Race-Related Service and Faculty of Color: Conceptualizing Critical Agency in Academe
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Race-related service and faculty of color: Conceptualizing critical agency in academe

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Abstract. Based on a qualitative study of sixteen faculty of color at a private research university, this article argues that service, though significantly presenting obstacles to the promotion and retention of faculty of color, actually may set the stage for a critical agency that resists and redefines academic structures that hinder faculty success. The construct of ‘service,’ therefore, presents the opportunity for theorizing the interplay of human agency and social structures. The article suggests that faculty may seek to redefine oppressive structures through service, thus, exercising an agency that emerges from the very structures that constrain it. Faculty of color, in particular, may engage in service to promote the success of racial minorities in the academy and elsewhere. Thus, service, especially that which seeks to further social justice, contributes to the redefinition of the academy and society at large.

At most institutions, and at research universities in particular, service is the least important criterion for advancement (Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Centra 1993; Jarvis 1991). Yet, paradoxically, service, broadly defined, is necessary for the functioning of institutions of higher education, and it might especially be important for promoting (and ensuring) shared governance. Thus, all faculty members struggle to balance service with the other promotion and tenure criteria. Faculty of color, however, struggle with this balance in particular ways given that they are offered more opportunities due to their high visibility, the belief that they present diverse perspectives, and the mentoring they are regarded by others as providing to students of color (Menges and Exum 1983). Consequently, faculty of color’s opportunity for advancement likely is reduced significantly by excessive service demands.

Given the institutional need for service, and its potential consequences to individual faculty members, service often is conceptualized in the research literature as a structural “problem” of the promotion and tenure process (see, e.g., Exum 1983). I argue, however, that conceptualizing service as “problematic” negates the role of critical agency in resisting and redefining institutional structures. I suggest as well that rather than framing service as a “problem,” scholars should question the institutional practices and views of merit that devalues an important part of faculty work. I do not intend to argue that service is more important than the other promotion and tenure
criteria; instead, I suggest that scholars question the underlying assumptions that ensure that service is deemed inherently less valuable than those other criteria.

I intend in this paper to provoke readers to think differently about some of the "givens" of the promotion and tenure process. The paper does not feign objectivity; it intends to contribute to the dialectic surrounding notions of justice in the academy. Specifically, I argue for the recognition of a critical agency which uses service to redefine institutional structures, and in this regard service is important and valuable when it furthers social justice. In making this argument, I question the suggestion by many scholars that institutions loosen their demands for service. Such suggestions negate work that seeks to improve the subordinated status of people of color. The demand should be, therefore, not for a loosening of service requirements but for the justification of the institutional structures and norms that ensure that faculty members are evaluated in particular ways that maintain those structures and norms.

I start the paper with a brief discussion of service and how it is deemed problematic for faculty, particularly faculty of color. I then describe a study I conducted that highlighted the importance of service for faculty of color. I use this study, not so much to "prove" that faculty of color deem race-related service important, but to highlight the possibility that the prevailing conceptualizations of merit, justice, and faculty work might benefit from a theoretical elaboration of structure and agency. The body of the paper consists of the study's findings and my elaboration of critical agency in initiating social change. Finally, I provide suggestions for resisting institutional structures.

Service and faculty evaluation

I define "service" broadly, following generally Blackburn and Lawrence's (1995) definition of service as the "CATCHALL [sic] name for everything that is neither teaching, research, nor scholarship" (p. 222). Blackburn and Lawrence indicated that there are two types of service. The first is "internal" service, which is defined as:

Performing "for the good of the organization" ... Meeting with a board committee, speaking to an alumni association gathering, arranging a visiting-lecturer series, sponsoring a student organization, entertaining advisees at your home - almost anything that casts the college in a favorable light among its many constituencies falls under the heading of what we call "internal" service (p. 222).
The second type is "external" service, and it includes the functions and activities professors perform outside their college or university, particularly paid consulting, "pro bono" work (i.e., service with remuneration), and professional service (i.e., service given to a disciplinary specialty). Service includes, therefore, administrative tasks, institutional and community activities, and professional activities. Implied in this definition are those activities that can not easily be evaluated, such as mentoring students, developing and participating in support groups and networks, and so forth.

The faculty at most institutions is evaluated on three criteria: scholarship, teaching, and service. Each criterion weighs differently depending on the institutional-type or mission of a college or university (Jarvis 1991; Tierney and Bensimon 1996). Many institutions, especially research universities, place greater value on scholarship than on the other criteria (Blackburn and Lawrence 1995). Non-research universities stress teaching (Jarvis 1991). But these generalities obscure important contentions about faculty work. As Altbach (1994) asserted "One of the main debates of this decade concerns the appropriate balance between teaching and research in academe — a debate that goes to the role of the university as an institution and is critical for the academic profession" (p. 235).

Service often is left out of this debate. If it is mentioned at all, it is framed as problematic for faculty. This "problem-perspective" is understandable, given the institutional practices that place greater emphasis on the other promotion and tenure criteria (Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Centra 1993; Jarvis 1991; Tierney and Bensimon 1996). The research literature indicates that service is expected of all faculty members at most institutions of higher education but rarely is valued highly by promotion and tenure processes that actually punish faculty members for doing too much of it. Jarvis (1991), for example, explained that many junior faculty members are exploited by being assigned too much responsibility too early, hindering their publishing and teaching effectiveness. Consequently, a number of scholars claim that faculty members see service as taking time away from other preferred roles and activities (See, e.g., Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Centra 1993).

There are some characterizations of faculty work in the research literature that frame these concerns in broader ways than merely whether institutions should give greater weight to teaching, service, or research. Boyer (1990), for example, argued in Scholarship Reconsidered that scholarship includes a wide range of activities, and he indicated that the scholarship of "application" may include the use of research in service activities that seek to solve social problems. He probably would contend, however, that this scholarship somehow must be "published" either through conventional means in books, journals, or monographs, or through, for example, presentations.
professional and community associations. The follow-up to Boyer’s study, *Scholarship Assessed* (Glassick et al. 1997), in stressing the need for standards of evaluation, substantiation, and documentation, illustrates that Boyer does not stray too far from privileging traditional notions of merit which emphasize the public dissemination of knowledge. Furthermore, as Davis and Chandler (1998) explained, Boyer’s work supports the prevailing faculty reward system, which will privilege research and teaching over service given the arrangements and structures that are served by traditional faculty evaluation (e.g., entrepreneurship). Yet, in providing an alternative to traditional notions of scholarship, Boyer’s work and its follow-up may be read as supporting a definition of merit that accounts for service that promotes social justice.

