the University of Connecticut, and her PhD in student affairs from the University of Maryland. Her research interests focus on educational initiatives that prepare students for engaged participation in a global society and experiences of international, underrepresented minority, and women students, faculty, and staff at U.S. higher education institutions. She currently serves as chair of ACPA's Commission for the Global Dimensions of Student Development.