Role Conflict: How Search Committee Chairs Negotiate Faculty Status, Diversity, and Equity in Faculty Searches

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Bias among faculty search committees has been considered a significant barrier to diversifying the professoriate. Given the traditional faculty hierarchy in academia, junior faculty search chairs may not have the positional power to challenge authority when confronted with bias or prejudice. Yet, search chairs are expected to ensure equitable practices and outcomes in their searches. In response to this quandary, through the lens of role theory, this study examined how faculty roles, within the hierarchical structure of tenure, affected equity during the hiring process. Findings revealed that the faculty hierarchy often superseded decision-making power given to search chairs if they were junior faculty, often leading to implicit support of biased hiring practices and the perpetuation of a culture of Whiteness. The study also indicated that search chairs' identities, values, and perceptions influenced how they operationalized diversity and equity in the search process, contributing to either diversity advocacy or support of the status quo. This qualitative inquiry makes an important contribution to the literature by exploring the ways in which faculty search chairs' status and social identities impact interpersonal committee dynamics and decisions about hiring diverse candidates.

Keywords: diverse faculty, equity, faculty search chairs, implicit bias, role theory

Grounded within an equity orientation, many higher education institutions have declared diversity to be a priority over the last few decades (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Turner et al., 2008; Warikoo, 2016). This call has become even more critical given the disparities made bare due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) global health pandemic, Trump presidency, and recent racial reckoning across the Unites States (Fain, 2020; Harper, 2020; Serwer, 2020). Sparked by the murdering of George Floyd and enduring sociopolitical protests, it is more important than ever to advance equity-mindedness in U.S. higher education (Malisch et al., 2020; Thomsen, 2020). The purported goal to increase student and faculty diversity in most institutions has not been yet realized (Chen, 2017; Harris & Ellis, 2020). This disparity is a matter of injustice that has been well documented in the literature (Gasman et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2004; Tomlinson & Freeman, 2018). Researchers have argued that one of the most significant barriers to increasing faculty diversity is implicit bias (Acker, 1990; Adam, 1981; Steinpreis et al., 1999; Turner et al., 2008). Consequently, institutions have often relied on the offices of Human Resources (HR) and Equal Opportunity (EO), and search committee trainings to help mitigate bias and ensure an equitable hiring process (Bess & Dee, 2008; Fine & Handelsman, 2012; Turner et al., 2008). This approach is problematic, however, as these mechanisms have little control over search committee dynamics, where implicit bias may be affecting hiring decisions (Gasman et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2004; Tomlinson & Freeman, 2018).

While it is assumed that search chairs have the appropriate training and authority to monitor and mitigate bias during the search, not much is known about what goes on during the faculty selection process according to Tomlinson and Freeman (2018). Current research suggests that implicit bias (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) and a dominant culture of Whiteness (Liera, 2020b) often govern faculty search committee interactions and decisions. Given these findings, it is possible that faculty search chairs are reifying inequitable hiring practices in service of the status quo. Further, given the traditional faculty hierarchy in academia (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996), junior faculty search chairs may not have the positional power to challenge authority if confronted with bias (Grier & Poole, 2020). In response to this quandary, through the lens of role theory, this study examines how faculty roles, within the hierarchical structure of tenure, affect equitable hiring practices. This research makes an important contribution to the literature by exploring the ways in which faculty search chairs' status and social identities may influence interpersonal committee dynamics and decisions about hiring diverse candidates.

Review of the Literature

In this study, *diversity* and *diverse* are terms used to connote individuals with minoritized identities existing within the pool of faculty candidates. While diversifying the faculty has continued to be a rhetorical goal for higher education institutions (Muñoz et al., 2017), bias in hiring practices of the professoriate has been documented over numerous decades (Adam, 1981; O'Meara & Culpepper, 2018; Smith et al., 2004; Steinpreis et al., 1999; Turner et al., 2008). Despite literature identifying implicit bias (Choudhury, 2015; Smith et al., 2004; Williams et al., 2016) and overt bias exercised within the hiring process (Adam, 1981; Collins, 1998), initiatives to diversify the

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professoriate have produced more talk and litigation than results (Collins, 1998; Muñoz et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2004; Turner et al., 2008). The complicated nature of these issues is examined below.

