Title: Building Strategies, Bridging Differences: An Intersectional Dialogue about Individual and Institutional Strategies to Advance (all) Women at Work

Keywords: Intersectionality, leadership development, identity management, stereotype threat, organizational change

Format: Workshop Proposal

Aim of Workshop: The purpose of this workshop is to create dialogue across intersecting identities about individual and institutional strategies to advance all women at work.

Context: Earlier this year, more than one million women and their allies marched to protest the incoming Trump administration and promote a comprehensive social justice platform. Of the 16 goals outlined by March organizers, five directly address economic justice and workforce equality across intersecting identities (The Women's March on Washington, Guiding Vision and Definition of Principles, 2017, January 21). While bold and admittedly ambitious, the process of clarifying a vision defined by and designed for "Black women, Native women, poor women, immigrant women, Muslim women, lesbian, queer and trans women" (p. 2) symbolizes a call to action that bridges social identity differences to advance systemic change. As diversity scholars and management educators, we are well-positioned to champion such a vision. Our work over the past two decades has helped fuel a movement replete with TEDTalks, trade books, and hashtags encouraging women to lean in, stand tall, and push back. On the positive side, these efforts have galvanized a generation of women to demand a seat at the table. At the same time, the advice women receive about how to navigate a successful career in the male-dominated workplace remains individually-focused and implicitly white. That is problematic when the barriers that impede workforce equality are institutionally embedded (Eagly and Chin, 2010) and differently experienced depending on a woman's access to social capital (Sanchez-Hucles and Davis, 2010).

- *How then can we support an intersectional platform that transcends the traditional approach to career advancement and gender parity?*
- *In what ways are our individual strategies for navigating threat effective and when might they become harmful in limiting institutional change?*
- *What can we do to shift the focus from individual and interpersonal tactics to strategies for institutional change?*

Literature: Although the conversation about women's leadership and advancement is becoming more nuanced (e.g., Ely, Ibarra, and Kolb, 2011), systemic change is stagnant. In 2016, women's representation at the top of the S&P 500 remained at less than five percent (4.4%), with women of color holding only three of the 500 CEO spots (Catalyst, 2017). Despite reports of ambition toward becoming a top executive (Piazzo, 2016), the underrepresentation of women of color is consistent in top-level positions across the corporate sector (Piazzo, 2016). Whereas white men

hold 62.6% of senior executive level roles and white women 24.3%, women of color comprise less than 13% despite representing more than 1/3 of the private sector workforce (AAUW, 2016). Described as a "concrete ceiling," results from survey data conducted by LeanIn.org and McKinsey & Co. indicate that women of color are discontent with their work environments, and are less likely to cite their workplace as inclusive. Black women specifically shared feeling as though they cannot bring their whole selves to work (Piazzo, 2016). These findings are discouraging, especially when one considers that minority women are rapidly increasing their employment in business and now account for 52.7% of first-time enrollees in graduate business degree programs (Ohkana, Feaster, & Allum, 2016). Thus, there is an apparent disconnect for women of color between desire to succeed, feeling supported, and advancing at the same rate as their white female peers.

The statistics and experiences of women and women of color are further complicated by their varied identities. Gender minorities, such as gender non-conforming and transwomen, as well as sexual minorities (*i.e.,* women who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer, LGBTQ) are an important nexus when considering how institutions such as higher education influence women's success in business. In addition to encouraging a major or focus, undergraduate and graduate education programs also provide social support, networking, and professional development skills that will eventually be used once an individual enters the workforce. Remarkably, reports indicate only 3% of MBA students identify as out lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer ("Reaching Out," 2016). In an exploratory study with transgender students, Dugan, Kusel, and Simounent (2012) reported differences in perception of support and efficacy in leadership (Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet, 2012). In particular, transwomen (MTF) reported a lower capacity for leadership, attainment of leadership roles, and leadership efficacy (Dugan, Kusel, and Simounet, 2012).

Whereas white women (who are also treated as if they are heterosexual and cisgender) have made some progress towards leadership advancement (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 2014), women of color, queer women, and transwomen remain notably absent from upwards trends and nearly invisible in the literature on effective strategies for leadership development (Godwyn and Stoddard, 2011). Of course, this conversation is not new, women at the intersection of minority identities have been advocating for visibility and representation for decades (Shields, 2008). Their work and the work of allies have illuminated valuable insights about ways women navigate careers in high-threat environments differently depending on social identity and access to power (*e.g.,* Bell and Nkomo, 2001). Yet, there remains a gap in understanding how the confluence of racial identity, gender identity, and/or sexual identity influences a woman's goals for managing threat and the effectiveness of her strategies. Though studies suggest gender and racial identity moderate perception of and response to stereotype threat at work (Block, Koch, Liberman, Merriweather, and Roberson, 2011), how that process unfolds in the workplace is still under investigation.

What we do know is that the advice women receive about strategies for advancement is focused at the individual or interpersonal levels. It is less common to find studies that identify and examine organization-level strategies that equip women to lead systemic change. This is interesting when one considers that researchers consistently conclude that institutional discrimination is responsible for stagnation in women's advancement, more than "human capital

variables" or "structural factors" (Eagly and Chin, 2010, p. 217). Moreover, the emphasis on individual strategies for success wrongly places the burden on the woman to effectively navigate, further promoting the fallacy of exceptionalism in the face of struggle. This may be in part why women who make it to the top fail to change the systemic barriers that keep women of color, queer women, and transwomen out. The Women's March organizers understood that. Not only are they advocating a movement for workplace equality that is led by multiple minority women, but also one that emphasizes the shift from individual strategies to collective action for systemic change.

Are we ready to follow their lead?

Workshop Format (90 mins)

The purpose of this workshop is to create dialogue across intersecting identities about individual and institutional strategies to advance all women at work. As multiple minority scholars who study gender, diversity, and leadership in business, our goal is to design an interactive session that allows participants to share their strategies for navigating threat at work. To do so, we will first engage participants in a "self-diagram" activity where they can create a "web" of their identities/characteristics that inform how they experience threat at work and inform their behaviors in response. Then, drawing from the research on stereotype threat and career preparedness for women, women of color, and LGBTQ women, we will work together to identify practical solutions to systemic problems that undergird our shared experiences with barriers to advancement.

Workshop Organizers

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