

ONGOING BARRIERS TO PROGRESS FOR WOMEN'S EQUITY IN
EDUCATION: THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF SUCCESS AND THE
PROMISE OF CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

Factors serving as barriers to ethnic women's success in post-secondary education are reviewed as they pertain to gender discrimination in the United State's Educational Amendments Title VII and Title IX. Selected sources of published literature examined institutional and cultural factors influencing women's educational experiences. While much progress has been made in the numbers of women in entering and completing degrees in various academic disciplines, under representation continues to exist in discipline areas traditionally dominated by men. Awareness of existing institutional policies and cultural attitudes that pertain specifically to the combined influence of gender and ethnicity may warrant attention in light of changing social demographics in institutions of higher learning. Existing educational institutional policies and cultural demands (e.g. gender role expectations and ethnic background) highlight circumstances that make ethnic women's academic and professional advancement more challenging. Providing appropriate resources that support women's academic and professional development, achievement and increased status are discussed.

What barriers must women overcome to obtain an education? Lacefield (2003) purports that education is a middle-class endeavor in its content and language. As such, it presents many institutional barriers against success for other groups of individuals. While gender represents a fundamental societal division, it operates in the context of class, race, ethnicity, culture and other factors. Every woman entering an institution of higher education carries a history of how each factor has influenced her outlook and motivation regarding education. Given that, how should educators accommodate the diverse populations of colleges and universities so as to provide the most comprehensive and meaningful educational experience for all? First, acknowledge the unique demands associated with each individual's personal history. Understand that to achieve success, an individual may be obligated to detach from the context of her personal life and assimilate to the existing structure and demands of the academic institution.

While much progress has been achieved in equity over the past several years through changes in legislation, particular factors remain a constant in the lives of many women whose ethnic and cultural heritage form a core part of their personal identity. Because each woman's life reflects a unique

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combination of factors, with some playing a more significant role than others, the dynamic interactions among the factors must be understood in order to assess the extent of progress in education, career advancement and women's status in society. How each factor contributes to a woman's success in fulfilling her academic goals and her preparation for future career opportunities in relation to Title VII and Title IX defines the scope of this paper.

The emphasis will be on how cultural perspectives frame the interpretation of progress. Early research emphasized women's abilities and progress in terms of patriarchal standards, regarding women as outsiders and the victims of a system bound by tradition and gender. More recently, however, a new perspective has emerged that emphasizes understanding the relationship among power, gender, and culture and the manner in which policy standards are important in changing women's status in institutions of higher education (Twombly, 1999, p.442). Given that Title IX, in addition to other influences, is still shaping the status of women in academics, it is important to review whether society has come to a better understanding of the processes involved in promoting gender equity today.

This paper will begin with an overview of women's progress since Title IX, followed by an examination of existing limitations on its implementation in the context of ethnic and cultural forces. Specifically, discussions will focus on the manner in which gender roles, that shape a woman's self-concept, are tied to ethnic views of one's familial relationships, acculturation and the personal conflicts inherent in integrating culture, educational goals and experiences. Lastly, acknowledging that potentially conflicting influences impact a woman's educational experience necessitates identifying programs to provide adequate mentoring and support to enable women to accomplish their educational goals.

While much public discussion has centered on the educational opportunities widely available today, certain groups of women, in particular, those from underrepresented ethnic groups, still face overwhelming obstacles in the actual experience of those opportunities. While the Education Amendments of Title VII and Title IX have played a major and constructive role in transforming educational opportunities, more remains to be done for underrepresented groups of women.

OVERVIEW TITLE IX

In 1972, the Title IX Education Amendment became a mechanism used to address the inequity in education that females historically experienced as a result of their second-class status in society. The law, along with others that promoted educational equity, has been a critical component of social change in the U.S. through its prohibitions against sex discrimination in federally-funded educational programs and activities.

Groups advocating equity in education maintain that education is a basic right that should be afforded to all citizens in an equitable manner and that equal protection under the law requires equal educational opportunities.

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES & EQUITY

Twombly (1999, p.448) summarizes several points from a feminist perspective about the framework used to understand traditional academic institutional policies and proposes several reasons why the existing policies may require further review. Some obstacles to institutional changes include: the patriarchal nature of higher educational institutions, existing institutional policies that continue to sustain inequity, and the ongoing absence of programs to prepare women for more prominent career and academic positions, to thereby enhance their status and role in society.

While some critics contend that these factors, acting within the context of institutional processes and agendas, account fully for women's unequal progress in education, others suggest that additional cultural factors (e.g. ethnicity) warrant attention.

What remains, then, is to ask how educational institutions can represent the interests and abilities of all their constituents, so that resources and opportunities adequately reflect all the integral components of society. Incorporating gender and ethnicity into the equation when modifying the educational agenda may raise social awareness and thereby transform policy to provide more equity in education. Moreover, monitoring sustained progress in these specific areas will be essential in further expanding opportunities for women.

PROGRESS SINCE TITLE IX

WOMEN'S ROLES AND PRESENCE IN SOCIETY

In the first decade after Title IX, statistical data began revealing changing trends in admission, degree-completion and directions in discipline interest for women entering higher education (National Center for Education Statistics 2003, Table 268; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, Table 269). With Title IX helping to ensure equity in educational opportunities, these trends served as a stepping-stone for the expansion of more egalitarian attitudes and an increased presence of women in leadership roles.

One of the primary outcomes of integrating females into educational programs in traditionally male-dominated fields is that it broadened the scope of women's contributions to society. Advancing educational opportunities and inclusion among these discipline areas have been important in providing females realistic opportunities to assess their abilities in relation to their male counterparts. The increased numbers of women seeking advanced degrees and

their enhanced prominence associated with leadership positions are important indices of how changes to access and support in education have transformed women's status and opportunities. Concerted efforts to provide support and inclusion in these areas make the United States a world-leader in providing access to educational opportunities for women.