Bias in the Hiring Process

In a recent study focusing on the reproduction of Whiteness in faculty hiring committees, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) found that even with the presence of language supporting diversity goals, search committee members enacted racial biases due to their protection of Whiteness and application of colorblind discourse. This discourse materialized in search processes as coded discussions of dominant cultural fit, the presence of one token minority committee member, and the inconsequential nature of diversity in the evaluation process (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). While the colorblind discourse appeared neutral to committee members, it furtively supported a culture of Whiteness by setting White behaviors, norms, and values as the benchmark of excellence, that is, the status quo (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). In a related study focusing on diversity in faculty searches, Liera (2020b) reported a similarly alarming result. In particular, he found that search committee members utilizing colorblind discourse favored candidates exhibiting White standards and values while believing their decisions were race neutral (Liera, 2020b). These studies demonstrate the danger and concealed nature of implicit bias, which is entrenched in search committee perspectives.

The initial job posting is another area in which bias has been found in faculty hiring (O'Meara & Culpepper, 2018). While institutions of higher learning have attempted to make them as biased free as possible (O'Meara & Culpepper, 2018), in her study on gendered organizations, Acker (1990) contended that job descriptions were not neutral and played into biased decision-making processes. Tierney and Rhoades (1994) agreed, arguing that a job description informs prospective employees what the institution values. Yet, it has been a commonly held belief, among the majority, that these documents are objective and value-neutral (Acker, 1990; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Similar to committee members' perspectives (Liera, 2020b), however, job descriptions are imbued with individual, institutional, and cultural values (Acker, 1990) that privilege Whiteness, heteronormativity, and masculinity as the norm (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). It follows that these descriptions can lead to biased evaluation of diverse candidates in the hiring process (Liera, 2020b).

Smith et al., (2004) have asserted that there is considerable power at the departmental level in hiring decisions. Specifically, senior faculty and department heads have agency in developing and tailoring their recruitment plans to decide what criterion is considered *quality* for their programs (Smith et al., 2004). Even with this power, scholars have argued that search committees have yet to be sufficiently trained to produce equitable hiring outcomes (Muñoz et al., 2017). While many faculty members claim the issue lies with a lack of candidates from marginalized backgrounds (Turner et al., 2008), Smith et al. (2004) have found that implicit bias has been a central obstacle for marginalized faculty during the hiring process. Similarly, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) asserted that "the presumed neutrality of White European enlightenment epistemology" (p. 561), applied during each stage of hiring, has privileged Whiteness under the facade of objectivity. Without the recognition of the presence of bias in faculty hiring decisions, diverse faculty will continue to be underrepresented in the professoriate (Gasman et al., 2011).

Strategies to Mitigate Bias. Approaches to mitigate biases have included special hires. This strategy allows committees to rationalize the need for a special hire because the candidate did not meet the specific criteria of the job description or they were in a field that made the case for diversity (Smith et al., 2004). Despite the success of special hires, this process has not become standard practice (Muñoz et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2004). If anything, special hires have tended to disproportionately benefit Whites (Swim et al., 1995), continuing to perpetuate biased hiring practices that have further marginalized racially diverse candidates and placed Whiteness as the norm (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Moreover, it remains unclear as to what or who sways a committee to make exceptions for these special hires (Smith et al., 2004).

Historically, affirmative action policies have been used as another approach to systematically address bias and provide equitable access with the goal to increase diversity in academia (Allen et al., 2000; Collins, 1998; Kaplan & Lee, 2014). The nuanced distinction between not discriminating and attempting to increase diversity through race-conscious policies has sparked debate and competing interpretations of the law, however (Collins, 1998; Kaplan & Lee, 2014). Thus, these policies have faced years of litigation leading to confusion and hesitancy regarding how to interpret and use them appropriately (and legally) to hire racially diverse candidates (Collins, 1998; Kaplan & Lee, 2014). Using a quota system has also been considered in the past but deemed consistently unconstitutional by the Supreme Court (Kaplan & Lee, 2014).

Relatedly, the idea of garnering a critical mass of diverse faculty has been viewed as valuable (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014), but given the nebulous nature of *diversity*, it has been difficult to institutionalize. Cluster hiring, a process where multiple diverse scholars are hired according to shared interests, has been another strategy to attempt to increase faculty diversity (Muñoz et al., 2017). However, because this approach can be expensive and departs widely from the traditional search process and lacks research on its effectiveness, some institutions have been hesitant to abandon their established practices (McMurtrie, 2016). These problems have left institutions with few standardized ways to challenge or change standard hiring procedures or address potential bias in faculty hiring (Cohen & Swim, 1995; Goldstein Hode & Meisenbach, 2017).