At any rate, service is made problematic in the research literature in two ways. First, since service is expected of all faculty members, and it usually is given little weight in faculty evaluation, it hinders scholarship and teaching effectiveness (e.g., Jarvis 1991). Second, because it is commonly understood that at research universities (at least) scholarship and teaching are valued more than service, faculty members feel burdened by service (see, e.g., Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Jarvis 1991). Furthermore, the negative consequences of service are deemed to result either from the abuse of institutional authority or, structurally, as a necessary but unimportant (or undervalued) condition of faculty work. These conceptualizations are prevalent in the research literature about faculty of color.

**Service and faculty of color**

Banks (1984), in an often-cited article, argued that rather than being encouraged to focus on their “academic work,” many Black professors were “sucked into a plethora of activities often unrelated to their competence and interests. . . . Scholarly work had to be accomplished in combination with the extra-academic responsibilities hoisted onto their shoulders and consciences” (p. 327). In distinguishing “academic work” from other activities, Banks recognizes, of course, that scholarship and teaching are important, and other activities can involve the “misuse of Black scholars.” Such assertions, however, although appropriately recognizing the consequences of service, have three pitfalls: (a) they fail to challenge the bases for those consequences, (b) they fail to acknowledge that service may benefit faculty of color by furthering personal and political goals, and (c) they fail to recognize the importance of critical agency in initiating social change.

It cannot be disputed by anyone that faculty of color have more difficulties with service than White faculty members (Exum et al. 1984; Garza 1987;
Johnsrud and Des Jarlais 1994; Tierney and Bensimon 1996; Tierney and Rhoads 1993). Much of this literature emphasizes the institutional demands for service, particularly minority-related service (See, e.g., Blackwell 1988; Menges and Exum 1983; Turner et al. 1997). Service, these studies seem to indicate, involve institutional abuse of faculty of color because it rarely is weighed favorably in promotion and tenure decisions. Consequently, some studies indicate that faculty of color are vulnerable to the “revolving door” phenomenon (e.g., Blackwell 1988) or to the racism associated with the “typecasting syndrome” (e.g., Reyes and Halcon 1988).

Tierney and Bensimon (1996) provided a persuasive elaboration of the problem of service. They argued that institutional and personal expectations for service lead to “cultural taxation.” Tierney and Bensimon explained that minority faculty are burdened by an obligation to serve the needs of their racial and ethnic groups. This obligation manifests itself in unreasonable institutional demands for service and the expectation (which bears significantly during faculty evaluation) that faculty of color will perform such service. Furthermore, cultural taxation, Tierney and Bensimon contended, includes the “commodification of race or ethnicity to make an institution look good” (p. 117). In other words, institutions overuse its few faculty of color in order to portray a commitment to diversity. For Tierney and Bensimon, the burden of relieving cultural taxation is on the institution: it is responsible for ensuring that information about promotion and tenure is disseminated freely to faculty of color, and for creating an “ethos of inclusiveness” in its environment (p. 117).

The focus on institutional demands for service, however, does not adequately explain the complexity of the issue. There is some evidence that faculty of color may engage (perhaps, even prefer) service to the other promotion and tenure criteria because they see significant personal or social benefits (See, e.g., Cuadraz 1997; Johnsrud 1993; Padilla and Chavez 1997; Pollard 1990). This research indicates that faculty of color are especially competent, and interested, in minority-related service (e.g., sitting on institutional committees, mentoring students of color). Furthermore, as Exum (1983) indicated, although service responsibilities burden faculty of color, institutions need the participation of these faculty members on committees. Service, therefore, may be important for both the faculty member and institution because it (a) increases the diversity of perspectives (Menges and Exum 1983); (b) ensures sensitivity to the needs of people of color (Tack and Patitu 1992); and (c) may be personally rewarding to faculty of color (Johnsrud 1993). In this regard, the problem is deemed not necessarily as one of institutional abuse, but as a structural barrier to faculty advancement.
In summary, the research literature privileges an understanding of the "problem of service" as resulting from institutional or structural constraints. This literature indicates either that (1) institutional structures create the problem of service, thus, it advocates the reduction of institutional demands (see, e.g., Banks 1984) or the development of special resources (e.g., mentors) to deal with the problem (see, e.g., Blackwell 1988; Tack and Patitu 1992); or (2) faculty members are unable (because of accumulative disadvantages) to understand institutional structures, thus, it provides advice for effective negotiation of those barriers (See, e.g., McKay 1988; Padilla and Chavez 1995). In both cases, the literature provides recommendations for helping faculty of color cope with the conflicting demands of the promotion and tenure process. The literature, however, neither criticizes the practices and norms that create the conflicting demands in the first place, nor acknowledges the role of agency in understanding faculty of color in White institutions. Using data from a study of faculty of color, I will argue that faculty of color do face serious constraints regarding service, but service sets the stage for a critical agency that presents the possibility of resisting and redefining those constraints.

Methods

The concerns raised in this paper arose from a qualitative study of faculty of color, in which I sought to understand how they constructed the promotion and tenure process. I conducted interviews between September 1994 and October 1995 with 16 faculty of color (8 tenured, 8 untenured) at a large, historically and predominantly White, private Carnegie Research II university in a moderate-sized city in the Northeastern part of the United States. The institution was a prestigious research university, with selective student and faculty recruitment processes. It ranked nationally within the top 40 of American institutions of higher education (U.S. News and World Report, 1995). Students and faculty were recruited nationally and internationally. The university had over ten-thousand undergraduate students, three-thousand graduate students, and nine-hundred full-time faculty (the latter number includes full-time tenured, tenure-track, and non-tenure-track faculty, but does not include part-time or adjunct faculty). The university was primarily residential, with the bulk of its student-body consisting of traditionally-aged college students. It had thirteen schools and colleges, numerous departments and programs, and granted undergraduate and graduate degrees in most academic disciplines and professions.

The faculty was evaluated on teaching, service, and scholarly achievement; scholarship was defined primarily through research and publications. During the period of the interviews, the institution's officers discussed giving
more weight to teaching and service than in the past. They discussed this, for example, in the 1994 yearly presidential report to the community (which was published in the institution's newspaper), in a "town" meeting I attended, in the 1995 chief academic officer's address to the faculty, and through other avenues (e.g., the school newspaper, college of education and departmental faculty meetings I attended). The culture of the institution was such, however, that without an adequate number of publications no faculty member—no matter how well regarded in teaching and service—could expect to be positively considered for tenure. The few examples proffered by the administration as evidence of its commitment to teaching and service seemed mostly to be tenured faculty members who were promoted to full professor on the basis of excellent teaching evaluations and professional service (but who still published). At any rate, the faculty (as evidenced from remarks made in public, at faculty meetings, in school newspapers, and in interviews for this study) apparently agreed that the administration's rhetoric did not match what actually happened in the faculty reward system.