Sustaining women's progress in education has required the establishment of policies and programs; however, these have proven far from comprehensive in their ability to maintain and produce additional improvement in women's educational success. Some educational institutions continue to exhibit discrepancies in inclusion, support and treatment of women. Noteworthy improvements over past policies are those prohibiting sexual discrimination and harassment, which have played a decisive role in creating social psychological environments that safeguard women's educational experiences and prevent an exodus due to, not a lack of ability, but the presence of a hostile environment.

One perspective on women's academic experiences addresses the contradictions between policies and actions that also characterize other major institutions. While academic institutions possess policies that are intended to assure equality in women's educational opportunities, their actual implementation varies greatly. According to Twombly (1999, p.445) once the numbers of women achieved a critical mass, it was expected that their presence in institutions would create a more favorable environment enabling women to thrive. The assumption followed that avenues for leadership training and experience would facilitate much needed organizational restructuring. In practice, however, the patriarchal institutional structure has resisted change in response to increased female presence and maintained enduring obstacles to women's progress in education and leadership.

Beyond the need to overcome existing institutional policies, efforts to advance women's status also draw attention to the intricacies of the current operational system. Women's experiences in academia tend to be vastly different from men's in such areas as appointments to lower-status positions, an absence of job security, lack of experience in leadership positions, lower prospects for positions of power and fewer opportunities for promotions (Twombly, 1999, p.440). Some of the factors contributing to female under representation in desirable positions include: deficient policies for advancing an equal-opportunity agenda, promotional criteria that place women at a disadvantage, favoritism, isolation, frustration and conflicts experienced by attempts to adhere to opposing demands of gender-role and institutional expectations. Restrictions such as these remain a part of the social structures influencing women's place in institutions of higher learning.

Proposals to implement fairness policies, then, are the "necessary first step toward establishing gender equity" (Twombly, 1999, p.450). Furthermore, Twombly (1999, p.450) contends, these policies should not only be a statement

of intent, but must identify concrete steps to show progression towards change while also resisting the constraints of the prevailing institution.

These points stipulate that the advancement of women into academia as colleagues and leaders should be with support and adequate guidance, not adversity. While there are some women who have advanced to higher positions, many continue to lack sufficient preparation and skills necessary to fully succeed. These are not inherent deficiencies, rather more a reflection of sociocultural barriers they have encountered that are mirroring aspects of cultural dissonance experienced in negotiating between their home and academic lives. Even in instances when women have made notable contributions in their fields, credit and recognition are less likely to be noted (Twombly, 1999, p.452). Moreover, these women do not advance as quickly to positions of power nor do they achieve the status that their male counterparts attain.

These issues indicate that increased admissions of women into various academic disciplines have not been sufficient to alter women's status and opportunities in higher education. Clearly, there remain institutional processes that do not fully serve the interests and abilities of women. What is more, women's progress in educational success is also undermined by another level of cultural influence, namely, one's ethnicity.

LIMITATIONS TO ACHIEVING EQUITY IN EDUCATION

CULTURAL FACTORS

To what extent are the challenges that women face in their educational experiences expressions of different cultural values and practices? Gender and cultural factors are among the many components influencing the climate of higher education. Alone or in combination, the task of these institutions of higher learning are to negotiate the delicate balance of being sensitive to the needs, issues and priorities of each of the groups it serves. A problematical issue to address is how these educational institutions determine which group's practices should prevail in guiding the direction of its institutional agenda. Each group that has contributed to the diversity of these educational institutions has unique histories in their treatment and access to education. No matter what the composition is of these educational institutions, their mission must reflect the needs of their student populations. The diversity that is now produced as a result of inclusion of traditionally underrepresented groups is an important acknowledgment of how each group, with their unique history in their access to educational opportunities, can play a role in achieving social, political and scientific transformation. However, even with increased representation, the data still reflect discrepancies among women and ethnic groups in achieving comparable advanced degree status to males and European Americans as Tables 1 and 2 show (National Science Foundation, 2003;

National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, Table 8-1; National Center for Education Statistics 2003, Table 258).

As much as society strives to attain racial and gender equity, stereotyped expectations preclude recognition of the abilities of individuals from scrutinized groups. The existing demographic composition of institutional organizations serves as an important basis for the current and future course of the institution’s interests and agenda. The institutional perceptual mindset often becomes the framework for judging which individuals are admitted into selective institutions of higher education. Institutions of higher education then, have the difficult task of being responsive to the issues of individuals from various subgroups while at the same time, reflecting the realities of their ability to represent broader social demographics. The thoughtful implementation of diversity initiatives can become a crucial component in mediating potential cultural tension among the interests and needs of diverse populations.

TABLE 1

Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctor's Degrees Conferred by Degree-Granting Institutions, by Sex of Student and Field of Study: 1999-2000

Major Field of Study	Bachelor’s Degree		Master’s Degree		Doctor’s Degree (PhD, EdD, etc.)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Biology/ Life Sciences	26,473	18,239	1,418	1,181	321	404
Computer Information Science	10,153	26,042	4,752	9,752	131	646
Engineering	11,902	46,525	5,306	20,290	835	4,549
Law and Legal Studies	1,405	520	1,558	2,192	25	49
Mathematics	5,688	6,382	1,531	1,881	276	830
Psychology	56,630	17,430	10,913	3,552	2,905	1,405
Social Sciences	65,039	62,062	7,042	7,024	1,688	2,407

Source: Data extracted from Table 258. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics; retrieved 12 Jun.2003. “Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctor’s Degrees Conferred by Degree Granting Institutions by Sex of Student and Field of Study 1999-2000”.

