

Exploring Womanhood, Blackness and Intersectionality

By Renada Goldberg

"For me personally and politically, there's no separating my womanness, my blackness, my transness from my me-ness." –Janet Mock

This quote is displayed prominently at the Women's Center at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. It's on bookmarks, used to decorate staff doors, and referenced in workshops and events. After spending the last eight months there as an MSW intern, I finally get how it connects to the work at the Women's Center.



Renada Goldberg

I spent the first seven months in the Women's Center thinking about how my blackness, my Americanness, my womanness, my motherhood, my studentness and my middle-classness help create this persona I project into the world. I spent the last two weeks examining how I could bring more of what Mock calls "me-ness" into my personal and political lives. I've decided I want to live and work intersectionally.

Learning new terms

As I started my internship, I didn't know how to approach gender inequity. Yes, I am a Black woman, but I am Black first. I'm always aware of my Blackness, especially attending a predominantly white university.

Learning about intersectionality at the Women's Center made me embrace more of me than my race and/or gender. Intersectionality could help me find the common ground I need in my role as a community practice social worker, a community organizer or a coalition member.

S. A. Shields provides in "Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective" (2008) a three-fold definition of intersectionality: (1) society uses identities to label, organize and interact with each other in positive, negative and neutral ways; (2) the intersections between identities empower and oppress; and (3) "identities instantiate social stratification" (p. 302).

Intersectionality acknowledges that multiple identities exist in our society and are used to label and control us. The idea challenges us to understand this paradigm so we can work across our identities to eradicate inequity and injustice. For a soon-to-be social worker, this idea fit with how I perceive coalition building, organizing and advocating for social justice.

Intersectionality at work at the Women's Center

With a better understanding of how multiple identities work together, I embarked on projects that encapsulated multiple social identities within a higher education institution. For example, I created and facilitated/delivered a workshop on redefining social capital for student women of color, a topic that explored how

women of color within a predominantly white institution (PWI) can achieve power and opportunity through social networking while remaining authentic to their cultural heritage.

I also organized a half-day conference for past participants of our biannual Women of Color Student Conference where we revisited the theme of "Loving Each Other Harder" and what this means on a predominantly white campus. I had the opportunity to be a facilitator for a university-wide social justice leadership retreat for undergraduates, where we discussed these concepts with undergraduates new to social justice and advocacy work.

Finally, I created an evaluation template based on the Women's Center's mission and values, so we can measure how our programming meets our long- and short-term goals of leading, changing and connecting. We're more than just feminists. This is feminism for the common good.

The mission of the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities Women's Center is the advancement of equity for women across identities, by increasing connectedness to resources and communities, cultivating social responsibility and advocating for systemic change. The Women's Center has challenged the way I approach advocacy and empowerment by encouraging me to act after paying attention, and provide space for those who are vulnerable and oppressed to become empowered.

As I end my internship at the Women's Center, I'm beginning to feel more comfortable in my *me-ness*, particularly in the social power and efficacy that idea embodies.

Lessons in practice

Next month, I'm going on a study abroad to Kenya, to participate in a community-based participatory evaluation of the needs of families in Mbita. I never thought I'd go to Africa, let alone Kenya, but in exploring my *me-ness*, I see myself in these women and children who share my skin color, my collective ideas of family, my struggle within the dominant culture, and I'm compelled to act and provide space.

Later this year, I'm headed to Alaska, to witness the incredible work and collaboration of an afterschool indigenous program, a higher education institution and their local indigenous community as they build upon their drive to develop and instill cultural self-esteem among high academic achievement. I'll pay attention and celebrate successful collaborations between communities and higher education when empowerment and enhancement of human well-being are prioritized.