The faculty, staff, and students at the university were predominantly White, accounting for approximately 87 percent of full-time students and 87 percent of full-time faculty. Men represented 68% (621) and women 32% (290) of the 1995 faculty. Faculty of color accounted for 13% (118) of the faculty (these figures include full-time non-tenure-track positions). Men of color made up 9% (83) of the faculty, 13% of the male faculty, and 70% of the faculty of color population. Women of color accounted for 4% (35) of the faculty, 12% of the female faculty, and 30% of faculty of color. Women of color, however, were over-represented in this study's sample (10-6). The reason for this was that the snowballing technique was used to identify most of the participants in this study, and the faculty members tended to refer me to women. The extent to which the faculty members were involved in institutional governance may have had something to do with the over-representation of women in this study. The women in this study appeared to be more involved than the men in institutional activities (e.g., the Black and Latino faculty association), and so these women were easily identifiable to other faculty of color.

There were two selection criteria for this study: (1) the faculty members had to be tenured or on the tenure track; and (2) they had to be members of a traditionally underrepresented racial or ethnic group. Of the faculty members in this study, four were tenured full professors; four were tenured associate professors; two were untenured associate professors; and six were untenured assistant professors (see Table 1 for a breakdown of my sample by rank, gender, and race). Of the untenured faculty members, one Asian American woman was denied tenure and was appealing at the time of the
Table 1. Breakdown by gender, rank, and race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Totals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Asian American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full Professor</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>2 T</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate Prof.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1 T</td>
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<td>Assistant Prof.</td>
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Total = 16; T = tenured; N = non-tenured.

Interview, and one Asian American man had resigned and was completing the year (he believed that he was not going to be recommended for tenure by his colleagues). Of the other untenured faculty, one woman was preparing for the tenure review; two (1 woman and 1 man) had completed their third-year reviews; and three women were preparing for their third-year reviews.

The racial and gender make-up of the sample was: eight African American women; three African American men; two Asian American women; one Asian American man; and two Latino men (see Table 1). I attempted, but was unable, to obtain interviews with Latina professors. There were only seven Latina faculty members in the institution and only three were on the tenure-track— all were untenured. The three Latinas who qualified for this sample could not be reached in time to complete the study. There were no Native American professors at the institution who qualified for this study (in fact, there was only one non-tenure-track Native American woman in the institution).

My sample represented 10 academic and professional disciplines: anthropology, business, counseling, history, law, nursing, political science, psychology, social work, and sociology (see Table 2 for a breakdown of my sample by race, tenure status, and discipline). Except for anthropology and counseling (where each faculty member was one of two faculty of color), the faculty members in this study accounted for all the racial or ethnic minorities in their departments (see Table 2).
Table 2. Breakdown by race, tenure status, and discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Tenure status</th>
<th>Anthropology</th>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Counseling</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Nursing</th>
<th>Political Science</th>
<th>Psychology</th>
<th>Social Work</th>
<th>Sociology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<td>Asian American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
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<td>non-tenured</td>
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<td>(0 W)</td>
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<td>(1 W)</td>
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Total = 16; M = Man, W = Woman.
Except for the first faculty member (who was interviewed twice so that she could respond to emerging themes), I interviewed each faculty member once in his or her office. The interviews averaged one and a half hours. I used an open-ended, semi-structured format and asked the participants to talk about their promotion and tenure experiences. As the study progressed, I asked the faculty members to respond to some of the emerging themes in the study. I analyzed and coded the data using Strauss' (1987) qualitative analysis method. This method involves raising questions and providing provisional answers, organizing the data into manageable units, looking for core concepts, labeling them, and attempting to understand the relationship among core concepts (Strauss 1987). The themes discussed in this article arose from careful coding and analysis of the interview transcripts, from the participants’ responses to emerging issues, from discussions with colleagues, and from a review of the relevant literature.

The significance of race-related service

Service was a salient concern for all but two of the faculty members; the tenured African American man in sociology and the untenured Asian American woman in political science did not mention service in the interview (unless otherwise noted, the rest of the paper does not include them in the discussion). Although the rest of the faculty members knew they were evaluated on more important criteria (i.e., important for the institution), service took on significance in their day-to-day activities. This was as true for the five men as it was for the nine women. Apparently, gender was not related to the significance of service in this study, and so I do not elaborate on gender differences in this paper. Gender was significant, however, in other studies (see, e.g., Tierney and Bensimon 1996).

The burden of service

The faculty members, as expected, distinguished between internal and external service. For example, an untenured African American woman law professor described her current service activities, which she had indicated were typical for law professors:

I'm on three faculty committees, and they all have different amounts of work that's required. But at least two of them require a great deal of work, the Faculty Governance Committee and the Curriculum Committee. Both of those committees this year require a lot of work, so that takes up a considerable amount of time. And then I am on some national committees, and the work there really depends on what's going
on at the time. I might have to do reports or participate in some decision making. Sometimes it’s by conference call, sometimes I have to travel to meetings and that kind of thing. I’ve been invited to speak at different places. It takes a lot of time to do these things.

According to this faculty member, she spent a great deal of her time doing service, but given the law profession’s commitment to service, this may not be unusual. The other two law professors spoke similarly about service, and all three law professors indicated that service was an important and highly valued (but not as important as scholarship or teaching) criterion for promotion and tenure. The law professors’ perceptions that service was valued in promotion and tenure, however, were not supported by the other faculty members, even in other professional studies (e.g., counseling, nursing, and social work). No other faculty member indicated that service was valued significantly in faculty evaluation. It may be, therefore, that law is unique in valuing service, or this finding may apply only to the particular law school in this study during the time of the interviews.

Despite the law professors’ beliefs that service was important, they understood that too much service would seriously reduce their chances to attain tenure. Any kind of service activity necessarily meant the faculty members spent less time on scholarship and research. Their understanding of the demands on their time for service matched what was explained in the research literature; for example, that service can lead to cultural taxation (Tierney and Bensimon 1996). Because the faculty members knew that fulfilling these responsibilities took too much time away from research, they felt burdened by service expectations. As the untenured African American woman in business explained, “Service is the downfall of most faculty of color. They are pulled in so many directions for service that frequently their research is not as high a priority.” In this study, the burdens of service required that the faculty members become very possessive of their time. They talked often about having to “control” their time or “be selective” when deciding which activities warranted their commitments.