Search Committee Structure and the Academic Hierarchy

Search committees tend to consist mostly of faculty members with varying ranks (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996; Tomlinson & Freeman, 2018). In U.S. higher education, there is an overrepresentation of White faculty (approximately 75%), compared with an underrepresentation of Black, Latinx, and Native American professors, which is roughly 11% collectively (Griffin, 2019). It is a common practice to invite women or minorities to be included in the committee demographic in order to provide a diversity of viewpoints (Harvard University, 2016). Nonetheless, these individuals often serve as the token minority perspective with little decision-making power (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Additionally, some committees may include a diversity advocate who is charged with ensuring an equitable process, however, this strategy has not been widely adopted (Gasman et al., 2011). Finally, while less common for faculty searches, some committees also include professional staff or students (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996).

Smith (2016) argues that the search chair role is pivotal to completing an effective and equitable search process. He asserts that these leaders are the "face of the institution" and must have the strength, authority, and power to regulate individuals who attempt to control committee decisions, while also listening equally to all perspectives. It is within the purview of this role to mitigate bias and support diversity (Smith, 2016). Invariably, the search chair's faculty status, values, and beliefs will play into the search process. Hence, understanding how search chairs negotiate their role within a committee along with their status within the institution can illuminate why certain decisions about diversity are made over others in faculty searches (Smith et al., 2004; Trower, 2012).

While atypical, it is important to note that faculty search chairs are not required to be senior faculty, which influences search decisions due to organizational socialization into the faculty hierarchy (Mullen & Forbes, 2000). According to Tierney and Rhoades (1994), socialization of individuals within an organization includes:

> Organizational hierarchies where the organization's participant must learn certain skills, attitudes, and values to handle complex tasks before moving on to a higher status. Passage to a higher status involves winning the approval of organizational gatekeepers [i.e., tenured faculty] who evaluate each participant on an individual basis. (p. 38)

Drawing from Tierney and Rhoades's description of organizational socialization, junior faculty status involves lack of power and agency compared with senior faculty. Moreover, there is an expectation that lower-ranking faculty ought to abide by the rules created by the gatekeepers (i.e., senior faculty) in order to advance in the academic hierarchy. Thus, junior faculty learn to defer to higher-ranking individuals with the assumption that if they do so, they will gain tenure (Mullen & Forbes, 2000).

The academic socialization dynamic can be problematic when considering equity and implicit bias in faculty search hiring decisions. For example, in their study on untenured faculty, Mullen and Forbes (2000) found that search committee members with the highest rank tended to possess the most decision-making power. Trower (2012) extended this argument, contending that the decision-making process in faculty searches was affected because untenured faculty were expected to align themselves with the culture of the department and institution. They claimed that the climate of departments and institutions invariably influenced the autonomy of faculty members of lower status (Trower, 2012). This agency was particularly pertinent to newer faculty who may have felt compelled to follow the status quo by aligning with senior faculty (Trower, 2012). Ultimately, the ability of junior faculty members to assimilate to the departmental and institutional culture not only had repercussions on their careers (Bess & Dee, 2008; Mullen & Forbes, 2000), but also on their participation in search committees (Trower, 2012). In the context of this study, this faculty hierarchy had tangible consequences on equitable hiring decisions, depending on the status, views, and identities of the faculty involved in the search process.

In sum, it is within the intimate context of the search committee that important hiring decisions are made (Liera, 2020b; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Smith et al., 2004). Why diversity and equity matter and how these concepts are operationalized in faculty searches is a value-laden process that will openly and implicitly engage the biases of the individual and the institution (Choudhury, 2015; Liera, 2020a, 2020b) and affect hiring decisions (Smith et al., 2004). Because research has indicated that search committees

