

**MINORITIES AND WOMEN IN
SOCIOLOGY IN THE
PACIFIC REGION**

**A Comment on the Five-Year
Follow-Up Study**

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In commenting on the results of the five-year follow-up study of minorities and women in sociology in the Pacific region, policy considerations and research needs are cited. The need for regular systematic surveys, exploring equity in employment of sociologists outside academia, and other methods of studying the issue are discussed.

Both the profession and the Pacific Sociological Association owe the Sociology Survey Research Laboratory and the Department of Sociology at Arizona State University a debt of gratitude for their efforts in providing information on the status of minorities and women in the Pacific Region. The results they have obtained provide important information regarding the relative equity faced by these groups and prompt both concerns for future policies and suggestions for further research. In the paragraphs that follow I briefly consider each of these areas.

THE PATH TO EQUITY

The picture presented in the preceding article provides a basis for some concerns regarding the future of minorities and women in the profession. For instance, there was only a slight increase in the proportion of women on sociology department faculties in the Pacific Region from 1979 to 1984 and very little

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change in the representation of minorities. In addition, although minorities and women were still overrepresented in the lower academic ranks in 1984, there was a slight decline in their representation in the entry levels. As in 1979, both minorities and women were found less often as faculty members than in the population as a whole. Among both minority faculty and minority graduate students Blacks and Native Americans were especially underrepresented in comparison to their representation in the population as a whole.

On the other hand, slightly more minorities were found in graduate programs in 1984 than in 1979, and these students were slightly more likely than nonminority students to receive financial support. Women represented more than half of the sociology graduate students in 1984 and were about as likely as men students to receive financial support. Both minority and women faculty were more likely to be tenured and in higher academic ranks in 1984 than in 1979.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Two results from the 1984 survey suggest that many departments in the Pacific Region have instituted policies that enhance equity. Most notable are the findings that untenured women are no longer overburdened by committee assignments and that minority graduate students are more likely to have funding than nonminority students. The former policy helps ensure that women have the time to devote to research needed to gain tenure. The latter policy helps ensure that students who may be most likely to need financial aid, given wider societal patterns of racial discrimination, do indeed receive support.

Sociologists, perhaps more than scholars in any other discipline, know the deep-seated roots of race and sex discrimination and the need to work constantly to develop and maintain any advances toward equity. This implies that departments concerned with promoting equity must consider not only hiring, tenure, and promotion policies but also those that involve the day-to-day working conditions of faculty. It is vital that equity

be provided in areas such as teaching loads, clerical support, and salaries.¹ Most important, established faculty members should exhibit genuine and ongoing concern for minority and women graduate students and beginning minority and women faculty. Studies of successful affirmative action programs in higher education note the importance of committed administrators and faculty members in increasing equity within colleges and universities (e.g., Hyer, 1985). I would hypothesize that a similar phenomenon occurs on the departmental level.

One of the most difficult policy areas, and one that the profession and departments probably cannot address in isolation, is the underrepresentation of certain minority groups, most notably Blacks and Native Americans, among both faculty and graduate students. This is a nationwide problem, reflecting the underrepresentation of these groups at all levels of higher education (see Harvey and Scott-Jones, 1985; American Council on Education [ACE], 1985) and the greater incidence of poverty among these groups. Changing these patterns will undoubtedly require efforts beyond those that can be implemented within the profession or individual departments, but certainly is not a responsibility that individual sociologists would want to shirk.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Regularly monitoring the status of minorities and women in our profession is extremely important. Case studies of various schools are relatively common (e.g., Hill, 1983; Hyer, 1985), but regular, systematic surveys such as those reported in the preceding article are extremely important, both for providing valuable information and for encouraging continued actions to promote equity. Just as it was important to follow the 1979 survey with one in 1984 to see how those who had entered academe fared over the five-year period, so it will be important to reassess the status of women and minorities in the profession in another five to ten years. As increasing numbers of sociologists reach retirement age, more academic positions should become available (Bowen and Schuster, 1985). The extent to which minorities and

women are able to obtain their share of these posts will be a real test of the development of equity in the profession.

Although it is hoped that regular surveys of departments will continue, it might also be profitable to expand the scope of inquiry beyond academia. The shrinkage of the academic marketplace over the last five years indicates that a number of sociologists are finding employment outside the traditional college and university markets. It would be important to examine how minorities and women fare in nonacademic areas as well as in academe.

It could also be profitable to consider means of tracking the status of women and minorities other than periodic surveys of departments. One possibility involves examining the fate of students entering graduate cohorts. It is well known that only a proportion of students who begin graduate study in sociology eventually finish their training and enter a professional career in the field. We do not know, however, to what extent rates of completion within sociology programs vary for women and men or for members of various racial-ethnic groups. We also do not know if various aspects of graduate training are especially prone to either encourage or discourage minorities or women in their graduate work.

Finally, research could focus on affirmative action, the major government-supported policy directed toward equity concerns. Numerous issues regarding the relative effectiveness of different approaches to affirmative action and their impact on the experiences of minorities and women in the profession and in graduate school need to be examined. Such considerations are especially important in an era when affirmative action policies have been challenged by highly placed government officials. (See Lynch, 1985, for a discussion of a number of theoretical issues related to this area.)

SUMMARY

Clearly, among tenured sociology faculty in the Pacific Region, men far outnumber women and whites far outnumber minorities.

Yet the pool of scholars available to replace these tenured faculty looks much different. Women make up two-fifths of all untenured faculty and over half of all doctoral students. Minorities make up 16% of all untenured faculty and 25% of all doctoral students. Thus, in many ways, the outlook for greater race and sex equity in our profession appears good. If colleges and universities in the Pacific Region hire and continue to promote and tenure women and minorities and if they provide atmospheres that allow them to remain productive scholars, it appears that the potential is present for greater equity in the profession. Continued efforts will be needed to realize this potential, and the greatest challenge undoubtedly lies in increasing the representation of members of the most underrepresented minority groups.

NOTE

1. Hill (1983) noted the success of one department in attracting women faculty over a period of years. However, in 1985 three of the five women faculty members filed formal complaints against the University, citing sex discrimination in salaries. Monetary settlements were made in all three cases.

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