My study revealed a distinction between tenured and untenured faculty members regarding the burdens felt due to service. The tenured faculty members were more likely than the untenured faculty to believe that individuals had some control over their time. The untenured faculty members, on the other hand, were somewhat more ambivalent about what they attributed as the reasons for their burdens. For example, this untenured woman in business explained how she negotiated the demands for service:

I had to use my department head as an excuse to say no [to service requests]. When in fact, part of what I negotiated coming in here was
the right to say no for two and a half years with no backlash – political backlash. In other words, hands off. And most institutions who are really committed to your survival will give you that.

This business professor, who was in her third year of service, indicated that she had “negotiated” the “right to say no.” But she believed as well that the institutions who are committed to faculty of color “will give you” that right. She expressed to me prior to these comments that she had not published enough to attain tenure, mostly because she was heavily involved in service. She attributed her lack of scholarly production both to herself and to the institution, particularly her department. The business professor’s sentiments contrasted with those of the tenured professor in history, who expressed little sympathy for those faculty members who spend too much time on service. He explained that promotion and tenure committees will not care about why a faculty member engages in too much service; they will judge that faculty member on the basis of his or her scholarship (and perhaps teaching). Thus, this history professor believed that if faculty of color do not focus on scholarship, they will have to “bear the consequences.”

The history professor’s sentiments were not completely supported by the other tenured faculty members, who recognized that it was difficult for untenured faculty members to refuse to participate in service activities (even this history professor explained that it was difficult for him to say no to others who requested his participation in institutional and community activities). His comments, however, indicate that tenured faculty of color have negotiated effectively the demands required of them, and the untenured faculty members could not be certain at the time of the interviews that they did so as well. It was understandable, therefore, that the tenured faculty members felt they had more control over their situations than the untenured faculty.

The importance of race-related service

The 14 faculty members who talked about service expressed a distinction between “general service” and “race-related work.” General service included community, institutional, and professional activities that all faculty members are expected to perform (e.g., curriculum committees, program development, reviewing journal manuscripts, etc.) but that had little direct connection to race, diversity, or social justice. Race-related service, however, was any community, institutional, or professional activity perceived by the faculty members as benefitting their racial or ethnic communities. Race-related service presented for them the most difficult challenges because they felt compelled or driven to participate in activities they believed would benefit their racial or ethnic communities. This was true even for the history professor
who believed that faculty of color had to “bear the consequences” of spending too much time on service. He decided often to choose race-related service over other types of activities.

To illustrate this compulsion toward race-related service, consider the comments of the Latino full professor in social work, who after telling me that he had to carefully control his time, explained why he chose to engage in race-related service and research:

Faculty of color’s circumstances are quite different from other people in that if you have any social consciousness, and any identification with your respective ethnic or racial group, you are going to want to help in some way, through your discipline or otherwise.

Race-related service was perceived as providing political benefits to the faculty members’ respective racial or ethnic communities. But such service seemed to have personal benefits as well. For example, the untenured assistant professor in sociology explained why her work with African-American women faculty and graduate students at the University were important to her:

My regular meetings with these people have really offered me a great cultural outlet and spiritual support. We need these groups to support each other. That kind of support fosters an environment that’s going to be conducive for a person of color to thrive. And it allows us to maintain a critical mass, and that is really important.

Consider as well these comments from another untenured associate professor in nursing, who explained how her community work with other nurses of color allowed her to deal with political (“minority issues in the health community”) and personal issues (“I need these other voices”):

I have a support group made up of black women nurses who work in the community. And next week, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, we will meet – we meet quarterly. We talk about minority issues in the health community. They’re very important to me, these other voices. Because the question is, are you the only [Black] voice where you work? Is this just your experience? When I tell them what’s happening in my school, I want to know if I’m crazy, because that’s how I’m made to feel. I need these other voices. So this community activity is one of the places where I talk about these issues.

Race-related work, therefore, may provide an opportunity for interpersonal support, which was important for these few faculty of color at a predominant White institution. And although race-related service was particularly important for the untenured faculty members, it was significant for the
tenured ones as well. For example, the tenured African American woman in counseling explained why she often works hard at forming networks and support groups at the institution and elsewhere:

You know, I benefit a lot, or I have benefitted a lot, because of my broad network. I know administrators. I know full professors. I know presidents of universities. I know scholars all over the country. And when I have decisions to make, I’ll call them. And I’ll ask what they think about such and such. And they say, “Well that’s not even worth worrying about;” or, “You should be doing this, or have you thought about this.” Because there’s many people with a lot of wisdom. It’s very difficult to maneuver academia by yourself. And they can save you from many mistakes and a lot of grief. And much of it they’ve experienced themselves. My network is multi-colored, multi-faceted. And I have a very strong support network in my home and in my academic circles. I know people in small colleges, historically Black colleges, Southern colleges, Northern colleges, Western colleges, all over the world.

The finding that race-related work has personal or political benefit was corroborated by the research literature. For example, Turner et al. (1997) stressed the importance of networks and support groups for retaining faculty of color (see also Tierney and Bensimon 1996).

The finding that race-related service is important for faculty of color may not be surprising to many, but its significance should not be underestimated by anyone. Consider the comments of these three faculty members, who did not feel connected to other faculty of color, and who were having difficulties in their departments. The first faculty member believed that her chances for tenure were “problematic.” The other two faculty members did not attain tenure:

I think, consciously, and I think in terms of verbal communication, [my colleagues] are extremely supportive. I think, unconsciously, and given the structure and the system, not very much at all. It’s up to me (untended African American woman, third year, business – preparing for her third-year review).

I got here – nobody knew I was here. [pause] It was raining, and [my wife and I] had to go around town from hotel to hotel after a drive in the car from [another state], trying to find a place. And then, we’re sitting in our apartment and had no furniture and stuff – and we don’t know anyone. All I’m doing is I’m teaching courses. Nobody is checking out to see whether or not we’re alive, whether we have things to do in the evening, whether we met people in the department, whether – there’s just
no humanity here (untenured Asian American man, sixth year, political science – resigned before our interview).

