

New Faculty Transitions and Obstacles: An Auto-Ethnographic Exploration

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Abstract: *Career transitions are inevitable. For the three authors, a seemingly traditional career transition of practitioner to faculty came with particular challenges and obstacles. In effort to make sense of this transition, the authors tracked and compared their experiences through an auto-ethnographic exploration. In this paper, three new faculty members present their transition from higher education administrators to tenure-track faculty positions using Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Race Theory. The findings presented issues around gender, race, age, class, identity and intersectionality, mentorship, organizational culture, and workplace socialization. The hope is that this paper can direct further attempts to understand this transition, as well as illuminate the need for support strategies around faculty career transitions.*

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Introduction

Whether entering academia as a new professional or after years of administrative experience, navigating the transition to faculty comes with particular challenges and obstacles. Documenting one's own experiences through auto-ethnography allows for critical self-reflection, exploration of a phenomenon from an insider's perspective, and serves as a gateway for transformative learning. This paper highlights the experiences of three new faculty members transitioning from higher education practitioners/administrators to tenure-track professorial roles.

This project started with a conversation... a discussion among three colleagues, who had recently transitioned into tenure-track faculty positions. We were casually talking about our experiences with one another, when we were inspired to start documenting our stories (using auto-ethnography) and then debriefing them with the intent to support one another and co-create meaning of our experiences. This paper is the result of that self-exploration and meaning-making process. We believe there is a lack of preparation for and support during this transition. We hope our exploration will prompt more dialogue around this topic and will not only be a way to engage others who are, will, and have navigated this transition, but also develop a deeper understanding of this process for academe.

In this manuscript, we first explore the literature on transitions, socialization into the workplace, and identity development. From this foundation, we discuss previous studies on faculty transitions, which may help inform individual and institutional support strategies. Then we discuss our contextual framework, informed by Transformational Learning and Critical Race Theories, our methodological approach of auto-ethnography, and how we collected and analyzed the data for this exploration. We then present our personal stories as vignettes, which contextualize our individual journeys of transition. Then, we synthesize our stories and the previous literature to present commonalities and comparisons within our transitions and the identities we hold. Here we also present a visualization of our

findings in a Venn diagram. We conclude this paper with a discussion of potential implications and recommendations – strategies and interventions that may inform future institutional practices to support new faculty. Throughout this paper, we address issues of race, gender, intersections of identity, institutional culture, organizational structure, mentorship, and our lived experiences.

Literature Review

There is a range of literature from multiple fields that contributes to our understanding and exploration of faculty transition. Here, we address literature relating to developmental transitions in general, socialization into the workplace, and identity. Finally, we review previous studies that explored faculty transition and the strategies found in the literature that might aid in supporting new faculty.

Transition

Transition is defined as “an event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the setting of self, work, health, and/or economics” (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 27). Furthermore, transition is a cyclical process of moving in, moving through, and moving out (Schlossberg et al., 1995). In approaching transitions (moving in), determining the *type*, *context*, and *impact* is essential in a smooth transitional experience (Anderson, Goodman, Schlossberg, 2012).

There are three *types* of transitions one can encounter - anticipated, unanticipated, and nonevents (Schlossberg, 1984). Additionally, *context* (such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geographic location), plays a large role in the perception of the transition. The relationship (personal, interpersonal, or public) to the transition, and the setting (self, family, friends, work, health, and economics) are crucial in understanding the significance of the transition for an individual (Schlossberg, 1984). Finally, the *impact* is the degree to which the transition alters one’s daily life (Anderson et al., 2012).

Socialization in the Workplace

An important factor in new faculty transition has been socialization into the workplace. “Socialization is of fundamental importance with regard

to many of the most pressing issues that confront academic administrators and faculty” (Tierney, 1997, p. 1). The workplace encompasses the communities that we directly associate with (the division of academic affairs, our specific college, and the department), but also the indirect communities (institutional culture, geographic location, and our social circles). Invariably, these communities and the institution’s culture influence socialization and integration (or lack thereof) into the workplace.

Socialization is not a one-size-fits-all, and the challenge is to utilize individual attributes to help build the culture, as opposed to having new-comers fit into a prescribed mold (Tierney, 1997). Furthermore, new members can help build institutional culture by creating departments according to their normative climates (Hermanowicz, 2005). Historically, the field of higher education has not been known for cultivating, preparing, and socializing individuals to enter the professoriate (Haley & Jaeger, 2012; Patton & Catching, 2009), and in the cases where individuals are socialized for these roles, it is top-ranked programs hiring graduates from their own or other top-ranked programs (Freeman & Diramio, 2016). These studies demonstrate great discrepancy and need for establishing a socialization process into the professoriate.

Identity and Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding identity, and specifically focuses on structures of privilege and oppression. It “helps us understand the multidimensional ways people experience life – how people see themselves and how they are treated by others” (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007, p. 630). When exploring and discussing intersectionality, the goal is to dismantle structural inequalities and promote social justice. Intersectionality validates lived experiences and stories of previously marginalized groups – this is important as it empowers individuals and communities to better understand themselves and others (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Dill & Zambrana, 2009). Additionally, the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) explains how multiple identities and the contextual lens we filter experiences through are inseparable from how we make sense of context – specifically the transition from practitioner to faculty.