TABLE 2

Percentage Distribution of Undergraduate Enrollment in Postsecondary Education Institutions According to Race-Ethnicity, by Carnegie Classification: Fall 1976 and Fall 1995

1994 Carnegie Classification	White		Black		Hispanic		Asian Pacific/ Islander		American Indian/ Alaskan Native	
	1976 - 1977	1995 - 1996	1976 - 1977	1995 - 1996	1976 - 1977	1995 - 1996	1976 - 1977	1995 - 1996	1976-1977	1995-1996
Research Universities I	88.2	75.2	5.8	7.1	2.6	6.2	2.9	10.9	0.5	0.6
Research Universities II	92.1	83.0	5.1	6.5	1.4	4.5	0.8	5.0	0.6	1.0
Doctoral Universities I & II	85.0	76.9	8.9	11.0	4.5	6.1	1.0	5.0	0.6	0.9
Master's Universities/ Colleges I & II	81.3	74.3	11.5	12.8	5.0	7.4	1.6	4.7	0.6	0.9
Baccalaureate Colleges I & II	81.1	79.7	12.2	12.9	5.2	4.0	1.0	2.8	0.5	0.7
Associate of Arts Colleges	79.9	70.3	11.2	11.5	5.8	11.3	2.1	5.8	1.0	1.1
Specialized Institutions	86.7	73.6	8.2	11.2	2.7	6.3	1.2	5.2	1.2	3.7

Source: Data extracted from Table 8-1 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics; retrieved 7 Mar.2003. "1976 Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS) and 1995 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 'Fall Enrollment' surveys".

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE; COMPETING INTERESTS

Chang (2000, p.161) contends that institutions of higher education are viewed by society as the source of solutions as well as the model for tolerance and change. In a comprehensive review of factors believed to influence racial dynamics in institutions of higher education, Chang details areas of competing interests that educational institutions must navigate in fulfilling their mission to provide opportunities for a higher education. The areas that the factors comprise include: maintaining institutional distinction, accessibility, freedom of expression, tolerance, opportunities for self-discovery, institutional norms/traditions, social transformation, institutional agenda, and responsibility to the general public. The choice among each of these options plays heavily in

determining what populations the institution will serve in its mission to provide educational opportunities.

Educational institutions, therefore, must negotiate between their ability to adhere to standards of excellence that serve to maintain institutional distinction and equal-access to higher learning for all. Chang refers to this dilemma as an issue between “Excellence” and “Equal Access”. The question often posed is how inclusion of individuals from diverse groups influences institutional standards of excellence. Some argue that goals of maintaining excellence and achieving equal access are bipolar opposite objectives; however, both are attainable when the intention to maintain standards is matched with a concerted effort to support implementation of diversity.

Still other competing interests that undermine institutions’ efforts to serve the needs of specific populations are what Chang refers to as the promotion of “Autonomy” or the use of “Normative Leverage”. “Autonomy” allows a student to identify her own values through individual experience, while “Normative Leverage” relies on institutional mechanisms to promote inter-group interactions. The academic experience of many students is often derived from following one’s passion within the context and support of the educational institution. For others, such as ethnic women, autonomy may not be completely obtainable owing to the constraints of one’s culture. The additional task of identifying others who share their cultural experiences and viewpoints compounds the complexity of their educational experiences. Therefore, the extent to which an institution of higher learning offers social and academic environments to promote inter-group interactions is critical in determining whether one’s educational experience is an isolating one or one that receptive and inclusive.

In Chang’s contrast of factors labeled “Stability” versus “Change”, educational institutions are faced with maintaining the continuity of well-established (cultural) foundations that may be at odds with responsiveness to changing social demographics. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), regularly tracks demographic information within colleges and universities. Many have noted shifts in demographic characteristics to reflect greater presence of women and other underrepresented groups than ever before (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, Table 268; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, Table 269). Thus, it becomes important to ask at what point do these institutions begin reflecting these changes in order to modify their agenda and curricula to accommodate different interests, needs and styles of learning for the new populations.

Finally, institutions often operate according to “Self-interest” in attempting to maintain the reputation of the academic institution. They also, however, hold the responsibility of advancing the needs of the general public something Chang labels “Public Good”.

Negotiating the parameters and responsibilities of universities and colleges in light of the various populations they serve as well as identifying an appropriate compromise for what the institutions offer and who the opportunities are offered to can be a formidable task. Chang's lists details issues pertaining to the functioning and philosophy of the educational institution and also address how, in the grand picture, the institution may overlook the importance of consciously defining the educational experiences of groups of individuals from underrepresented groups.

Since educational institutions serve so many different groups, the task then is to provide a focus that is both comprehensive and simultaneously tailored to the distinct needs of particular groups. Chang (2000, p.169) contends that "the success or failure of 'diversity' initiatives depend on more than good will and commitment". Because these institutions of higher education are given the charge of representing the elements of society within their institution, Title VII helps to ensure an ethnically diverse population. The competing interests described here must receive serious attention in order to improve racial and gender dynamics. How colleges and universities integrate the conflicting demands into their mission will determine their ability to promote educational equity.

Thus, while the intent of Title VII is to address racial diversity, Title IX speaks specifically to opportunities that support gender equity in education. While prohibitions against sexual discrimination and sexual harassment have been defined through Education Amendments, recent disclosures of incidents of sexual harassment at the United States Air Force Academy continue to reflect a climate of intolerance to the presence of women in these institutions of higher learning. In 2003, a series of articles in the San Diego Union Tribune, 8 March, 13 March and 16 March 2003, reported the investigations of more than 56 cases of rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment that resulted in victims being reprimanded, punished or ostracized for reporting incidents of victimization. Throughout the investigation, it was noted that several women even resorted to terminating their education at the academy because of an intimidating and unsympathetic environment. A follow up article in the San Diego Union Tribune, 2 June 2003, reported that Secretary of the Air Force James Roche blamed the culture of the U.S. Air Force Academy in playing a role in allowing these severe cases of sexual harassment to occur. An article published in the San Diego Union Tribune 13 March 2003, credits the leadership for its newly-gained awareness of how institutionalized cultural attitudes can be expressed in brutal behaviors against women. Such information has prompted a commitment to change in order to provide women an environment conducive to achieving educational and professional goals similar to their male counterparts. To what extent other institutions of higher education also continue to hold similar resistance to the presence of women is uncertain but remains a valid concern.

