Women of Color in Leadership

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Founding of a New Journal in Trauma

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WOMEN OF COLOR IN LEADERSHIP
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In the spring of 2000, I was invited to a meeting that was the beginning of a new Division in APA. Judie Alpert wrote to all current APA divisions and invited them to send representatives to a meeting at the APA convention regarding founding a division in trauma psychology. I was serving as the representative to the Committee on Disability Issues in Psychology on the Division 38 (Health Psychology) Board and was one of the health psychology representatives who attended that meeting.

The room was packed when the meeting took place at APA. Everyone there was excited about forming this division. From that meeting, an executive committee was formed, and a listserv and Website begun. These were our first steps in our six-year journey to become the APA Division of Trauma Psychology (Division 56). I became Division Secretary at that first meeting, a position I have held ever since. In 2006, we received conditional approval from the Council of Representatives to become a Division, and we had our first official meeting at the APA convention in New Orleans.

From the beginning, a goal of the Division was to have a journal. Initial work on the journal began in 2006. In 2007, upon request from the Executive Council, Laura Brown (current President Elect) formed a Journal Committee and served as chair. After weighing many options, the Committee recommended that we purchase an existing journal, Journal of Psychological Trauma, from Haworth Press. APA approached Haworth and they were willing to sell JPT to APA. It looked like a done deal. It was not.

Shortly before the APA Convention in 2007, our Executive Council learned that mega-publisher Taylor & Francis (based in the U.K. and publisher of more than 1500 journals) had purchased Haworth Press. Taylor & Francis, as the new owners of the journal, were not willing to sell the journal. The Executive Council invited Gary VandenBos, chairman of APA Publications, and Kevin Bradley, president of Taylor & Francis, to our Executive Council meeting in San Francisco. Before the meeting, Judie Alpert (President), Bob Geffner (President-Elect) and Steve Gold (Editor of JPT and current Division 56 President) met and developed a list of questions that they had for both APA and Taylor & Francis. Jennifer Freyd, chair of the Science Committee, brought up the issue of open access for articles (which means that authors maintain the copyright for their work). Authors need to be able to share what they write with others in the field, and younger investigators will not write for journals that don’t allow that.

After Gary and Kevin left the meeting, the group discussed their offers in more detail. Judie suggested that both Melba Vasquez and Terry Keane be added to the journal committee. Both agreed. The Journal Committee worked together for several more weeks and decided to go with APA as our publisher. The contract negotiation took several more weeks, as Bob,
Laura and Gary VandenBos negotiated the contract. When the Journal of Psychological Trauma was originally slated to be the Division journal, Steve Gold was the current editor. During our discussions, the Executive Council asked Steve if he would be willing to become the Editor of the new journal, assuming that it would not be the Journal of Psychological Trauma. Steve’s exact response was “in a New York minute.”

Several months before the discussion about making JPT the Division journal, Steve had asked me to become Associate Editor. That was put on hold until we saw what would happen with the Division journal. Steve also invited Chris Courtois to become an Associate Editor. Our new journal, Psychological Trauma, was officially launched at the APA convention in Boston with a lovely wine-and-cheese reception (and very good wine).

Once we knew the journal was a “go,” we assembled an editorial board. In considering this board, we included both clinicians and researchers. We included people with expertise in various types of trauma: disaster, combat, family and interpersonal violence. We also considered the diversity of the board, including ethnicity, disability status and sexual orientation. All three groups are well represented on the editorial board. We invited Sherry Hamby to serve as our Associate Editor for Statistics. Learning to be a journal editor was pretty daunting at first, but Steve has been a great mentor for both Chris and I. We have weekly conference calls with Steve, Chris, and I, and the journal’s editorial assistant, Yenys Castillo.

When an article is submitted, it goes through an APA Website called the “Journal Back Office.” This site helps us manage the flow of articles. They get assigned to our queue, where we can click on a link read the article, assign reviewers, and read reviews. We can then write decision letters. The system keeps track of all of this, and when we pull up a specific article, we can see the full history of it. Although a very nice system, there was a fairly steep learning curve. It was several weeks before it felt really comfortable to use. But once again, it was nice to be in such congenial company of fellow editors as we learned the system together.

Our current challenge is getting enough reviewers to review submissions in a timely fashion. As an editor, I prefer to have at least two reviews on an article, but sometimes it’s quite difficult to get two—so a manuscript may be stuck in limbo for weeks. We really worked hard to get the first issue put together by our January deadline. When we successfully made our first deadline, we learned that APA was quite surprised—and impressed—that we made it.