Support Strategies for Faculty

Researchers have identified struggles and supports that are indicative of transitions from administration to faculty. These struggles include navigating unwritten job expectations, understanding changing professional identity (from administrator to faculty), circumnavigating the cultural climate of higher education, and aiding others in transition (Kinsey et al., 2006). Although much of the research around faculty transition has been from K-12 administrator roles to faculty, the findings are still applicable to other faculty transitions (Kinsey et al., 2006).

Many researchers discuss the negative experiences of faculty transitioning (Erickson & Rodriguez, 1999; Haley & Jaeger, 2012; Patton & Catching, 2009; Piercy et al., 2005); however, there are also support structures that administrators can implement to aid in transitions and ultimately retention. Faculty mentoring programs (Queralt, 1982), collegial relationships (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Zhou & Volkwein, 2004), and professional development monies (Kinsey et al., 2006) are demonstrated means that impact faculty retention. Each of these strategies provide support for individuals as they transition from administrative to faculty roles.

Another important aspect to consider in terms of supporting faculty is the professional-personal balance. One of the main issues when considering balance is “that the tenure-track is a stressful time, academic work never ends, and institutional expectations for tenure can be unclear” (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004, p. 252). Tenure earning faculty often struggle between the joy of their positions, the constant need to *watch the tenure clock*, and how personal choices – mainly children – factor into their professional goals (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Creating more positive institution policies and offering flexibility around the tenure clock are two of the ways administrators can continue to foster environments that support work-life balance for tenure track faculty.

The literature related to socialization, identity, and transition have helped us to make meaning of our experiences. Furthermore, studies of previous faculty transitions, albeit from various fields, have supported the findings of our own exploration.

Conceptual Framework

Transformative Learning Theory discusses how adult learners process and make meaning of their experiences, and specifically how society and structures influence their experiences (Mezirow, 1991). “Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1978, p. 162). Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991) identifies 10 stages adult learners experience when making meaning of situations and experiences. These include: Disorienting dilemma; Self-examination; Sense of alienation; Relating discontent to others; Explaining options of new behavior; Building confidence in new ways; Planning a course of action; Knowledge to implement plans; Experimenting with new roles; and Reintegration. Essentially, his stages outline how one moves from a learning experience inhibiting growth toward learning experiences that one integrates into their new ways of knowing and being. Most notable in transformative learning theory is the process by which the transformation occurs. Three components are necessary to transformative learning – experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse (Mezirow, 1991). First, an experience of discord needs to occur, where the incident does not fit into existing frames of reference. Second is critical reflection – which is considered to be the distinguishing characteristic of the theory – where learners reflect on the validity of their worldviews. Finally, rational discourse is the catalyst for the transformation. This critical opportunity allows learners to explore the depth and meaning of their worldviews.

Another contribution to our conceptual framework is Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an examination of society and culture through intersections of race, power, and law; this supporting the status quo of White authority and Black subordination. The six premises of CRT resonate with us as we have explored our own identities and meaning-making process (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado, 1995):

- Storytelling is a significant part of the law. Evidence suggests that the disenfranchised have different stories and different ways of storytelling.

- Racist behavior is not an aberration or rare occurrence; it is normal practice.
- Elites and the enfranchised act against racist behavior in a society only when it serves them and their goals.
- Race is a social construct. Modern genetics has confirmed this fact.
- Characteristics ascribed to a particular race will and do change.
- People have intersecting identities in that they belong to more than one demographic group and are consequently affected by disenfranchisement or inequality in more than one way. Individuals view the world through multiple lenses.

CRT challenges the experience of Whites as the normative standard (Calmore, 1995) and grounds its conceptual framework in the distinctive experiences of people of color (Williams, 1991). CRT is grounded in the lived experience of racism, which has singled out African Americans and others that White individuals deem worthy of suppression (Crenshaw, 1988). Additionally, CRT challenges the notion of promoting the interests of the majority; for example, White people do not see this as their perspective, but the truth (Delgado, 1989). Most recently, Patton (2016) posited that CRT plays a vital role in disrupting the field of postsecondary education by racism and White supremacy which are ingrained in the fabric of the academy. Patton (2016) eloquently noted how postsecondary education in reference to its history, curriculum, policies as well as research being conducted within the ivory towers are grounded in tenants of racism and White supremacy. Although only one of the three faculty members in this exploration identifies as African American, these tenants are important not only for his identity development and understanding, but also for the two White researchers as we all work to understand our identities in a complex and oppressive system.

This meaning-making process is not an independent endeavor, but rather, interdependent and built on trust (Bumgartner, 2001).