Yet another example of the role that institutions of higher learning play in access to educational opportunities is represented by the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling regarding admission selection through Affirmative Action by the University of Michigan in *Gratz vs. Bollinger, et al.* and *Grutter vs. Bollinger, et al.*, cases that address equity in university admissions policies (Kurtz, 2003; Public Broadcasting System, 2003; American Association of University Women, 2003; Wood, 2003). While the Supreme Court ruling endorsed the principle of diversity, at this time, a decision has not been made regarding what mechanisms should be employed to achieve racial diversity and how they should factor into the admissions selection process. Careful procedural consideration was, however, a point of emphasis. These cases demonstrate the critical importance that racial equity continues to play in how educational institutions should best represent and serve the interests of the general public.

The disparities in educational experiences that are racially or gender based exemplify some of the difficulties that individuals may face in their desire to advance their education and status in society. These examples also make obvious how problematic one's gender and race can be in various issues of education. It should be noted that the examples cited address each factor individually, rather than in combination. Instances in which both factors are operating concurrently represent even far greater challenges for women from underrepresented groups. The overriding theme of equity issues is not just inclusion, but also providing ethnic women with the means to appreciate their abilities and contributions in the context of every aspect of their lives.

DISCIPLINE INTEREST

Historically, women's educational experiences have not reflected the opportunities that men's have in making contributions to various academic disciplines. Much of the discrepancy stemmed from views that held women in lower-status positions. Corresponding to these views were perceptions of ability that prohibited women from being considered for various educational opportunities. These gender and socially-based restrictions were partially responsible for the source of gender discrepancies in various educational disciplines.

To date, much of the data on the social improvements associated with Title IX fail to report the percentages of women from underrepresented groups. Even though women have been admitted to colleges and universities in higher numbers than ever before, a gender and racial discrepancy still exists in many components of education. The additional barriers posed by one's ethnicity are factors some women must be able to surmount to achieve the educational opportunities that will allow them independence, greater economic freedom and increased social status. The barriers are especially significant for women of particular age groups and for those who can only accomplish their education on

a part-time basis (American Association of University Women, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, Table 268). Moreover, when considering the ethnic composition within some disciplines (e.g. biological sciences, computer information sciences, engineering, physical sciences), even greater discrepancies between the sexes are evident as indicated in Table 3 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, Table 269). The need to address reasons for this continued discrepancy and ways of remedying them is an ongoing endeavor.

For ethnic women, the challenge to advance their education can be significant in and of itself simply due to cultural proscriptions. To enter fields of study that are nontraditional would require even greater motivation to demonstrate one's ability in the face of potentially strong gender cultural prohibitions.

TABLE 3

Bachelor's Degrees by: Racial/Ethnic Group, Major Field of Study, and Sex of Student 1999- 2000

Major Field of Study	White non-Hispanic		Black non-Hispanic		Hispanic		Asian/Pacific Islander		American Indian/ Alaskan Native	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Biology/Life Sciences	25,961	19,286	3,452	1,422	1,938	1,388	4,595	3,684	230	161
Computer Information Science	5,093	170,555	1,686	1,841	592	1,236	1,778	3,721	61	113
Engineering	7,443	32,609	1,117	2,036	720	2,467	1,706	5,337	91	244
Law and Legal Studies	996	358	233	66	103	52	52	33	7	5
Mathematics	4,199	4,697	515	484	291	341	474	508	38	34
Mechanics/ Repairs	6	49	0	3	0	1	0	1	0	0
Psychology	10,873	2,406	3,370	824	1,310	359	464	142	182	39
Social Sciences	45,784	47,365	7,431	4,447	4,993	4,042	4,406	3,837	529	441

Source: Data extracted from Table 269 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics; retrieved 9 Jun. 2003. "Integrated Post Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 'Completions' survey":

Bachelor's Degrees Conferred by Degree-Granting Institutions by Racial/Ethnic Group, Major Field of Study and Sex of Student 1999-2000".

GENDER AS A CULTURE

Over the past several years, behavioral science researchers have gained a greater appreciation for the variety of ways gender based cultural differences are articulated. While gender disparities in academic fields-of-interest, achievements and opportunities continue to be viewed as an index of progress in achieving equity, it is still not known to what extent these gender differences are a result of negative social and cultural attitudes about women's abilities. Still, this increased social awareness has prompted educational programs to encourage advocating respect, appreciation and accommodation of the gender differences because they may indeed be reflective of distinctive cultural views (Kunkel and Burleson, 1998, p.103).

Oftentimes, gender roles are used to make assumptions concerning what individuals know or what they can accomplish. Historically, widespread perceptions regarding abilities of men and women have served as the basis of expressing value-laden judgments of women being "less than" rather than being different (McEwen, 1990, p.504). The merit in distinguishing differences in ability rather than status is important in that it conveys a great deal about one's perspectives of another individual's potential. The extent to which these views are articulated throughout educational institutions is crucial to consider since it has the potential to impact a woman's perception of her own abilities to obtain an education as well as her own views about her contributions to society.

SELF-CONCEPT/WORTHINESS

This discussion of factors contributing to a woman's educational experience directs attention to the potential motivational factors that appear to sustain women in these environments so that they are able to advance their education. For some, the rationale to seek an advanced degree may include reasons such as: professional advancement (primary motive), developing social relationships, compliance with external influences (e.g. family, peers), social welfare (assisting others), escape/stimulation and cognitive interest (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p.54). Yet another cultural factor influencing a woman's educational experience is the way gender boundaries define the prospects for her future and social contributions.

A potentially significant factor influencing motivation and perseverance in achieving one's goals is the perception of one's abilities. A person must be able to acknowledge the value of who they are and the nature of the contributions they are capable of sharing with others. The perception and formulation of one's self-concept of worthiness is due in large part to external

socially-based factors. Learned beliefs, attitudes and opinions that each person holds about themselves tend to reflect the perceptions of individuals who play a significant role in their lives and can profoundly influence one's self concept (Purkey, 1988, p.1). Self-concept, then, is very much a social product. How do certain (educational) experiences contribute to one's self-concept?