I was very collegial with my colleagues. I got along well with them. I didn’t think there was a problem until this tenure thing came up. I didn’t realize I was hated (untenured Asian American woman, sixth year, political science – denied tenure before our interview).

These three faculty members, especially the two Asian American professors, did not feel connected to other faculty of color. The business faculty member engaged in a great deal of service with students and the community, but she felt isolated from other faculty of color. The Asian American man similarly engaged in a great deal of service but not with other faculty of color. The Asian American woman was one of two faculty members who did not mention service during the interview. These comments illustrate the extreme isolation perceived by those faculty members who do not feel connected to other faculty of color. Unfortunately, there is little opportunity for faculty of color to meet others like them in their departments (only law had more than two faculty of color), and, therefore, race-related service may provide the only opportunities for faculty of color to meet others for support.

The finding that faculty of color might feel compelled to engage in race-related work for personal and political reasons must be tempered by the comments of a few of the faculty members in this study. Not all of the faculty members felt strongly about race-related work. As mentioned previously, two faculty members did not discuss service at all in the interviews (this does not mean, of course, that they did not have feelings about this issue). And the Latino tenured professor in anthropology expressed being insulted when he realized during his third-year review that he was expected to join the “faculty-staff minority association”:

[We appointed a new department chair before my third-year evaluation. In anthropology there is no committee for this review.] And [the chair] gave me my review, and it said that I had worked on this thing, and I was working on a book manuscript, and the teaching is good. And it said that I had “not been involved in the faculty-staff minority association.” And I looked at that, and I thought, hell, what is this? And I said “this is racist. What you’re doing is you’re saying here that because of my skin color I’m supposed be involved in some voluntary organization?” And I swear I didn’t make this up – I actually said this. I said, “if I were Irish – because remember this is in March – if I were Irish, would you put down that I didn’t march in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade?” She got really flustered. So she changed it around. And it later said, “as a
minority faculty, Peter should be careful not to become too involved in organizations.” And I kicked myself because I had been so embarrassed for her that I had given back the piece of paper. When I said I won’t sign this — because you’re supposed to sign off on it, and I said I wouldn’t — I should have realized, my God, that I should have kept that review for blackmail. Because this is illegal. On that piece of paper, she’s saying “I’ve seen you as a person of color, and I’m treating you differently.” So, essentially, the message was the same as a derogatory name, it just wasn’t as threatening.

This anthropology professor obviously resisted being victimized by what Reyes and Halcon (1988) called the racism of the “typecasting syndrome,” or by what Tierney and Bensimon (1996) argued is one of the effects of “cultural taxation.” He did, however, perform service for his ethnic community (e.g., he mentored his students of color, and he worked with the Latino community), but he was careful about dissociating this service from his ethnic identity. These comments illustrate, therefore, that although race-related service may be important to the most of faculty of color, it poses a risk that they will be typecasted as preferring such service to other types of activities (or other types of service).

The notion of preference should be explored further in these types of studies. It is important to note that in this study, the burdens perceived by the faculty members were as likely to be present regardless of whether the service was “race-related” or not. Although a few of the faculty members (five) indicated that they enjoyed race-related work more than any other type of activity, the importance of the finding about race-related work is not that the faculty members preferred such work, but that they perceived it as more important than other types of activities. This is not to say that the notion of preference is unsupportable; it means only that the assumption of preference should be examined in these types of studies.

Nevertheless, generally, the faculty members in this study clearly expressed that race-related work was important to them. This importance stemmed from the belief that this type of service (a) helped them cope with difficulties encountered in their workplaces [e.g., “I want to know if I’m crazy” (nursing professor), or “It offered me a cultural outlet” (the woman in sociology)]; and (b) benefited their racial communities [e.g., “you’re going to want to help out in some way” (the tenured man in social work)]. There might be, therefore, an inextricable link between race-related service and personal and political goals. In the next sections, I explore this link in more depth.
Race-related service and coping

All except five faculty members talked about coping with isolating and alienating work environments by engaging in race-related service. This finding was not surprising, and it confirmed what sociologists contended about participation in ethnic institutions, rituals, and practices: such participation allows racial and ethnic groups to cope with hostile environments (see, e.g., Hutnik 1991; Lal 1995; Porter and Washington 1993). Eleven faculty members in this study participated in race-related service in order to cope with problems encountered in their departments and colleges, especially the problem of isolation. Few departments had more than a few faculty of color, and in this study only law had more than two such faculty members. Isolation was particularly difficult for the untenured faculty members (all but the law professors discussed feeling isolated), a problem that Boice (1993) and Tierney and Bensimon (1996) also found prevalent in their research.

Isolation is encountered by many faculty members (see, e.g., Tierney and Bensimon 1996), not just faculty of color; it may be an inherent consequence of conventional ways of performing faculty work. But isolation may strike faculty of color in particularly problematic ways given their underrepresentation at most institutions. These faculty members, therefore, must make an effort to find the kind of “ethnic participation” referred to by sociologists and that White faculty members may take for granted.

Furthermore, this kind of isolation (i.e., from others of one’s racial or ethnic group) may be felt by tenured faculty as well. In this study, five tenured faculty members indicated feeling isolated from other faculty of color. For example, consider the comments of the Latino full professor in social work, who explained why he was working to form a Latino support group at the University:

The reason is because I would like to see some kind of mutual support group for Latinos, which we don’t have now. So that we know about one another; or know when somebody is down; or know how to help out. I think with the growing number of Latinos in this Country, this University is so far behind that it needs to move very quickly in making sure that there are Latinos throughout the University, including at the highest levels of the administration. All the way down. Right now, Latinos are concentrated in janitorial or custodial positions.

In this study, tenure status did not seem significant to perceptions of isolation. While White colleagues might be supportive, the faculty members usually sought other faculty of color (even those who were not members of their own ethnic or racial group) to cope with such isolation. This latter point was not surprising. As Hutnik (1991) explained, racial and ethnic minority individuals
seek out others like them because they share a common culture, a common history, or a common tradition.

Furthermore, for the faculty members in this study, race-related service provided more than an opportunity to meet others with similar backgrounds, it offered them the opportunity to be validated. As the nursing faculty member indicated about her community work with other nurses of color, "When I tell them what's happening [in my school], I want to know if I'm crazy, because that's how I'm made to feel." This study confirmed, therefore, what Alperson (1975) indicated about racial minorities: that they often seek the support of other minorities in order to confirm and validate experiences of exclusion and to share the common experience of rage and pain engendered by such exclusion.