Our third issue has just gone to press, and the journal is doing very well. According to the APA publication’s office, we are about three years ahead of schedule in terms of number of subscribers, and 35% of subscribers are not Division 56 members (meaning that we are having an impact outside of our Division). Steve, Chris and I have all been impressed at the range and quality of the articles we have received. Not only do they cover the full range of traumatic experience, but the submissions are from all over the world. Our plans are to bring on two more Associate Editors, as well as 2-3 Statistical Editors, to handle the flow of submissions.

So that is how we founded Psychological Trauma. It’s been challenging, but also a great deal of fun. Steve, Chris and I would like to invite you to join us by either reviewing or writing articles. If you would like to know more about our journal or Division 56, I would encourage you to visit our Website www.apatraumadivision.org.

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As we write this article about women of color in leadership, it is during the first month of the nomination of Judge Sonia Sotomayor for Supreme Court Justice by President Barack Obama. We are absolutely delighted about this event for multiple reasons. The nomination and hopeful appointment of Sotomayor as Supreme Court Judge is another opportunity for women of color to be recognized for their competence as leaders, whether it be in the judicial system, politics, universities, other governmental contexts, corporate entities, or professional organizations. It also provides us with an interesting case study as we write this article.

Critics of Sotomayor have raised questions about the possibility that her identity as a Latina would affect her decision-making. Of course it will, as do the identities of white privileged males. As psychologists, we know that all justices, as well as most individuals in any work context, may at times bring their lived experiences to the bench.

Empirical research on federal appeals court decisions indicate that in sex discrimination and sexual harassment cases, female judges were significantly more likely than male judges to find for the plaintiff (Peresie, 2005; Liptak, 2009). Even more interesting was the finding that the mere presence of a woman or Black on a three-panel appeals court increased the probability that a White male would find for the plaintiff (Peresie, 2005, Liptak, 2009). The implication is that the presence of a woman of color in most settings may influence awareness of colleagues, including increased understanding and empathy for the perspective represented by that identity. Marian Anderson, a world-renowned African American singer said, “Leadership should be born out of the understanding of the needs of those who would be affected by it” (Lewis, 2005). Her point argues for the very characteristic that is eschewed by the Sotomayor critics.
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The Challenges

Women of color generally feel encouraged and inspired to see other women of color achieve visible leadership roles, but can be demoralized by the challenges and barriers that those women come up against. What are the challenges of leadership in nontraditional areas for women?

Achieving and taking on leadership on the part of women of color is “not for the faint of heart.” We are distressed by the appalling treatment, for example, of Texas A&M University President Elsa Murano who was the first woman and first Latina to lead that university. She was apparently forced to resign due to differences in philosophy, after she questioned a “Governor Perry-flavored plan” that was to award bonuses to faculty members based on student evaluations (Haurwitz, 2009, p. A1). Subsequently, although she had been hired over a year ago for her “leadership abilities, integrity, research credentials, global understanding, willingness to listen, decisiveness and experience running a large, complex organization” (Haurwitz, 2009 p. A5), she was poorly rated on her evaluation by the Chancellor on items including honesty, integrity, decision-making and being a team player. President Murano said the review was “not based on the facts.” US Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison from Texas, who will run against Governor Perry next year, called the situation at A&M “unacceptable” and said she hoped the Board of Regents “ends the politics now” (Haurwitz, 2009, p. 7). Gender/racial/ethnic politics may be involved, and we are interested in a full feminist/multicultural deconstruction of this tragedy. What do the positive and negative events like these mean for women of color leaders?

Although women of color come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, they often share similar experiences in that they face challenges to leadership in any context, including prejudices in the workplace and traditional socio-cultural expectations at home. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Badar Ginsberg, the second woman to serve on the Supreme Court, and currently the only woman, is reported to have reported uncertainty about her influence. She indicated, “I will say something—and I don’t think I’m a confused speaker—and it isn’t until somebody else says it that everyone will focus on the point” (Liptak, 2009, p. OP4). Even at the Supreme Court level, the dynamic of being invisible is evident!