In many instances, a person's desire to seek educational enrichment expresses, on some level, a sense of worthiness despite the possibility that their self-concept may be different from the way others see them. Part of what may determine how successfully that path is negotiated, therefore, may be one's ability to prevail over external limitations. Thus, belief in one's worth may require the ability to recognize and take advantage of opportunities that may be significant in accomplishing one's personal goals. In this way, success in accomplishing that endeavor provides important validation for continued progress.

Diversity issues emphasize clearly how certain groups may face social constraints on choices they can make in life. When combined with limited opportunities available from the larger society, differences in expression of behaviors and attitudes emerge within particular cultural groups. Culturally specific behaviors and attitudes then may influence the persistence of the marginal status of individuals from these groups (Wilson, 1996, p.65). Their inclusion within the larger society requires sensitivity to the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the realities of their cross-cultural existence. For the individuals, it is the awareness of the connections to the opportunities in different social contexts that become more challenging because of lack of familiarity with one's personal experiences. Appropriate support networks appear to be necessary to reveal the similarities in different cultural contexts serving to bridge the experiences of these individuals as well as reducing the social isolation experienced.

Constraints on success then may reflect barriers created by institutional cultures and society that are more indicative of differences in sociocultural expectations than individual deficiencies (Wilson, 1996, p.53). Understanding that individual choices mirror an individual's cultural perspective and that they may be discrepant from the dominant society is critical in determining how to best provide resources (e.g. information, guidance, etc.) necessary to enhance the likelihood of success. Just as individuals develop unique behavioral repertoires, much of the behaviors and attitudes that are often expressed also reflect the influence of the cultures that are a part each individual's life history and experiences. Understanding how these connections influence an individual's perception of choices is vital in the transformation of how institutional cultures operate on behalf of the various groups whose interests they serve.

The challenge that many women face as they negotiate the influences of various cultures (e.g. gender, institutional, ethnic) in the discovery of their destinies as well as their identities, is being attentive to the extensive resources

that are available to them. Furthermore, finding power in knowing how to ask the right questions and the knowledge of having choices are important in enabling women to see beyond their external cultural and internal self-imposed boundaries. It may be that part of helping women to increase their academic and career status is to expand their awareness of the opportunities and resources that are available to them.

The context of women's experience then, is chiefly defined by the existing social structure of the educational institution. The existence of this structure does not necessarily mean that women's educational goals will be unmet, especially when they strive to extend themselves into territories that have been traditionally less inclusive. Having additional knowledge of how the path to one's goals is possible can play a significant role in her experience and likelihood of success. This notion is expressed well in the following quote:

As we recognize that we are not merely passive victims of our circumstances, we can consciously become the architects of our lives. Even though others may have drawn the blueprints, we can recognize the plan, take a stand, and change the design (Corey, 1978, p.3).

In Kanoy, Wester and Latta's (1990, p.138) study describing differences between high and low achieving women, attribution of success is indeed related to their self-concept. They contend that improvement of self-concept coincides with encountering successful experiences; that these experiences then serve to alter women's perceptions to allow them to see what they can accomplish. Perceptions of a woman's ability, from within their individual communities as well as from external sources, can thereby serve as powerful mediating influences to obtaining an education. Quinonez claims that discouraging remarks can often influence a woman to believe that she is not good enough and lacks the skills that would allow successful completion of her education (Munoz, 2003, p.6). These data disclose how prohibitive cultural influences from one's family and community can later undermine a woman's self-confidence to achieve and decrease the likelihood of participation in the broader context of her educational experience. Mitchell and Dell (1992, p.42) found importantly, that as people become more comfortable with their racial identity, they are more likely to be more open and to take part in activities that extend beyond their typical academic experiences. For example, participation in extracurricular activities often provides valuable resources and experiences to advance an individual's education. While this data is specific to comfort with one's racial identity, the negative gender based attitudes held about women also convey important social messages about acceptance and inclusiveness that may require women to develop comfort with that aspect of their identity in a similar fashion.

Another example of negative views that women may face in their educational experiences is within the context of student leadership. McEwen (1990, p.504) identifies several biographical correlates of student leaders' attitudes towards women and found that a number of these factors have a socio-cultural basis. Importantly, gender continues to play a significant role in attitudes towards women. McEwen's data indicate that student leaders holding more favorable attitudes towards women tend to be upper class students, politically liberal, less religious, and major in the social sciences. They have greater career commitment, are female student leaders and are themselves females. In contrast, male student leaders tend to express vastly different attitudes due to their lack of personal context regarding the issues of rights and roles of women, and are less personally connected to such issues. Consistent with other data that have found the presence of women in the biological and physical sciences to be lacking (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, Table 269), student leaders in these traditionally male dominated fields maintained less accepting attitudes towards women. Despite the fact that this represents a more contemporary index of attitudes towards women in higher education, the data continue to reflect social and psychological resistance to accepting women in roles of leadership. McEwen cautions, however, against using these indicators of attitudes as predictors of these individual's actions. These data do, however, underscore the importance of making a concerted effort to maintain diversity of attitudes within an institutional organization as well as a continuing need for information about the roles and rights of women.

If these data, which represent only a limited sampling of universities, are viewed in light of the incidents involving the leadership at the Air Force Academy, they do convey the necessity to promote greater respect for diversity and the value of inclusiveness. The differences in level of support and expressions of confidence from leaders within these institutions of higher learning are points worth addressing in understanding how academic environments contribute to women's opportunities and success.

ETHNIC CULTURAL FACTORS

While Title IX has been important in women's access to the opportunities that are associated with higher education, other barriers to education persist including those associated with one's ethnicity. How cultural factors contribute to a woman's motivation to extend herself beyond her family boundaries to better herself personally, academically and professionally is also essential to understand. Care must be exercised to examine the context of how cultural values may contribute to a woman's autonomy in relation to her perceptions of her duties and obligations to her family and culture.