exercise bias against minoritized groups (i.e., Adam, 1981; Collins, 1998; Williams et al., 2016), inequitable hiring practices may be due to ignored, dismissed, or overlooked biases grounded in status quo decision-making (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017) and color-blind discourse (Liera, 2020b). This investigation intends to reveal the ways in which these biases play out in faculty searches.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws from Bess and Dee's (2008) role theory to explore how actors within higher education either perpetuate institutional bias, under the guise colorblindness, or dismantle hegemonic notions of equity by challenging the status quo. Role theory assumes that institutions are an interlocking network of roles, where roles are defined in relation to one another (Bess & Dee, 2008). In role theory, there are role senders, who communicate the expected function or behavior, and role receivers, who carry out the functions or behaviors. The role receivers' behavior depends on their personal decision-making (Bess & Dee, 2008). The original theory, posed by Katz and Kahn (1978), highlighted that a role receiver develops a "predictable outcome"—that is, an expected behavior through working in the context of their role. Roles can be complicated by multiple role senders who hierarchically may be above or below the role receiver. Roles can also be complicated when an individual serves as a role sender and a role receiver at the same time. Role senders traditionally have authority and power and communicate the role receiver's duties to both the individual employee (i.e., role receiver) and other stakeholders within the work environment. The received role is the functional role that the role receiver understands to be their duty, however, their behavior depends upon their personal beliefs, interpersonal dynamics, the work hierarchy, and political factors.

Role senders in this study included institutional leadership from the Office of Equal Opportunity and Human Resources, campus administrators, and senior faculty. Role receivers were all members on the search committee, including faculty search chairs. If the search chair was a tenured faculty member, they concomitantly operated as both a role sender and a role receiver. The use of role theory in this study showcased how the faculty hierarchy and interpersonal dynamics were created and maintained throughout and during the faculty search process. In particular, this theory exposed how the institution and the actors within this system were not objective or impersonal, but rather possessed particular values and perceptions about diversity and equity that were inculcated into their hiring practices. We analyzed the role of the search chair first as a role receiver, with the possibility of also being a role sender (i.e., tenured faculty), which exposed how role conflict, role ambiguity, and the faculty power structure may have protected the perpetuation of inequitable hiring practices for diverse faculty under the façade of objectivity and colorblind discourse.

Figure 1 shows the intricacies of role theory by visualizing the relationship between the inputs, transformations, and outputs that shape hiring practices. The figure demonstrates the ways in which cross-boundary interactions (i.e., engaging with individuals in other roles or holding multiple roles) may lead to possible conflicts that affect hiring decisions as well as search chairs' personal well-being. The figure also illustrates how certain organizational components (i.e., Predominantly White Institution [PWI] and rural setting), and attributes of the search chairs (i.e., social identity and faculty status)

Figure 1
Diagram of Role Theory Applied
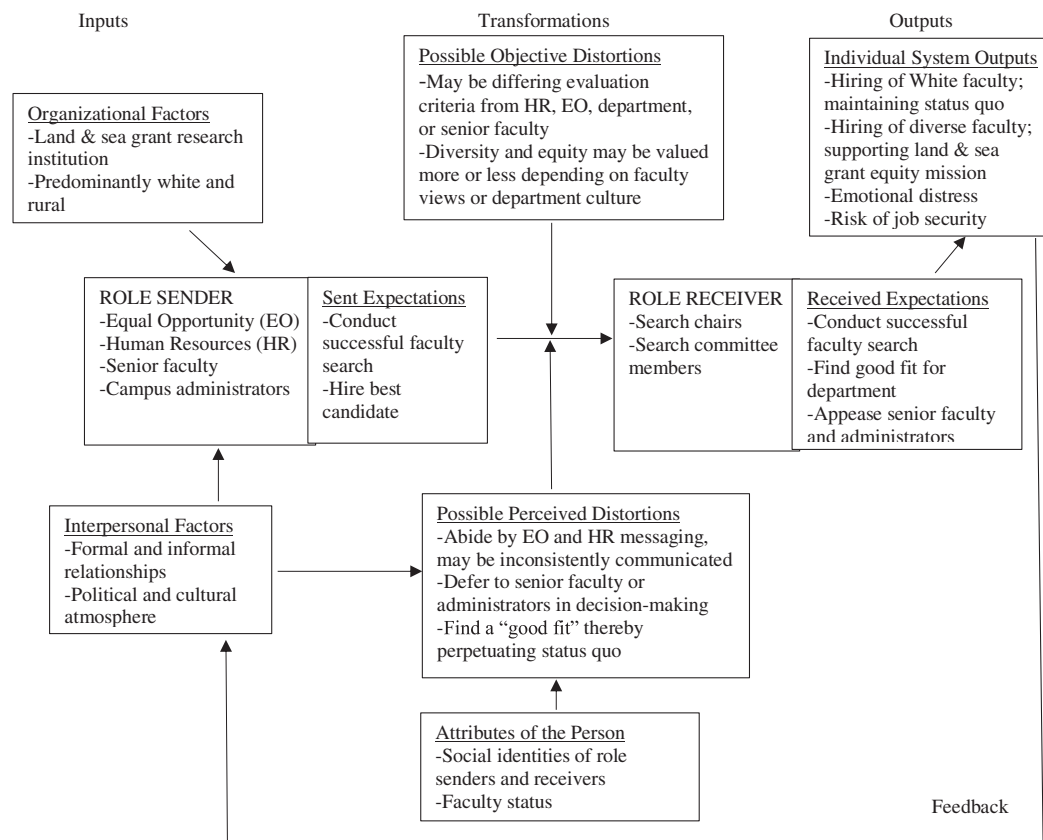
Note. Adapted from Katz and Kahn (1978, p. 196).