Utilizing Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Race Theory frameworks for this exploration allowed us to utilize each other's stories as a way to better understand our own experiences. These theories stress the importance of the relationship between self and society – and in this case self, society, and our communities to better understand the social, political, and cultural context. The hope is that by applying and understanding these theories as a conceptual framework to examine our experiences, we can better differentiate aspects of our lived experience and integrate various dimensions of learning from these experiences into our relationships with others, society, and hopefully, other tenure-track faculty. As a conceptual framework, Transformative Learning and CRT provided us with a lens for analyzing and interpreting our experiences as new tenure-track faculty and informed our methodological approach.

Methodological Approach

In this qualitative exploration, we used auto-ethnography as the method and transformative learning theory to better understand the experiences of new tenure-track faculty that transitioned from administrative roles. Transformative learning theory focuses on understanding qualitative changes individuals make throughout a learning process (Skyes, 2014; Taylor, 2008). It requires individuals to expand their consciousness and critically analyze their beliefs about the world and themselves. As a theoretical framework, transformative learning provides us with a lens for analyzing and interpreting our experiences as new tenure-track faculty.

Auto-ethnography is a reflexive method of research that examines and analyzes personal experiences in relation to cultural phenomena (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Borchner, 2000). This method allows the qualitative researcher to utilize the practice of narrative storytelling to convey the personal (*auto*) examination and analysis (*graphy*) of faculty culture (*ethno*; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Borchner, 2000). Auto-ethnography is often seen as both a process and product and is used within many disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and education (Skyes, 2014). With Transformative Learning and CRT as lenses and auto-ethnography as a method, we critically analyzed and discussed the ways in which one's individual experiences as new tenure-track faculty shaped and challenged each person's worldview.

As part of auto-ethnographic methodologies, each of us participated in creating autobiographical narratives¹. We individually wrote about our experiences through the first year of the tenure-track process (monthly). Then, through critical reflection and dialogue, we engaged each other about transformative experiences around our various identities. The first part of our analysis was individually analyzing each other's narratives and interpreting similarities and differences among our experiences, what Yin (2003) calls cross-case synthesis. The second part of our analysis occurred through dialogue, as we discussed and shared our interpretations supported by the narratives and other dialogues held previously.

Through our analysis, we explored patterns and coded for themes across our three experiences that compared and contrasted previous literature around transition, learning, and new faculty experiences (Yin, 2003). We utilized these steps in order to triangulate our experiences with previous literature about faculty transition. In analyzing our transformative learning experiences, we discussed and critiqued the ways our lived experiences shared commonalities and diverged from one another based on identity, social structures, and socialization. Furthermore, we implemented vignettes and connected back to the literature throughout as is customary with autoethnographic research (Johnson, 2013).

Findings

Within auto-ethnography, storytelling is an important and pivotal component of process and analysis. Thus, in effort to contextualize our experiences, we first present three vignettes, both as an introduction to us – as the participants – and to the discussion of the themes. Finally, as consistent with auto-ethnography, we discuss the themes by integrating our analysis in conjunction with our narrative stories.

¹ This research was conducted and written while all three authors were in full-time faculty positions. Since then, Adriel has moved to an administrative role at a different institution, and Shannon and April remain in full-time faculty positions.

Shannon: Auto-ethnographic Vignette

The smell of the paint was strong as I walked down the hall. It was my first week as a new tenure-track faculty and my office was getting a fresh coat of sky blue paint. I beamed with excitement as I spoke with the painters. What I quickly noticed in addition to the fresh paint, was a lack of furniture. My furniture would arrive in mid-October the painter told me. Where was I supposed to work until then I thought? My colleague next door quickly reassured me that we would figure out something in the interim. Her encouragement during the transition from administration to faculty was sincere and affirming. I knew administration – I had been an administrator for 10 years – but this new faculty world seemed wonderful and yet strangely different. I had worked as an administrator in a variety of settings - public colleges and private ones, large institutions, mid-sized, and even a small college. I was also not a stranger to new situations, I had lived and worked on the west coast, east coast, and in the middle states.

Throughout my time in administration, I worked in housing, leadership, academic advising, service learning, and with international students. I had moved and transitioned my life, circumstances, and jobs multiple times throughout those 10 years. Transition was something I thought I was good at, or at least done so frequently that I could tackle any transition. However, had it not been for my colleagues initial and continued guidance through my first year, navigating the politics, identities, and systems my smooth transition would have been more difficult if not impossible.

I knew I had always wanted to teach. Originally, my undergrad degree was in elementary education, and I believed I wanted to teach the younger kids, until I ended up in a second grade classroom. Although my career shifted focus and I began working with college students, the desire to teach never faded. I sought out opportunities to teach undergraduate intro courses and when I pursued my Ph.D., I co-taught as many masters level courses as possible. I had received sage advice when approaching graduation, and that was, if I was interested in pursuing faculty (eventually), I should look into it sooner than later as the higher I climbed administratively, the more difficult it would be to transition to faculty due to the potential (and likely) pay cut that would be required. Therefore, as graduation approached, I threw my name in

many hats, most for faculty positions - and after an on-campus interview at another university, I knew it was exactly where I wanted to be.