*Race-related work and political change*

The primary (and most common) reason given by the faculty members (all but two) in this study for the significance of race-related service was to represent and advance the interests of traditionally-subordinated social groups (all except three participants expressed this reason). They felt they were speaking for, and representing, those who could not do so for themselves. Despite feeling the burdens of service, the faculty members felt obligated to, and responsible for, their racial or ethnic groups. As a result, they engaged in activities within the academy and outside of the academy they felt benefitted their respective communities.

The faculty members' activities "within the academy" included participation in institutional committees addressing the retention of students of color, hate speech, affirmative action, ethnic studies departments, and teacher training. In their disciplines, the faculty members engaged in race-related work as well (e.g., heading up minority caucuses, or, for one faculty member, involvement in a national task force dealing with racism). This race-related work was perceived as extremely important for ensuring that their institution and disciplines address the needs of racial and ethnic minorities (as well as other traditionally-subordinated social groups). To illustrate this point, consider the comments of the nursing professor, who discussed why she felt it essential to become involved in the promotion and tenure committee of her college:

In my second year here, I asked to be a member of the Promotion and Tenure Committee. It is one of the unique things about this University that you don't have to be tenured to be on the Promotion and Tenure Committee. Having found this out through my network with the minority faculty here, I made it my business to be asked to be on the Committee.
There was a little resistance because they needed someone to do the work. So I've had the opportunity to be on the Committee, which was revising the promotion and tenure policies. And so I was able to talk about diversity issues.

None of the faculty members expressing this concern took for granted that their White colleagues would be similarly concerned about "diversity issues." As a result, they felt responsible for these issues, a responsibility which placed on them additional burdens but also provided them with a significant sense of accomplishment if their goals were achieved.

"Outside of the academy" the faculty members engaged often in work they believed benefitted their communities and promoted social justice. These activities included community work dealing with low income people (e.g., homelessness and hunger), police brutality, prisoners' rights, teenage pregnancy, urban public schools, and hate crimes. A tenured full professor in law, who specialized in communications law, for example, stated: "I am involved in work that addresses such questions as "What about children of color? How do decisions about pay per view affect communities of color in terms of that service?"" This faculty member indicated that she tied her service work with her scholarship; in other words, she wrote about these issues so that she could have credibility when she participated in such activities, and her involvement in these activities gave her the data she needed to write about those issues. Another law professor, an untenured African American woman, directly connected her service work with her teaching:

You know the stuff that's going on at the jail [in this city], which prompted the Justice Department to investigate the county jail [police brutality of prisoners, particularly Black inmates]. We thought, myself and another professor here who works in the law clinic, that these are important issues. This was a unique opportunity to create a forum to provide some information not only about the conditions at the jail, but to tie that into the larger lessons that we're doing in the classroom. So we developed that. That kind of thing is important. You know, it's the way you view the role [as a faculty woman of color], and the kinds of things you do, and whether you try to bring those issues to the Law School.

Race-related work, therefore, gave the faculty members the opportunity to be engaged in political activism on behalf of traditionally-marginalized groups. The untenured African American law professor referred to her involvement in such service and "bringing these issues to the law school" as a matter of "social justice."
The law profession might be conducive to this understanding of one's faculty role. The untenured law professor argued explicitly that service allows law professors to become parts of the "larger debates in society":

Service is not a difficult standard to meet because most of us would do those things anyway. It's part of why we want to do lawyering [sic] before we get into teaching. And we continue those aspects of our professional lives in academia, those activities that allow us to do things that are of interest to us -- women in law types of things -- that you may not have the opportunity to do within the law school. You know, there's a whole big world of lawyers and organizations doing things that interest you. Service actually encourages you to get out there and be a part of the larger debates in society.

For this faculty member, it was her commitment to service that led her into the classroom. Seven other faculty members expressed the same sentiment, so it might be inappropriate to suggest that the law professor's perceptions are limited solely to her profession. But the finding that faculty of color might choose academe to serve their communities provides a counter-argument to those offered by scholars claiming that faculty have other preferred roles and activities (See, e.g., Banks 1984; Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Centra 1993; Jarvis 1991).

Furthermore, and perhaps more significant, is the finding that the faculty members linked service with teaching and research in a particularly important way. The law professor, for example, suggested that linking her activist service with her teaching was "social justice." The African American woman in sociology similarly indicated that she saw herself as a "scholar-activist" because she engaged in race-related research and service. This study corroborated, therefore, what a few scholars have implied about such service: it may provide evidence of political or social activism by faculty members (e.g., Cuadraz 1997).

By choosing to engage in race-related service despite understanding the risks of doing so, the faculty members were exercising an agency that appeared to contest the predominant definitions of faculty work. In other words, they knew that their institution required conformity with prevailing notions of merit, but they felt also that their work forced their colleagues to rethink (if not accept) its importance in creating social change. And, just as significant, some of the faculty members tied race-related service to their scholarship or teaching, thus, presenting themselves to their colleagues and students not as detached researchers and teachers but as "scholar activists," deeply engaged in initiating social change. Race-related service, and the agency that supports it, therefore, might set the stage for the contestation of
institutional structures and roles, and the notions of merit ensured by them. The rest of the paper elaborates further on the notion of agency and social change.

Race-related service and agency

It would be naive to deny that service demands, regardless of type, impose on faculty of color additional burdens not imposed on their White counterparts. Because service requires faculty of color to resolve difficult role-conflicts (e.g., between service and research roles; between racial minority and faculty roles), it can be, as this study’s untenured woman in business explained, “the downfall of most faculty of color.” Conversely, perhaps it would be naive as well to conceptualize service only in terms of institutional demands without accounting for agency in faculty of color’s experiences. The research literature, even when it recognizes that faculty of color might prefer to engage in service over the other activities (e.g., Aguirre 1987; Johnsrud 1993), stresses institutional structures and de-emphasizes human agency. For example, Aguirre (1987) argued that the academy’s organizational logic transforms faculty of color’s participation in service into personal expectation. Aguirre seems to argue that there can be no agency that does not result from the structures of the academy.