contribute to possible perceived distortions that impact the search and may lead to inequitable outputs. We extrapolate on the application of this theory in our findings and discussion.

Method

We grounded our study in social constructivism. This paradigm espouses that reality is constructed through individuals' engagement with each other and the environments in which they are situated (Charmaz, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Social constructivism maintains that humans are mutual producers of epistemological and ontological truths, which are subjective and circumstantial (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In our study, we recognized that conceptions of reality were formed through the day-to-day conversations, messaging, language, and imaging with which faculty search chairs engaged. During these interactions, participants developed, internalized, privileged, and legitimized certain logics over others (Charmaz, 2008). Accordingly, social constructivism helped us make sense of these logics as they emerged through patterns, contradictions, and themes related to diversity and equity in the search process.

Due to the exploratory and qualitative nature of this study, data were collected by conducting 17 in-person, individual interviews, which lasted between 45 and 90 min. Interviews were conducted by two researchers. Interview protocol focused on participants' conceptions of the value and centrality of diversity and equity in their faculty searches. Participants were also asked to reflect on the utility of the institution's EO search training and their beliefs about equitability during their search. Key questions in our protocol included:

1. How do you personally define diversity and equity?

2. In what ways do you think diversity plays a role in faculty recruiting?

3. What strategies did you use to make sure your language and engagement with candidates was inclusive?

4. In your own words, can you describe what inclusive and equitable practices look like in the search process?

5. What are some challenges you faced regarding ensuring an equitable search process, if any?

6. In what ways did the university support you in facilitating an equitable search process?

Informed by social constructivism, we aimed to understand the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of faculty search chairs, as they were influenced by social, cultural, political, and temporal

contexts. Thematic content analysis guided us in investigating how participants engaged with equity and diversity, reflected upon interactions with diverse candidates, and addressed bias during their faculty searches (Neuendorf, 2017). We also examined how faculty status may have influenced participants' behavior as it related to equity-oriented practices and hiring decisions. This method was useful as it allowed us to center the voices of the participants and make meaning of the data through an inductive, iterative, and systematic process of categorization, coding, and validation (Neuendorf, 2017).

Institutional Context and Participants

The study was conducted within the context of a predominantly White Land-grant institution located in rural Northeast United States. This university is considered a public research institution with a student population of approximately 11,000. The faculty population was listed as 78% in 2018. Given the recent racial reckoning in the United States (Harper, 2020; Thomsen, 2020), and the call to increase faculty diversity (Turner et al., 2008), it is imperative that public institutions value and support diversity and equity in their faculty searches (Liera, 2020b). Despite these factors, many institutions remain predominantly White in faculty status. Thus, we chose to explore a PWI to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which diversity and equity have been operationalized, and to explore the potential barriers search chairs have faced in attempting to diversify their institution.

We obtained the list of search chairs from the office of HR upon Institutional Review Board approval. The invitation email was sent out to 41 faculty members who were listed as search chairs in the Fall of 2016 or Spring of 2017. From this initial invitation, 17 search chairs agreed to participate, of which, seven were women and 10 were men. Eight participants were from the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) field, three were social scientists, three identified within the arts and humanities, and three were within the field of education. Participants were not required to share specific demographic information during their interviews. Rather, we collected the identities mentioned during the interview process to inform our analysis. Table 1 provides further details on participant attributes.