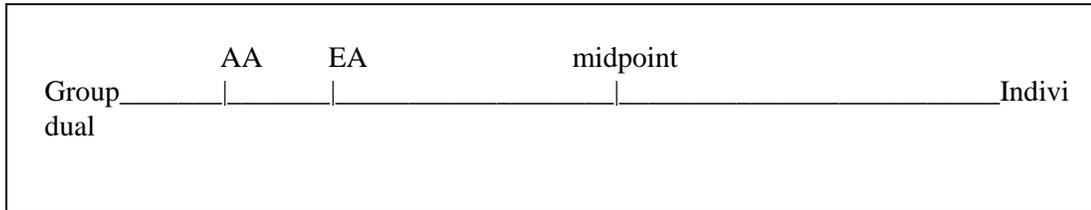
An important question to raise regarding this issue is whether there are indeed cultural differences among different ethnic groups. Secondly, what role do these differences play in a woman's prospect of receiving an education?

The research of Yoshito Kawahara (personal communication, 28 May, 2003) provides an answer to the first question. In an examination of cultural values of Asian Americans and European Americans over the past several years, Kawahara found empirical data to question some long-standing beliefs about each of these groups. The research provides a perspective of cultural values demonstrating their situational nature expressed in work and social settings for both groups (see Table 4). These cultural values then, represent degrees of differences and how social context may play a significant role in what values are expressed. For Asian American women, then, the context of which group she is currently self-identifying with (family vs. university) would provide an understandable cultural context for her responses.

Bipolar Continuum for Group/Individual Values

Asian Americans (AA) & European Americans (EA)

Fig. 1 Visual analog scale of opposing values (reproduced by permission from Y.



Kawahara, 2003)

TABLE 4

Opposing Values of Asian Americans & European Americans
Examples of values in Work/Social Setting

Asian American	European American
Group Oriented	Person Oriented
Collectivist	Individualist
Interdependent	Independent
Cooperative	Competitive
Harmony	Mastery
Duty & Obligation	Free-Will/Personal Rights
Formal	Informal
Self-Discipline	Spontaneous
Pessimism	Optimism
Situation-centered	Person-centered
Indirect/Nonassertive	Directive & Assertive

Table 4. Cultural Stereotypes of Asian Americans and European Americans
(Reproduced by permission from Y. Kawahara, 2003)

From this data, Kawahara proposes that Asian Americans (Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, Korean Americans) are far more similar in values than most people stereotypically believe. Moreover, that the stereotypes and polar dichotomization of European Americans from Asian Americans is inaccurate in describing expressed cultural values for these groups. While Asian Americans are significantly different from European Americans in cultural values, they are not bipolar opposites as shown in Figure 1. What these data help to clarify is that both groups are Group oriented however Asian Americans are more so.

These values then, represent stereotypes that may function to exaggerate differences between groups in order to further distinguish “us” versus “them” and consequently justifying diminishing the status of members of the other group. Kawahara goes on to state that the use of stereotypes by dominant groups may also serve the purpose of discounting and dehumanizing others. The perception of group differences as deficits further serves to segregate their association from one another. When viewed in the context of prior research that finds that women’s status relative to the dominant group is perceived to be “less than” (McEwen, 1990, p.504), perhaps maintaining stereotypical views of ethnic groups also serves the purpose of sanctioning exclusionary practices based on gender. It remains critical to empirically ascertain how these values specifically apply to women who strive to balance their ethnic value systems with opposing institutional demands, since they indicate potentially conflicting interests that can affect her educational goals.

In addition to the view that hold women to lower status positions is another that reflects her relationship to her family. Ethnically based views emphasize traditional attitudes that maintain that a woman’s status should reflect her role in the family.

The level of adherence to traditional views of women’s roles in society is reflective of the degree of acculturation. This perspective that a woman’s “proper” place is in the home where her primary role is in fulfilling the needs of others continues to permeate the values of several cultures (e.g. Hispanics, Asians, Middle Eastern). Such views limit women’s prospects for educational opportunities by requiring her to choose between her obligations to her family and her self, or to negotiate some other compromise. Without the opportunity to advance her education, she weakens her economic earning potential as well as her social status (American Association of University Women, 2003, p.10). While fulfilling the duty to remain with her family would maintain family harmony, it will likely preclude the degree of autonomy required to advance her educational status. Access to educational opportunities then becomes a critical factor in a woman’s social advancement due to their ties to economic, social and psychological independence. Women coming from cultures that place a high value on tradition-bound roles may have even greater difficulty overcoming these restrictions.

Educational institutions that do not take into consideration all the facets of a woman's personal history and the richness that comes with understanding how integrating gender and ethnicity can shape her identity and her place in society, restrict a woman's prospect of changing her social status. The lack of understanding of the personal challenges that a woman confronts, stemming from the behavioral expectations of one's gender and ethnic group, can be burdensome. Part of the difficulties that ethnic women face when attempting to advance themselves through education is achieving conscious awareness of how behaviors, expressed from one's gender and ethnic background, conform to different institutional and interpersonal cultural schemas. It is critical, then, for programs that are intending to provide equity in opportunities to be aware of the extent to which they may be demanding a woman to forego the parts of her self that she has known in order to express the behaviors that are more in compliance with social norms of the existing institutional standard.

FAMILY DYNAMICS: SUPPORT, ATTACHMENT & ADJUSTMENT

An ongoing theme for ethnic women seeking an education is the issue of establishing personal priorities for their families, themselves and society. An important social component of a woman's life is the emotional connections and support she receives from others. Females may need to maintain attachments to their support networks (family, friends, peers, etc.) more than they need to achieve behavioral and attitudinal independence from their primary sources of psychological and emotional support (e.g. their families).

According to Kenny and Donaldson (1992, p.435), in order for women to adjust well to their college experiences, they must be able to receive parental and emotional support for their autonomy. This reflects other findings that support the importance of familial encouragement to women, in attaining comfort with pursuing educational goals. The view tends to reflect a Western orientation, however, where the parental connections and support of individuation from the family facilitate a female's adaptation to changes associated with college experiences. The extent, therefore, to which this generalizes to other ethnicities requires further exploration.