Most of the faculty members in my study (all but four), and particularly the tenured faculty members (seven), however, suggested a soft kind of indeterminism in talking about their experiences. In other words, they often blamed themselves (or blamed others) for the negative consequences of decisions, or they attributed their actions to personal “choices,” “mistakes,” and so forth. The presence of this “blaming” was especially true in their discussion of service. The tenured professor in history, for example, explained that faculty of color’s decisions to engage in service activities were “choices” that had “consequences”:

Those of us who sit in judgement on tenure and promotion will say, “Well, people don’t realize that they’ve got some choices – hard choices to make. Are you going to accommodate the students in this way? Are you going to perform these off campus duties and responsibilities? Or are you going to do some research and writing, and become known off the campus in the general American academic field?” That’s a decision that most would say each individual would have make for him or herself. And if people don’t make the right one, then they have to bear the consequences.
As I indicated previously, no other tenured faculty spoke with such tone, but they did privilege an understanding of "choice" in discussing how faculty of color negotiate the promotion and tenure process. In addition to the word "choice," the faculty members used language that connoted a kind of "free will," and that academic (and the institution) could somehow be "negotiated." For example, the untenured African American professor in law explained regarding demands from students of color that "You have to keep control over your time. ... If I didn't keep some control over that situation, then I could spend all of my day talking to students outside of class." The untenured woman in business stated, also about student demands, "The first year that I was here, I told people to pretend that I wasn't here - in terms of students and student groups' needs. I was totally unavailable, and I was extremely productive [in terms of scholarship]. This year I made myself available, and I have suffered." The other untenured professor in business stated in regards to departmental committee work, "I got involved in things that were for the school's benefit, but were not necessarily for my own. ... But that was a choice I made. I don't put that off on anybody else." The tenured male professor in social work explained in regard to excessive service demands, "You have a couple of choices. You either stop doing these activities and concentrate on tenure and promotion. Or you can do them over and above everything else that is required for tenure. But you can not do them instead of what is required for tenure and promotion." All this language reveals that the faculty members perceived as negotiable the structural constraints that characterized their experiences as faculty of color in White institutions (e.g., excessive service demands, merit defined as scholarship). My study illustrates, therefore, that the structure/agency conflict is much more complex and contentious than is accounted for in the literature.

Any elaboration of a notion of agency, however, must recognize that faculty "choices" are not easy to make, and many faculty members do not make the "right" choices. Furthermore, and most important, such elaboration must account for the constraints imposed by social structures, which are there, obdurate, and seriously restrict individuals' ability to exercise "free will." The research literature's emphasis on institutional structures in explaining the challenges faced by faculty of color, however, fails to account for the "temporal" nature of social structures; that is, social structures must be repeated by individuals to ensure their efficacy (Butler 1997). In other words, as Giddens (1987) explained in different words, institutional structures results from "patterns of social activity reproduced across time and space" (p. 11). Paradoxically, social structures are created by an agency that is constrained by those structures. Thus, although the language in these interviews implies
“free will,” one must account in theorizing about the experiences of faculty of color the interplay between agency and social structures.

I put forward another view of agency that does not privilege the rationalist discourse of “free will.” It is theoretical, and, thus, it is subject to application and evaluation. In the rest of this paper, I speculate on the complex link between structure, resistance, power, and agency in order to provoke readers into thinking differently about faculty of color and the promotion and tenure process. Using as illustration the notions of race-related service I discussed previously, I redefine agency, not as free will, but as actions that are possible within the context of disciplinary power. I borrow Gramsci’s (1971) notion of “critical” agency as “purposeful” (or “deliberate” or “designed”) action that resists hegemonic practices which ensure and justify the social domination of some individuals by others. In other words, “social-justice” service, for lack of a better term, arguably considered “the downfall of faculty of color,” might resist institutional structures, and in resisting those structures presents the possibility of redefining them.

An understanding of the power of social structures is important in order to adequately recognize the “problem” of service for faculty of color. Blauner (1972) argued that racial oppression is institutionalized in processes that “maintain domination—control of whites over nonwhites—[because these processes] are built into the major institutions. These institutions either exclude or restrict the participation of racial groups by procedures that have become conventional, part of the bureaucratic system of rules and regulations” (pp. 9–10). Blauner, obviously, emphasizes social structures, explaining how they oppress individuals and constrain agency. Power, therefore, is, according to Blauner, not so much possessed by Whites, as it is embedded in social structures. Referring back to academia, power might be re-conceptualized, not as possessed by White faculty members, administrators, and promotion and tenure committees who intentionally reject any definition of merit that does not privilege scholarship, but is embedded (and disguised) in the structures of the promotion and tenure process—in the rules, practices, norms, and discourses which privilege certain behaviors over others.

Incorporating too static a notion of these structures, however, prevents understanding how human agency can subvert the power of structures. As indicated previously, the power of social structures has a “temporal life,” thus, agency is constrained but not determined in advance. That is, because structures do not take place once and for all (they are “temporal”), they must be repeated by individuals to reconsolidate their power and efficacy (Butler 1997). Structures, therefore, remain structures only through their being reinstated as such, and because they must be reinstated to remain efficient, they are vulnerable to subversion and redefinition. Perhaps, from the repetition of
institutional structures in higher education there emerges the possibility of a critical agency from the "margins of power," to borrow Butler's words (1997, p. 156). In other words, race-related (or social-justice) service, might provide the context for the kind of agency that subverts institutional structures.

The agency discussed here, however, can be overemphasized; that is, it cannot be deemed to transcend power. Critical agency must be viewed within the context of disciplinary power. Foucault (1977) lends further understanding to this notion of agency. He argued that power can not be conceptualized merely as the prerogative of states, institutions, or classes of individuals. Foucault argued that power is "disciplinary" and its effects are normalization (pp. 200-201). Power is ensured by the "disciplinary mechanisms" embedded in structures, practices, and relationships (power is everywhere), and these mechanisms observe and regulate individuals. The effectiveness of disciplinary mechanisms lies in the fact that individuals know they are being observed, and behave appropriately. For example, the emphasis on scholarship in faculty evaluation might be a disciplinary mechanism that observes faculty to determine which faculty warrant a reward and regulates them (by providing an "objective" basis for punishing those faculty members who refuse to conform); scholarship, then, allows faculty to discipline themselves and each other through faculty evaluation committees. Power, though diffuse, scattered, and invisible, regulates behavior so pervasively and silently that individuals internalize its normalizing-effects and then regulate themselves. As Foucault (1980) argued, power is everywhere local, in the minute details of everyday life (p. 60).