A few weeks after starting in my new faculty role, I found myself sitting in a large classroom space waiting for my first faculty department meeting to begin. Looking around, I appeared to be one of the youngest in the room. And although most of the faculty were White like me, I was also quick to recognize well over half the room as well as those in leadership (chair & dean) appeared to be men. Although everyone was collegial, it became clear there were invisible power structures that existed within the group. During the meeting, the new faculty was welcomed and encouraged to find a faculty mentor and team, and quickly. The notion of this team is a group of three individuals with tenure who help guide you through that process. After interacting with a few individuals, I began narrowing down possibilities. For my faculty mentor, I gravitated toward someone who I easily identified with and someone who in many respects resembled my situation – a White younger woman who was single when she began the tenure process. The encouragement and relationship we have developed has been instrumental in my success this first year. She has demystified much of the process, challenged me when necessary, and encouraged my progress as a teacher and scholar. Navigating the complexities of this new position has been smoother because of her mentorship.

Throughout the year, there were many times I was consciously made aware of my multiple identities and the difficulty in navigating those identities. White, young, single, woman, scholar, teacher, tenure-track were some of the identities I struggled to negotiate in any given space. Many times this would exemplify itself through microinsults – unintended insults that demean an individual's identity but can appear to be compliments (Sue et al., 2007). I frequently think about the ways I negotiate my varying identities within a given space, whether or not it is a privileged or oppressed identity. Sometimes the reflection on my identities is of my own accord, and sometimes it is spurred on by an event or incident.

At the end of the year, I participated in our culminating case study – similar to comprehensive exams, but less like exams and more like case analysis. The goal is to engage students as colleagues entering the field as they address a critical incident that could occur on a college

campus. After students complete the case study, they are given the opportunity to offer feedback on the program. During one reflection, the student begins to thank each of the faculty for their role in his academic and personal life. Moving around the room the student names and thanks each person. Tears were shed by many in the room and as I ponder the moment of realness and authenticity, something stirs my mind and makes me uncomfortable. After thanking each person by name and title (Dr.), the student simply refers to me by my first name. Although part of this occurs as a result of the approachability I model, I am not naïve to the realization that the men and senior faculty were the ones addressed by their titles. This incident and others signify both the intense support I have received during my first year, and the challenges as a new tenure-track faculty member.

Adriel: Auto-ethnographic Vignette

Ralph Waldo Emerson's quote, "make the most of yourself, for that is all there is to make," is a philosophy that I have practiced throughout my understanding of life as a mature thinker. To make the most of myself, is however a complicated, yet divine process that is still happening even as I compose this narrative. Placed in the home of parents that saw fit to stop producing children after me is what I recognize as the start of my psyche, motivation, and expectations from the outside world. While coming of age in Miami, Florida, my mother often said, "You can't beat exposure." In recognition of my mother's belief in exposure, I desired to become a senior level administrator within the realm of higher education.

After more than four years serving in administrative roles (assistant vice president for inclusion initiatives, chief diversity officer, assistant secretary to the board of trustees, and executive assistant to the president) at both a private and public institutions of higher learning in the Mid-west region of the United States, I decided to transition to a faculty role in the South. Currently, I serve as a tenure-track faculty member and also director of a higher education student affairs graduate program. As one may think, this transition has been a challenging one. I transitioned to this role in hopes of stability and as a result of mentors indicating that for males of color, faculty rank is vital.

As a young male of color, single with no dependents, and one that attended all historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) for

my undergraduate and graduate experiences, the transition to the professoriate at a Predominately White Institution (PWI) has been slated with its ups and downs. I have broken down my lived experience based on how I am evaluated from my employer: research/scholarship, teaching and service.

Research. My research is tied to my academic and professional interests, which are related to public policy and higher education with particular emphasis on minorities' access and achievement in higher education. I am interested in affirmative action, the impact of the proliferation of race neutral admission policies on minorities, recruitment and retention of students of color in higher education, and the relevance of HBCUs. As an African American male, I am also interested in the African American male achievement gap—the causes and remedies.

Therefore, while working within my current role, I am often a voice of reason in insular spaces regarding research impacting marginalized populations. I have heard colleagues note the following since my arrival:

- “He writes on those Black folks.”
- “Why are HBCUs needed and are they still relevant?”
- “HBCUs are not quality institutions.”
- “Black males are endangered species.”
- “Is affirmative action still needed in society and are you a recipient of affirmative action?”

Since my transition, the rich quotes above are those that come to mind that have impacted me on a daily basis while walking the halls of these ivory towers. Therefore, I continue to try and fly under the radar (as I listen more than I talk... I write more than I talk).

Teaching. Within my teaching role, I teach a host of courses and have taught Diversity in Higher Education, Law and Ethics in Higher Education, Student Development Theory, and Program Evaluation and Assessment. One may say, of course the Black male is teaching the diversity course, and my student evaluations have been impacted by my

lived experience in this course. One comment from a student noted the following: “Be aware of the Black vs. White debates. I felt that we discussed it a little too much in the class.”