For some women with particular ethnic backgrounds, maintaining ties to one's family becomes a task of negotiating a bi-cultural existence. Since each culture communicates their own expectations for adherence to gender roles, a bi-cultural woman must be able to address the context of expression of each of her cultural identities (Taub and McEwen, 1992, p.444). Some women's educational opportunities then are linked to the cultural values of her ethnic heritage with some demanding more accountability and compliance than others.

The influence of family and cultural ideals on a student's academic performance is a central component to Asian cultures (Kim and Rohner, 2002,

137; Li, 2002, p.265). The family positions of males, who serve as disciplinarians, teachers and guides, and those of elders, are of primary importance in Korean American and Chinese American ethnic groups. The father's role in Asian families commands obedience and respect and his approval and involvement then become salient features of a child's academic life. At least in Asian cultures, duty, obligation and interdependence on family members mean that one's educational experience is not typically obtained through behavioral expressions of autonomy. Obtaining approval from the patriarch of the family, then, becomes an essential part of one's educational opportunity. While not necessarily overtly expressed, there is the full knowledge that one's success or failure will always be reflected back upon the family. So for Asians at least, the context of one's duties and achievements are bound to one's culture.

Naomi Quinonez, a professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies at the California State University Fullerton, who fought against cultural stereotypes to receive an education, shared an example that illustrates the influence of the family on a woman's educational aspirations. According to Quinonez, Chicanas face a number of challenges that can interfere with their ability to get into college and complete their education. Her ethnic background and gender, like other Chicana women, placed her in a traditional role in the family where she was discouraged from pursuing higher education because "a woman's place was in the home". Quinonez remarked that women often face stereotypes to be silent, refrain from having their own opinions and ideas, get jobs and get married (Munoz, 2003, p.6). The statistics illustrate the difficulties Chicana's face in obtaining their undergraduate degree (American Association of University Women, 2003, p.46; National Center for Education Statistics, 2003, Table 269). Quinonez states "5 percent of Chicana women over the age of 25 complete a four-year education, while 21 percent of Anglo women, 31 percent of Asian women, and 14 percent of African American women earn a four-year degree" (Munoz, 2003, p.6).

Thus, in order for some women to obtain higher education, they must be able to separate themselves from their families and culture. The conflicting interests between a woman's own needs and those of her family can be a source of personal conflict. According to Rosalinda Camacho, coordinator of the Women of Color Resource Center, the struggles that Chicanas experience can influence their motivation to complete their education (Munoz, 2003, p.6). If some of the stresses that ethnic women are experiencing are related to cultural conflicts, then knowledge of the resources that will help them adjust more easily to their bicultural existence is important to provide. Some contend that acculturation processes may play a role in the degree of independence a person feels from the expectations of one's family and culture.

Social support, in addition to providing approval and connections to family and friends, plays an important role in determining academic success. Mallinckrodt and Leong (1992, p.76) found a correlation between the degree of

social support from one's family and the adjustment level for international students in graduate programs. Social support offers a strong coping resource for those encountering unfamiliar circumstances. Their research found that women received significantly less social support from their academic programs, and that support related to resources, relationships with other students, and curriculum flexibility were critical to enhancing women's educational experiences and reducing their negative experiences. Students who expressed negative evaluations of their experiences identified problems with childcare, living conditions and inadequate finances. Those issues, in particular, were strongly correlated with depression for the women in their study. These data indicate, then, that the unique circumstances of female international students may require special sensitivity to providing adequate resources for social support. While the previous studies emphasize the importance of emotional and psychological support, this data emphasizes the need for material support also.

ACCULTURATION

Another factor that may contribute to a student's likelihood of successful pursuit of their educational opportunities is related to one's cultural identification. Whether the students are international students who have only recently arrived or those whose families have been in the United States for several generations, the degree of comfort within one's self (Glenn, 2003) as well as one's social environment can certainly make a difference in one's academic success (Steward, Germain and Jackson, 1992, p.155). Of particular concern for some students are cultural differences, and connections to their extended family, finances and school (Parr and Bingi, 1992, p.24 ; Twombly, 1992, p.442). It is important to note that when these concerns are adequately addressed, students' emotional profiles express confidence, determination, and happiness (Parr and Bingi, 1992, p.24). It is apparent that the contrasting cultural differences do indeed affect these students' coping abilities and their academic experiences and that the magnitude of the effect is related to the degree of cultural contrast.

Researchers and educators continue to argue for the importance of sensitivity to the degree of acculturation in students from various ethnic groups. For Asians, there is a social context of learning that is influenced strongly by the degree of support from one's family. When the family is nurturing and supportive, the pursuit of learning acquires a more positive emotional tone that can enhance the pride of the student's achievements (Li, 2002, p.260). For Chinese families especially, gratitude for support and the knowledge of their family's sacrifice plays a profound influence in monitoring a student's learning behavior. In a larger context, there is a moral purpose to learning that is lifelong and achieved through one's efforts (Li, 2002, p.257). Inadequate academic performance is associated with feelings of shame in the

negative judgments received from one's families. Learning's affective qualities for Chinese, then, certainly are related to the individual, their families and their peers. What is less clearly understood is how well these values persist into subsequent generations of families whose presence in the U.S. has been longstanding.

CONFLICTS WITH FAMILY

When women experience conflicts between their family and their goals, they can feel further isolated in their personal experiences. Differences in degree of acculturation may be a point of conflict with their families. Without the support from their families, students may resort to seeking help from providers; especially from those who reflect their particular value system. For Asian Americans, the type of support that students prefer differs according to how strongly they identify with traditional values. Since a core component of Asian culture affecting an individual's response to learning is filial piety (the respect due to elders and other authority family figures), students who maintain these cultural values may express discomfort looking to outside sources for assistance and support. It is understandable, then, why students who maintain more traditional values are more likely to seek help about personal problems from authority figures who are more consistent with their value system (Atkinson, Whiteley and Gim, 1990, p.155). Having such resources available would serve a very important need to students with these particular circumstances.