Any understanding of the power of human agency or social structure should be understood within the context of disciplinary power. In other words, disciplinary power provides the "coercion" that constitutes the agency that creates and repeats social structures. Thus, for example, the discourse of academic merit, and its realization in institutional practices, might be the "discipline" that reinforces the structures of the promotion and tenure process. But human agency, as Butler (1997) suggested is constrained, but not determined in advance of social structures. Thus, resistance is possible, but perhaps only "locally." Resistance to power, for Foucault (1980) was "anti-disciplinarian" (i.e., the assertion of counter-mechanisms, potentially repressive, of course, but also potentially politically liberating). While disciplinary power "in general" might be impossible to resist because it permeates social relationships and practices, any particular disciplinary mechanism is subject to resistance and subversion. And, thus, resistance is always most effective when localized. That is, local struggles are the sites of confrontation with power. Resistance in academia, therefore, likely begins with individuals in departments who reject "common sense" to subvert what is deemed an
oppressive social practice. Scholars should focus attention to the local sites of tension between structure and agency.

Neither Butler nor Foucault would negate the structural oppression explained by Blauner; they recognized, however, that social structures have temporal (Butler) and disciplinary (Foucault) bases. Although structures might be reinforced by “disciplinary mechanisms,” those mechanisms can be stripped of their hegemonic power. Thus, the elaboration of structure in the research literature about faculty of color and service should be redefined as the instances of struggles between agency and structure – between power and its resistance. These struggles may provide the settings for the possibility of, per Butler, the agency that emerges from the margins of power, or, per Foucault, the local struggle at the site of confrontation with power. Therefore, while racism, institutional prerogatives, conventions of promotion and tenure, and traditional notions of merit all constrain faculty of color’s choices, they might exercise a critical agency that resists these forces (not always effectively, of course), but in doing so, they make possible the subversion and redefinition of these structures.

Agency and resistance in higher education

Despite pointing the benefits of service, much of the research literature emphasizes the problem of service (i.e., its obstacles to faculty advancement). Yet, when framing service as a problem for faculty members, many scholars fail to address the ethical questions raised by institutions (and the individuals who act on their behalf) which demand from faculty that which they know will not be rewarded. More important, the “problem perspective” reinforces prevailing notions of merit that work against faculty of color. This perspective does not question, for example, the economic and disciplinary coercion that ensures that service (a large part of faculty work) is deemed less valuable than the other promotion and tenure criteria. Faculty of color, of course, must be concerned with the consequences of service, but they also should be aware of those disciplinary mechanisms which impose obstacles to the kinds of political actions that will resist those mechanisms.

The prevailing discourse of merit does not account for how service, specifically that which may be called “social-justice” service (e.g., race-related work), presents the possibility of redefining existing structural barriers for traditionally-subordinated groups. I argued in this paper that such service sets the stage for critical agency. Without such agency, traditionally-subordinated groups will never share equally in society’s resources, and social institutions will continue to maintain advantages for Whites and males. If it is accepted that the greatest obstacle in this society for the successful inclusion
of people of color is racism (or sexism), especially that which is embedded in the apparently neutral policies, practices, and norms of social institutions, then race-related work must be seen as breaking down that obstacle. The discourse of service, by focusing on its negative aspects, belittles all faculty members, but especially faculty of color, who may use service to redefine themselves as scholars and activists, and to connect them to their racial communities in important ways.

My argument takes a "local" perspective to social change, and the suggestions provided below are directed at faculty scholars. I do not underestimate the power of institutional change "from above;" that is, through administrative decrees, as I indicated previously in this paper is emphasized by much of the research literature. But I hope that this paper is read as providing an understanding of how individual faculty members, who ignore "common sense" in order to engage in work that seeks to initiate political change, contribute to the resistance and, potentially, redefinition of social structures.

While it is prudent always to point out the detrimental aspects of service for all faculty members, given prevailing definitions of faculty work, scholars might pay attention as well to the kinds of discourses, and their realization in institutional practices, that devalues it (e.g., the privilege given to scholarship). Rather than exerting too much effort to encourage institutions to loosen their demands for service, an inclusive strategy might be to highlight how institutional change occurs "from the ground up." With this in mind, I offer three suggestions for resisting oppressive institutional structures.

First, scholars must focus on how faculty members repeat institutional structures that constrain the choices of other faculty. Foucault (1977) pointed out how disciplinary power produces self-regulating practices, norms, and discourses. Faculty, who most make up the academic community, constitute and are constituted by these practices, norms, and discourses. Faculty, through promotion and tenure committees, place emphasis on scholarship, partly because this promotes prestige but also because individual merit is defined primarily through publications. These faculty committees, therefore, often do the "dirty work" for institutions, and so it is inappropriate to "blame" solely the institution for the difficulties encountered by faculty of color. In other words, scholars should explore how faculty members "discipline themselves."

Second, scholars should emphasize both the positive and negative aspects of service for faculty, institutions, and society. There has been much discussion in the literature about the importance of teaching (e.g., Boyer 1990). Service, especially when it helps to eliminate barriers preventing some groups from fully participating in society's resources, also should be considered
important. Faculty scholars should recast the discourse of service, as has been recently the case with teaching, by highlighting its positive and important political benefits, including the possibility for critical agency it presents.

Finally, scholars should offer critical perspectives on faculty evaluation. They should, for example, expose the underlying assumptions and power arrangements in the discourse of individual merit. While this kind of exposure is difficult (since these assumptions and power arrangements are hidden), the focus might be on the "effects" of traditional notions of merit (and other academic conventions). In the meantime, scholars should advocate the expansion of the definition of merit. As Tierney and Bensimon (1996) indicated about much of the promotion and tenure process, merit is a social construction, one that can be redefined in a less hegemonic way.

I do not suggest the substitution of one view of merit for another. And I do not contend that the academy should ignore scholarship (or teaching). All of the promotion and tenure criteria may be important in their own right. And scholarship and teaching, as with service, provide contexts for political activism and critical agency. Furthermore, some faculty of color may not want to engage in a great deal of service, choosing instead to concentrate on the other criteria. My point is that a limited view of merit can have hegemonic effects, and so I advocate for an expanded view of merit that accounts for important politically-activist work and that rewards those faculty members—regardless of race or ethnic background—who engage in this work. An expanded view of merit benefits everyone.

Notes

1. Service in general is difficult to evaluate (Blackburn and Lawrence 1995; Centra 1993), but especially, as Tierney and Bensimon (1996, pp. 27–32) indicated, because it is defined differently at each institution.

2. Ironically, the two Asian American professors were in the same department but each disliked (and, consequently, did not support) the other, though both failed to attain tenure. I can not go much more into detail about this relationship because to do so may compromise the promise of anonymity I gave each of them. It might be important to note here, however, that gender has a significant bearing on the support faculty of color can provide to others.

References