As a critical race theorist, and one that writes extensively on diversity, equity and inclusion in the academy, I bring my own biases to the content area/classroom as well as my lived experiences, where I have been discriminated against and treated unfairly as both an administrator and now faculty member. Within the professoriate, I have witnessed time and time again the status quo of White authority and Black subordination (“whatever White is right”), as I am one of five Black American faculty at the institution in which I am employed. The notion of CRT, which I use in my work and reflect in my experience as a Black male faculty member is interest convergence. Interest convergence is centered on the notion that Whites have historically maintained their dominance over minorities through multiple forms of power (e.g., social, political, economic). As a result, their power has been codified in laws, policies, and processes which subjugate non-Whites (Bell, 1992). Thus, interest convergence suggests that the White dominant majority will only aid people of color in societal advancement if it is to their benefit. As noted by Bell (1980), “the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of Whites” (p. 523). Bell (1980) expressed that Whites will only promote the advances of Blacks when they also promote White interests. He noted that, historically, Whites have always been willing to sacrifice the well-being of people of color for their economic self-interests.

Service. In my role as a faculty member, I serve and have served on several search committees. In addition, I advise a fraternal organization, and I am asked to speak at each cultural heritage celebration or event on campus and within the community (i.e. NAACP Humanitarian Awards etc.). It is called the “Black Tax” (Wingfield, 2015). Therefore, I am over-committed at this PWI, but this is common within the academy. Also, the Black Tax notes that Blacks must do more than their White counterparts to be successful. I must write, keynote, publish, serve, and teach more than the baseline for one’s acceptance. I must also be the best classroom teacher in order to generate the best student evaluations, as my institution only has one tenured Black American (domestic United States) faculty member.

In addition to the evaluative items (teaching, research and service), I am constantly impacted by microaggressions as a member of the faculty. Microaggressions are common every day, slights and/or insults, in which my colleagues and/or students say to me on a daily basis. For example, as a Black male that goes to the gym regularly, I am asked often, “Are you a student athlete?” Why must I be a student athlete? This notes that Black males at each PWI are only present to play sports, which is not the case. In addition, I am often asked in the community surrounding the University, “what do you coach?” by community members. This means that all Black males in university settings are coaches, and they cannot be academics. Above all of these items, I continue to have a collegial attitude with my peers university wide, as a host of persons of color were not successful in receiving tenure and promotion as a result of collegiality.

April: Auto-ethnographic Vignette

As someone who researches identity and transition, and specifically identity development of recent college graduates who are leaving formal education and entering the world of work, I cannot help but draw comparisons from the post-university transition to the transition I find myself in now – from higher education practitioner to tenure-track faculty. Above all, I am reminded how cyclical transitions are and how identity formation is an ongoing process.

I have been a Student Affairs practitioner for 10 years (primarily working with student leadership, campus activities, and student affairs marketing/fundraising), while simultaneously achieving my Masters and PhD. Mid-way through those years, I took on the identity of wife and international student. Shortly after getting married, my husband and I moved to New Zealand to pursue our doctoral degrees, where I encountered yet another transition of self-discovery and identity development. After completing my PhD at 29 years old, we moved back to the United States, and specifically to a state and institution where we had no previous affiliation. While we moved for my husband’s job, I took on an interim practitioner role, as I was pregnant. I wanted to “give myself permission” not to work after having the baby, a luxury and privilege, I know. I always knew I wanted to be a mother, but my decision to get there was so logical and practical (ie: move overseas – check, get a PhD – check, have babies in my 30s – check) that I wanted

to allow myself to fully experience motherhood without the pressure of immediately returning to work. I made it about six months before I was itching for something. I returned to higher education in a part-time practitioner role and teaching adjunct, as to “ease back” into it all. I did that for a year before returning to work full-time as a tenure-track faculty member.

Although I had taught dozens of undergraduate courses throughout my years as a practitioner, I had never taught full-time nor been fully immersed into the “academic side of the house.” Not only was I entering the new world of academia, but I was also returning to work full-time for the first time after becoming a mother and had primarily been stay-at-home for the previous year and a half. Therefore, I was facing two significant transitions – neither of which I think I could comprehend until I was fully immersed.

My faculty role is in a Higher Education Student Affairs graduate program. Although I felt confident and competent to teach the content, as I had been a practitioner in this field at three institutions across two countries, I had never taught a graduate-level course nor fully understood the nuance of tenure-track, which I had suddenly found myself knee-deep. The graduate program I was hired into was facing complete turn-over. I was hired at the same time as another new tenure-track faculty member, who was also transitioning from administrator, and we were the only two faculty members in this program. Together, we were tasked with completely revamping the graduate program – from recruitment and new marketing materials to curriculum revisions and re-establishing program rigor. Needless to say, our work was cut-out for us. However, as a previous practitioner, this type of administrative work and strategic planning invigorated me. In addition to revising the program, I was just beginning to understand the expectations of me as tenure-track faculty. This is where I feel things started getting hairy. In my first year, I taught six courses, involving new-course preparation, navigating how to teach graduates students (as opposed to my previous experience teaching only undergraduate students), and managing those tasks with the demands of research, service, and the program overhaul. About mid-way through my first semester, I realized how deep I was into “this world.”