In a study contrasting Israeli Jews and Israeli Arab adolescents in academic achievement, ethnic and gender differences appeared to be related to the degree of parental involvement and "demandingness". Seginer & Vermulst (2002, p.554), report data that points to the value of maintaining an awareness of the context of an individual's cultural background. They found that the social background of Israeli Arabs and Jews influences academic achievement differently for male and female adolescents with corresponding differences in expectations for achievement. The strong culturally-bound gender social proscriptions were reflected in their findings that Arab parents placed less demands on their daughter's academic achievement than their sons.

For an Arab female, then, pursuit of an education requires motivation based on her own self-interest. Females from this culture do not experience the parental involvement that a male would, primarily because she is expected to follow the traditional path of early marriage. If females do pursue an education, it is only possible with the consent of the males in her family. These females learn that they must solely shoulder the responsibility for high academic achievement; and such achievement is a necessary but not sufficient condition for pursuing a higher education. Arab females must possess a higher degree of self-reliance and not look to their environment (family) to support their educational goals. This may conflict with the expectations to behave obediently

and show commitment to one's family and culture, which are vital parts of their value system. Going against cultural traditions can potentially impede Arab women's educational goals. These data reinforce, once again, the idea that ethnicity, culture and gender do indeed strongly influence access to educational opportunities.

ACCULTURATION CONFLICT ISSUES

It is important to address how women's cultural identities are expressed, as well as the context of that expression. Role conflicts like those described above are limited examples of what many women experience when seeking an advanced education. The persistent traditional message that a woman's primary role is as a marital partner and mother continue to be at odds with goals to advance academically and achieve a career (Seginer and Vermulst, 2002, p.553). It is very likely, then, that the ways in which an individual overtly expresses one's immediate cultural identity may be situation specific.

Role conflict issues may also be behaviorally expressed as "frame switching" tendencies in bicultural individuals, the notion being that ideas, values and knowledge shared by various cultural groups may be either compatible with or in opposition to ethnic and mainstream cultures. Benet-Martinez, Leu, and Morris' (2002, p.509) assessment of an individual's attempts to integrate aspects of their bicultural identity show that some groups more easily negotiate the discrepancies between their cultural identities than others.

Kawahara (personal communication with author, 28 May, 2003) suggests that some bicultural individuals rely on external environmental cues to guide their behavior. Responses to situations then reflect perceptions of cultural differences and awareness of the discrepancies between differing cultural standards and values. Data such as these emphasize the need to maintain sensitivity to an individual's perceptions of how different their personal identities are relative to the environment they operate in and the requirements of negotiating possible cultural conflicts. Factors such as gender, ethnicity, and others all contribute to an individual's social identity, with each imposing unique demands that ultimately require some aspect of integration into their lives (Benet-Martinez, et al., 2003, p.512).

Degree of acculturation, amount of personal conflict, institutional climate towards diversity all serve as cultural boundaries to women's access to education and future opportunities to careers and leadership. In 1992, Nagasawa and Espinosa (1992, p.137) explored the factors influencing academic achievement in Asian Americans. While Asian Americans embrace middle class values, and they express similar tendencies striving to attain upward social mobility, lack of total acceptance and respect may play a role in the social isolation they experience. Identifying support networks of peers who understand their experiences becomes critical in adjusting to social differences

and providing support. The sense of cultural isolation and personal conflict that ethnic women often experience may therefore require her to identify other sources of social and emotional support. By having these alternative sources of emotional support, women may better manage the demands of pursuing educational goals. Together, these data emphasize the importance of awareness of cultural differences and the necessity of social support mechanisms. Importantly, what may arise out of this tight social support is the encouragement to persist.

NEED FOR MENTORING/SUPPORT

Given that an ethnic female's educational experience may be influenced by various cultural factors that can affect her self concept, self worth, feelings of support and expressions of cultural and family foundations, it seems clear that identifying and providing adequate mentoring support networks and programs is imperative in her attainment of success. Mitchell and Dell (1992, p.42) contend that some females may be less likely to be involved in cultural and professional organizations because of their lack of exposure to appropriate role models and support networks that males typically possess.

In examining the many interdependent constellations of factors influencing ethnic women's educational experiences, those factors that help to sustain the realization of her goals are, related by and large, to interpersonal needs. Among the more consistent findings is the need for various forms of support, some related to material resources, others more personal. The studies reviewed illustrate fairly clearly that there are hierarchical preferences.

Foremost is the support from one's family. For many women, gaining approval from significant family members to pursue one's educational goals is vital. The need for this approval is an outgrowth of cultural foundations that have a collectivist/group oriented social structure. Within this cultural context of strong interdependency, desire for cooperation and duty to one's family, such approval provides a meaningful endorsement for these women's educational pursuits. It can determine, therefore, a woman's ease with advancing her education.

Peer support becomes significant in the absence of family contact and support. Because peers share similar academic experiences, they provide a different form of validation from the women's families. Peers are more likely to understand the academic challenges and are also sympathetic to the issues surrounding family dynamics (Steward, et al, 1992, p.154).

When the support of one's family and culture are lacking, institutional resources become important. At a rudimentary level, the educational institution can provide material resources: financial aid, housing, childcare, etc. thereby freeing women from worry over the more basic needs of existence. Mentors become essential in assisting the women to become familiar with the expectations and demands from the educational institution that they are a part

of. These mentors can serve, additionally, as role models playing ongoing roles in academic and professional development. Since mentors of similar ethnicity and/or gender have experienced many of the same issues, they are generally the most successful in offering guidance and encouragement to achieve educational goals.

The Education Amendments of Title VII and Title IX have demonstrated that access to education has significant and far-reaching influence in advancing the status of individuals from underrepresented groups. The programs and policies set forth by these amendments have enabled countless numbers of individuals to escape the limits imposed upon them by virtue of their gender and ethnicity. It is important to remember, however, that ethnicity will always bind individuals to many aspects of their cultural identities; cultures that will determine, to varying degrees, how individuals choose to define their identity, their obligations to their families and communities, as well as their contributions to society. Title VII and Title IX have played significant roles in charting a course to success for underrepresented groups. New policies are critical to the continuing improvement of educational opportunities so that one day, gender and racial equity will become a reality.

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