Unique challenges for women of color include: devaluation of work and contributions; subtle gender and racial/ethnic discrimination; role restrictions; anxiety about performance, which can interfere with actual performance (stereotyped threat); relative lack of mentoring and other networking opportunities that have been identified as critical to success (Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007; Vasquez & Daniel, in press). That is, even though a woman of color may hold official positions of leadership, status and prestige, she may also have the lonely experience of not really being accorded the respect, value and inclusion of those of her White male peers. Nonetheless, she is likely to be called upon constantly by others seeking support from her as a role model and mentor.

The ways in which the intersection of racial/ethnic and gender group membership intersects with other dimensions of identity is also important. Many women of color have additional aspects of identity that may influence the experience of a woman of color in her efforts to achieve leadership. Identity factors, such as sexual orientation, disability, physical size and socioeconomic factors, are examples of other dimensions of identity that enhance or detract from one’s value to others (Green, 2007).

The Strategies and Benefits

Women of color have much to offer and contribute that is unique. Workplace experts have described diversity as a foundation for resilience, creativity and vitality (Shullman, 2009). Providing and receiving mentoring is a critical strategy in achieving and maintaining leadership. Mentored women and men report having more satisfaction, career mobility.
and opportunity, recognition, and a higher promotion rate than non-mentored individuals (Fagenson, 1989). The significant factor in achievement for various minority groups may be access to mentors (Comas-Diaz, in press). We suggest that there are various forms of mentoring, including the traditional individual mentor as well as “situational mentors,” brief events of mentoring from peers, white men, white women, men of color and other women of color, both from within one’s group as well as other racial/ethnic groups.

In a survey of mentors and mentees, Jeruchim and Shapiro (1992) found it helpful for women to have both male mentors as well as female mentors. Male mentors tend to offer more instrumental assistance and can promote greater advancement opportunities because of their position in a power hierarchy, while women mentors, often in less powerful positions, tend to provide more emotional support and personal advice. They also found it will take longer and require a more cautious approach for minority women to find mentors. We believe that women of color should strive to find multiple mentors at any given point in time as one mentor rarely fulfills all of her needs (Vasquez & Daniel, in press).

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Taking risks to aspire for leadership, whether we achieve our goals or not, are important processes to model for those who observe our efforts.
Austria and Austria (in press) described effective mentors as those who provide a climate of respect for their protégés. They provide emotional support, high expectations, vision, empathy, nonjudgmental support, and a sense of humor. They are usually described as intelligent, caring, committed, practical, generous, honest, empathic and patient.

Effective mentors provide support and encouragement to mentees, especially at crisis periods or turning points in the mentees’ career life. They create opportunities for the mentees, allow their work to be unimpeded and set high performance standards. Kitchener (1992) emphasized that effective mentors are ethical and exhibit professionally valued behaviors, attitudes and skills to help their protégés achieve competence, confidence, and clear professional identity. They are honest and forthright, with high integrity. They are attentive to performance problems, provide honest feedback, and recommend corrective measures, including termination of the relationship, if necessary.

Other strategies and skills related to involvement in leadership include risk taking, persistence, flexibility & adaptability, and seeking support (either expertise or emotional), especially when one makes errors/mistakes. One can strive for excellence, but not expect perfection (Vasquez & Daniel, in press). Evidence (Aronson, 2002) leads us to understand that intelligence and related abilities are expandable or incremental qualities that are increased by training and experience. In other words, most of us can learn to “rise to the occasion” if provided the opportunities.

We are among those who prioritize values to support, mentor and empower others. The importance of giving and receiving support and mentoring is critical at all stages of the leadership experience. Taking risks to aspire for leadership, whether we achieve our goals or not, are important processes to model for those who observe our efforts. One of us, for example, has run for APA President, and the other is currently a candidate for APA president. We also appreciate that Diane Willis and Alice Chang are women of color who have been candidates for the APA Presidency as well.

The process for each of us has been an amazing experience in the impact it seems to have on other women of color. We strive to win, and whether we do or not, the experiences for us and the impact on others makes it worth the effort. In 1972, Shirley Chisholm was the first woman of color to run as a candidate for the Democratic nomination for President of the United States. She said that while she was a very serious candidate, she was running so that other people of color might run and win. She ran so that Barack Obama could run. Erkut (2009) found that women in leadership are tenacious and optimistic and they serve with a sense of mission. These traits certainly fit the women we have mentioned in this article. We have the same kind of tenaciousness, optimism, and sense of mission. Women of color must lead because their leadership inspires and makes a difference.

**References**


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