Before I address support in my practitioner-to-faculty transition, I must address what I identify as the biggest hurdle through this whole experience, which had nothing to do with my faculty role. As a recovering workaholic and returning to work full-time for the first time as a mother, I was suddenly facing a whole other set of obstacles around identity, transition, and work-life balance. For the first time in my life, my top priority was not about me and advancing my career or personal agenda. I felt an overwhelming desire to first be an amazing and available wife and mother, even if that meant my career taking third place. This feeling was something that the 25-year-old version of myself could not have imagined or predicted. I had big dreams of one day becoming a university upper-administrator, and not to say that those dreams may never happen, but for the first time in my life, that was not my first priority... And that was a transition of identity.

I immediately started seeking sources of support and mentors who had navigated the tenure process while also being a young mother. Although I gleaned lessons from the different women/parents whom I spoke with, I did not find anyone who seemed to manage it all flawlessly, and presumably that is the take-away. Some of the women were “rock-stars” in their field – writing books, doing multiple speaking engagements, and publishing dozens of articles. When I asked them how they did it, they all seemed to allude that their partners held the role of “primary child care provider” in their families, or that they had a lot of external support from extended family and babysitters. Other women, who seemed to be involved and available wives and mothers, struggled to maintain the scholarship that the other women were achieving. Furthermore, they always seemed exhausted and in a hurry. Therefore, mentoring a new faculty member was not a priority or on their radar.

Although I struggled to find an exemplar young faculty-mother, I was able to seek support from other types of people and places. First, older female faculty members, whose children were grown, were able to speak retrospectively about their experiences. They each alluded that it was a stressful and demanding period of life, and that they produced scholarly work at a slower pace than their male or non-mother-female counterparts. They offered encouraging words and their availability. I also sought out mentorship opportunities outside of my institution. Through national organizations, I was paired with women who had navigated similar transitions to the one I was facing. Finally, my

Department Head (direct supervisor) offered me more support than he will ever realize. He is a counselor by trade, and I could feel it. Despite the fact that he was an older male, he seemed to understand the inner-battle I was confronting. He seemed to always remind me that although our work as educators is powerful and inspiring, if we were not happy with our lives and roles outside of work, then it is all for nothing. Knowing that my supervisor held this perspective allowed me to give myself permission to make my family my top priority without feeling guilty.

My faculty transition was intertwined with so many other transitions that the combined hurdles I went through made this an extremely challenging process, and one that I am still experiencing. I will say that not having six new course preps and revamping a graduate program this year has given me much more time to focus on research, service, and improving my teaching. I find myself conflicted daily with how to balance the demands of my profession and achieving tenure, while also not having “mom guilt” about working too much. In my mind, if I fail as a spouse and parent, which is the epicenter of my world, how will I ever be able to do well in my job or ever find fulfillment in my work? The answer, at least for me, is that I will not. Therefore, I have put some strict boundaries in place to help me not revert back to my workaholic self, so that I can feel good about the other roles in my life, and subsequently be great when I am at work.

Synthesis: Commonalities and Comparisons

As we explored the commonalities of our experiences, each of the vignettes tell a story of individuals navigating multiple identities and searching for balance in those roles. We noticed that in addition to the intersections of our identities, the institutional culture and our socializations played a large role in the ways we individually experienced our transitions. Our experiences, although distinct and unique, have many similarities to each other – and we suspect to others as they transition from administration positions to faculty roles.

Intersectionality

Race, gender, age, marital status, career ambition, and personal commitments are just some of the themes of intersectionality that

emerged in this study. Shannon talked about being a single, White female who sought similar qualities in choosing a mentor. Adriel discussed the lack of representation of Black faculty and specifically those who had received tenure. April divulged her struggle to navigate her career while also balancing the responsibilities she held in her personal life. Each of us recognized that we cannot approach this transition process, or any meaning-making process for that matter, without first recognizing various identities in our lives that are inseparable from and contribute to our lived experiences.

Regarding gender, Both Shannon and April have experienced invisible power struggles by working in a male-dominated industry and going through a tenure process created by men, for men (Mason, 2013). Shannon specifically addressed her observance to ‘men in positions of power’ at her institution, and April identified her struggle to find female role models who successfully navigated both tenure and motherhood. Regarding race, Adriel has found that his lived experiences align with the previous research on Black males’ triumphs and struggles in the academy, specifically through the lens of CRT (Hilton, Wood, & Lewis, 2012).

In terms of our up-bringing, which contributes to our lived experiences and interpretations of such experiences, we each have arrived to where we are in our lives and careers from very different avenues. Shannon grew up in a lower-middle class home in Stockton, California and was the first in her family to attend college. She attended a community college and transferred four times before she graduated from a religiously-affiliated private institution for her undergraduate degree. Since starting her career, she has worked for both private and public institutions spanning from Texas to Georgia. Adriel grew up in an upper middle-class home in Miami and attended three different HBCUs for his three degrees, one of which was private and two were public. His educational experiences and network have placed him in a league of “Black elites.” April grew up in a middle-class home in Oklahoma. The three institutions she has attended and worked for have all been mid-sized public institutions with a predominantly White student body. We recognize issues of class, access, and education all are contributing factors to our intersecting identities and have impacted our perceptions of the experiences within higher education as a whole, and specifically within the practitioner-to-faculty transition.