As I develop as a social worker within higher education, I am committed to helping everyone feel comfortable expressing their *me-ness*. Janet Mock's quote

Learning about intersectionality at the Women's Center made me embrace more of me than my race and/or gender.

inspires us all to redefine our me-ness holistically, personally and politically, and in doing so, reframing and reclaiming the expression of our humanity. 📖

Renada Goldberg worked as an MSW intern for the University of Minnesota's Women's Center, where she examined and analyzed the effectiveness of gender-based support systems at an institutional and macro level. Renada has a Master of Education degree in Human Resource Development from the University of Minnesota. In June 2015 she will have completed a Master of Social Work degree with a concentration in Community Practice with Families and Children. Renada Goldberg is also the Outreach Project Director in the Center for Research and Outreach (REACH) Lab within the Department of Family Social Science, where she works to promote and strengthen community capacity through partnerships with higher education.

Women on the Move, continued from page 10

- **Dr. Nancy McIntyre** moves from senior associate dean for research and outreach to interim dean of the College of Business and Economics at West Virginia University.
- **Karen Nelson Moore** was elected president of the Harvard University MA Board of Overseers. She is a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit.
- **Dr. Ellen Nerenberg** becomes dean of arts and humanities at Wesleyan University CT.
- **Dr. Robin P. Newhouse** will become dean of the Indiana University School of Nursing on July 1.
- **Dr. Lynn Okagaki** moves from dean of the College of Education and Human Development to interim deputy provost for academic affairs at the University of Delaware.
- **Dr. Leslie Parent** becomes vice dean for research and graduate studies for the College of Medicine and associate vice president for research at Pennsylvania State University.
- **Dr. Ruby Perry** moves from interim to dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health at Tuskegee University AL.
- **Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills** becomes dean for undergraduate studies and vice provost at Oregon State University. She has been serving as executive associate dean in the university's College of Liberal Arts. Dr. Rivera-Mills is the founder of the Center for Latino/a Studies and Engagement.
- **Dr. Sue Roberts** becomes associate dean for international affairs and director of the international studies program for the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Kentucky.
- **Dr. Laura Ann Rosenbury** will become dean of the Levin College of Law at the University of Florida on July 1. She will be the first woman to serve as permanent dean of the College of Law in its 106-year history.
- **Dr. Kanwal Singh** moves from associate dean to dean of Sarah Lawrence College NY.
- **Dr. Carla Swearingen** becomes dean of faculty development and director of the Teaching and Learning Center at John Brown University AR.

- **Janice Tawney** was named associate director of development for the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Tawney was national accounts manager for the Hubbard Peanut Company.

- **Ramona L. Taylor, JD**, moves from assistant attorney general in the education division for the Commonwealth of Virginia to general counsel at Virginia State University.
- **Dr. Maria Toyoda** will become dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Suffolk University MA on July 1.
- **Elizabeth Tranter** becomes associate vice president for research planning at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- **Dr. Kirsten Waarala** moves from director of medical education at Garden City Hospital MI to assistant dean of the Macomb University Center of the College of Osteopathic Medicine at Michigan State University.
- **Amanda Walsh, JD**, becomes Title IX program officer at Brown University RI. She is the first full-time Title IX program officer at the university.
- **Dr. Lori S. White** moves from vice president for student affairs at Southern Methodist University TX to vice chancellor for students at Washington University in St. Louis MO.
- **Joanne Woodard** moves from vice provost for institutional equity and diversity and chief diversity officer at North Carolina State University to vice president for diversity and inclusion at the University of North Texas.

Serving and Supporting Trans* Students, continued from page 11

- What should you do if a student identifies as trans*?
- **Respect** the rights of the student to define themselves.
 - **Ask** for preferred name and pronouns.
 - **Recognize** that you will make mistakes and that's okay. Just be sure to not take offense if corrected.
 - **Give** the student as much time and space as they need.
 - **Find and know** the available resources for trans* students both on campus and in the larger community.
 - When it's possible, **accommodate** the situation to the person rather than making the person accommodate the situation.

Hernandez and Hopkins note that serving and supporting trans* students is important because we're aiding student identity development, fostering diverse learning environments and working toward a more equitable society. 📖

—KJB

www.wihe.com