# Chapter 10
# Issues in Academic Leadership:
## Narratives of Personal Experiences of Diaspora Administrators

**Uche Onyebadi**
*Texas Christian University, USA*

**Dorothy Bland**
*University of North Texas, USA*

**Herman Howard**
*Angelo State University, USA*

**Carolyn Walcott**
*Georgia State University, USA*

## ABSTRACT

*Occupying administrative positions in any organization is an enormous and difficult task, especially in universities and other higher institutions of learning where the culture and conventional practices demand shared governance and collective decision making. Even more complex is when such positions are occupied by minorities who need to weigh a lot of factors in their decision making in order to effectively navigate and accomplish their duties and objectives. This chapter offers a brief theoretical insight into administrative leadership in the academy. More importantly, it provides the narratives of the personal experiences of administrators in the United States and Guyana; people whose gender and racial backgrounds categorize them as minorities. Sharing such experiences aligns with the purpose of this book and also provides some learning opportunities for people in the diaspora who aspire to become administrators in the academy and minorities who are currently doing the job.*

## THE CHAIR ISN'T THE BOSS; THIS MIGHT BE HARDER FOR DIASPORA MINORITIES IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

Generally, academic leadership is a rough and unpredictable territory. Gunter (2001, p. 94) described it as a "crowded and busy terrain both in terms of policy texts that seek to redefine roles and tasks in school leadership."

Unlike leaders in other industries, especially in the world of business, there is a dilution of power and authority in the academy. This is mostly encapsulated in the concept and expectation of, and at times outright demand for, *shared governance* with colleagues up and down the organizational chart or organogram in an academic department. Yet, the academic or educational leader is expected to lead, successfully accomplish goals, deliver on vision and mission, in spite of the fact that such person does not operate in an environment of "command" and "control" administrative structure embedded in leadership positions outside the academy.

The situation is even more complex when the educational leader is a minority defined by race or ethnicity or gender. Oftentimes, such minority leaders find themselves serving in positions where they are generally regarded as no more than artifacts and exhibits to satisfy public yearnings for "diversity" in leadership. In his book, *Leaders of Color in Higher Education*, Valverde (2003, p. 79) contended that, "So from the start, African American leaders at universities were compromised. Quickly, the faculty saw them as tokens or window dressing for the external community by…appointing one or two minorities, the university could show that it does not practice discrimination."

Male minorities in academic leadership positions appear to "enjoy" a measure of better perception and respectability than their female counterparts. Gold (1996) noted that the main issues against women in leadership positions in the academy is about their perceived lack of self-esteem by the dominant groups, irrespective of their academic and other sterling accomplishments. Cubilo and Brown (2003, p. 282) attributed such often unsubstantiated and misogynistic perception to "a consequence of the impositions of traditional male hegemony at the macrolevel and the patriarchal culture and climate at the meso-level."

One consequence of such unfounded and illusory perception of women in academic leadership is that those of them who are in the minority by their gender and also by race or ethnicity suffer double marginalization. But, overall, women, especially minorities, find themselves in disadvantaged positions in academic leadership. Bower and Wolverton (2009, p. 4) for instance, observe and concede that "African Americans and women still struggle to see their viewpoints and talents

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