Institutional/Organizational Culture

Despite our varied educational experiences (where we have attended and worked within higher education), we had similar issues of transition in reference to culture with our shifts to faculty roles. We each have experienced significant issues, especially as first-year faculty, with students challenging our authority and/or credibility. We recognize there are a variety of contributing factors, which may also include our ages (32-35 years old) as well as being new to the faculty role. We have also experienced structural inequalities within our organizations as a result of our lack of ability to push back because of our junior faculty status. It has been instilled in us that our voice comes with tenure, and whether explicitly or implied that we should lay low until we have that power of voice and opinion. With that said, both Adriel and April have had much flexibility and autonomy to run their academic program and make changes however they see fit. Alternatively, Shannon has experienced more restrictions with suggesting and implementing program changes.

One advantage we believe each of us had in this transition was our contextual knowledge about higher education in general. Although we are new to faculty and tenure processes, we have all worked in (and are now teaching about) the academy. Therefore, we understood basic organizational structure, general university protocol, and overall cultural nuances. Our transition was more of a shift in roles within the academy, which is presumably why we were all surprised by the difficulty. However, we recognize that if a practitioner from a different field (for example, a lawyer or nurse) transitioned into a tenure-track faculty role, they would not only be facing the practitioner-to-faculty transition and learning a new institutional culture like we did, but they would also be learning the general nuance and organizational structure of higher education as an industry. Presumably, the contextual understanding of general higher education practices aided in our transitions; whereas, other practitioners might have additional hurdles within their transition. This is also an implication for further research – to explore the transitions of faculty from a variety of fields.

Support and Socialization

We each identified support and struggles within our socialization process. The most prominent support aspect of our transition was the

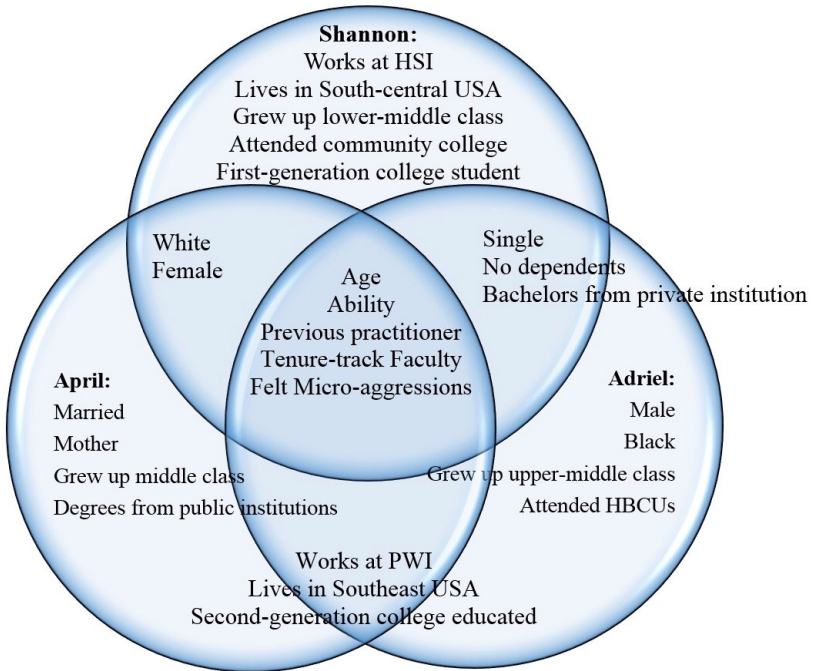
need for mentorship. Not only a need in the formal sense, but also organic mentorship from individuals who held similar identities to that of our own, who had navigated the organizational culture, and who could offer insider-information on the tenure and promotion process. In varied ways, we each have had some form of mentorship, and we partially accredit the navigation of our first year to those individuals. Adriel and April were not designated formal mentors through their department, but sought support on their own. Shannon was assigned a mentor through a formal departmental process, and she accredits her mentor to serving as a buffer in protecting her from over-committing herself, particularly in the first year.

Regarding tenure, we each had different socialization structures in place. For example, Adriel and April were provided with a departmental document outlining tenure benchmarks for each year and the points needed to achieve each level. However, resources are limited and financial support to achieve scholarship points (ie: travel funds to attend and present research at conferences) are scarce. Alternatively, Shannon's tenure and promotion process has been far more ambiguous, and she has had to rely on her mentor to offer insight. However, she has access to plenty of resources and additional financial support.

Another thing to consider is that through this research project we have had the support of one another. Although we have not been able to offer each other contextual advice on how to navigate this transition, by having that peer support – just knowing there are others out there navigating the same process – offered a sense of hope and community to our transition. Based on a synthesis of our research findings, we have created a visual representation (see Figure 1) of our similarities and differences and the intersections of our social identities.

Each of our vignettes demonstrate how we have navigated (and are still navigating) issues of transition, multiple identities, and socialization into the workplace. For the most part, our lived experiences align with the previous research (Schlossberg, 1984; Tierney, 1997; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Our experiences align around the struggles, supports, and recommendations tied to strategies for socialization and mentorship. Based on our analysis and synthesis of our experiences, we believe the potential implications of our research will aid administrators in creating institutional support strategies and providing considerations for individuals who want to transition to faculty roles.

Figure 1: Intersectionality of social identities between authors



Discussion and Implications

During this research project, we wanted to understand the similarities and differences among new tenure-track faculty experiences. Although our experiences are uniquely ours, there are many similarities we feel would likely be shared among many new tenure-track faculty. These experiences, as noted within our vignettes and synthesis, provided transformative learning opportunities for each of us. Whether the experiences were positive or negative, we each have had vivid memories of transition, negotiating multiple identities, and socialization processes to faculty roles.

Institutions of higher education must welcome differences; differences in religion, dialect, dress, sexual orientation, gender, and heritage, to name a few (Patton & Catching, 2009). A diverse faculty enriches the learning environment, provides different methods of instruction, increases active learning, and presents students with role models who mirror themselves (Outten & Hilton, 2013; Smith, 2000; Umbach, 2006; Zirkel, 2002). It is not enough to hire diverse faculty, but we must retain them throughout the tenure process (Haley & Jaeger, 2012). Once faculty are hired, they need to feel welcomed to the institution in order to be retained (Turner, Gonzalez, & Wood, 2008). Phone calls, personal letters, and consultations with current underrepresented faculty can all assist in creating a welcoming environment where these individuals succeed (Alger, 1999). In higher education, we espouse diverse learning environments – thus, we must also create these spaces where diverse faculty are socialized and supported (Patton & Catching, 2009). Continued research in this area is necessary to understand what is and is not happening as we strive to create diverse learning environments.

Institutions and administration must also find other creative means for acclimating and supporting faculty, such as teaching or research programs for new tenure-track faculty. More research needs to address the ways in which faculty are supported in order for other faculty to benefit from these understandings. Many faculty have negative experiences as they navigate their new role and negotiate multiple identities (Patton & Catching, 2009). This is why mentoring programs and other support initiatives are pivotal in helping new faculty. These programs should not only assist with acclimation and socialization, but

also include initiatives to help new faculty successfully achieve tenure and promotion. Mentorship programs also allow for new faculty members to benefit from candid conversations with faculty who have succeeded to tenure at their institution. With regard to women-mother faculty, implications for practice include developing a culture that fosters faculty taking leave, partner support for job searching, reduced-cost daycare sponsored by the university, summer research stipends, and gender equitable pay (Kelly & McCann, 2013).

Although there is no single way to retain and acclimate tenure-track faculty, it is important to research and understand a variety of means to help new faculty feel supported through the transition. Systems should help ensure positive socialization, but new faculty by definition of being new, can help shift the culture of an organization, department, or institution. That said, helping new faculty understand the existing normative cultures of the institution or department are extremely important for helping new faculty succeed and feel satisfied. New faculty need help navigating the politics and issues within each academic culture in order to have a smoother transition in and through the tenure process.

Although support through transition does not come from colleagues alone, a large part of the transition process can be mitigated by support of peers. Additionally, creating intentional, built-in systems and strategies to support faculty will likely result in higher retention rates, increased productivity, and feelings of connectedness to the institution (Haley & Jaeger, 2012). By providing this support, new faculty will be better suited to navigate the complexities of their multiple identities and smoothly transition to their new roles. Furthermore, more research needs to address the role mentorship plays in assisting faculty with their transitions.

As for the three of us, we each circumnavigated similar intricacies of the transition and socialization process all while navigating our distinctive multiple identities. And although each individual joining the faculty will have unique lived-experiences, we hope our shared experiences will encourage other new tenure-track faculty in their journey and challenge seasoned faculty to aid in the continued support and socialization for new and diverse tenure-track faculty.

Conclusion

In this paper, we presented an auto-ethnographic exploration of three individuals navigating the transition of practitioner to tenure-track faculty. We addressed literature on transitions, intersections of identity, and socialization into the workplace. Transformative Learning Theory and Critical Race Theory provided the conceptual framework for this exploration, which utilized auto-ethnography as a methodological approach to collect, analyze, and present the initial data. This exploration illuminated themes of race, gender, age, class, family roles, intersectionality of identity, work-life balance, institutional and organizational culture, and support within workplace socialization. The implications of this exploration include developing institutional support strategies such as, mentorship, acclimation processes, peer support, and opportunities for professional development.

We believe with a better understanding of this transition, individuals moving from practitioner to faculty will have more support, increased quality of life, and higher achievement and performance. Furthermore, institutions will subsequently have happier, more fulfilled employees resulting in the recruitment and retention of more diverse faculty. If we can continue to share these experiences, engage in productive dialogue, and do the work to foster better work environments and practices, we believe this situation can be fixed in the future. We recognize this is an ongoing process of exploration and self-discovery, and the more research and intentional conversations that are facilitated on this topic, the more likely institutions will respond.

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