Of the 17 searches included in this study, 16 searches were for fixed length or tenure-track positions, and one was for a university-wide administrator position. Identification of junior and senior faculty status emerged from our findings. Namely, only fixed length, tenure-track, and associate professors discussed a lack of agency and power in their

Table 1
Participant Details

Position	Female	Male	STEM	Social science	Education/ extension
Lecturer	0	1	1	0	0
Assistant professor	1	2	0	2	1
Associate professor	3	4	2	3	2
Full professor	1	3	3	1	0
Joint position (adjunct and staff)	1	1	0	0	2
Total	6	11	6	6	5

Note. STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

interviews, which aligned with how junior faculty status was discussed in the literature (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Thus, we labeled full professors as senior faculty, while all others were included in our analysis as junior faculty. Of the 17 searches, 16 were deemed successful, meaning one of the top candidates accepted the position. Individuals quoted in the findings were assigned pseudonyms.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do search committee chairs interpret and operationalize diversity and equity in the faculty search process?

2. How do search committee chairs understand and implement equitable hiring practices during the search process?

3. How does the faculty hierarchy affect faculty search processes?

Data Analysis

The interviews were digitally audio recorded and then transcribed by a transcription service and the research assistant. Applying thematic content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017) through the qualitative software tool Nvivo, both researchers first coded and analyzed the data independently. The social constructivist theory was used in the coding process to explore and locate how participants made meaning of equity and diversity while serving in their search chairs roles. Beginning with a close and thorough read and reread of the transcripts, each researcher identified and inductively developed a coding frame centering participants' perceptions related to diversity and equity in faculty hiring. We then came together to discuss our coding frames and interpretations of the data while noting any outlying themes or contradictory logics, which increased confirmability and credibility (Krippendorf, 2004). Initial codes were used to build broader themes while simultaneously seeking competing examples (Krippendorf, 2004).

Aligned with social constructivism, our themes or "constructs" embodied the ways in which participants conceptualized and engaged with diversity and equity according to their faculty status, sociocultural milieu, and campus environment. Based on these constructs, we then analyzed how faculty search chairs interpreted information about their role in enacting equity and advocating for diversity in their searches. Through several iterations of inductive coding, we recognized that participants talked about equity and diversity in distinct ways contingent upon their identities, faculty status, and institutional roles. Given the coconstructed nature of reality through the lens of social constructivism (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we recognized the possibility for participants to distort or misinterpret information communicated through space and time due to differences in social backgrounds, status, and biases. Consequently, we examined our themes through the lens of role theory to better understand and explain this phenomenon. Established codes included *search chair role*, *role sender*, *role receiver*, and *role conflict*.

Positionality

The authors of this study approached the data with distinct positionalities related to sex, gender, race, and faculty status, which we acknowledged to be intertwined with the interpretive process. Given the qualitative nature of this inquiry, we recognized that our salient identities (i.e., white, queer, woman, heterosexual, tenure-track faculty, and doctoral student) needed to be examined through

critical self-reflection during our analysis. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend reflexive journaling to mitigate bias and enhance credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Accordingly, we engaged in writing memos to help bracket our assumptions, potential biases, personal reflections, and initial interpretations. We employed member-checking by allowing our participants to view the data to ensure accurate interpretations, which enhanced the trustworthiness of our findings (Creswell, 2009).

Findings

In this study, search chairs were first recognized as role receivers, which meant that organizational factors and negotiations with role senders influenced their interpretations of their role as search chairs in advancing equity. Role senders included department chairs, college and university-wide administrators, and employees from EO and HR. Interestingly, HR and EO were most often discussed within the role-sender category as important elements of the search process. With equity as the focus, the section below describes the experiences of faculty search chairs in navigating their roles as both faculty members and search chairs during faculty searches.

Distinct Interpretations of Diversity and Equity

Participants were asked to share their personal definitions of diversity and equity and how those definitions informed their searches. A disconnect arose between how individuals discussed their understanding of diversity and how it was perceived as an institutional value in the search process. Specifically, participants' own understandings of diversity imbued how they talked about it in the search process. Yet, when asked how institutional actors such as administrators, HR and EO talked about diversity related the search, race, ethnicity, and gender were most often cited as important. For example, when asked how she defined diversity to the search members, Dr. Valen, a White associate professor stated:

> My frame of reference is, as the program director here, every year I have to fill out a form, a big, huge, annual report. In that report I have to talk about the diversity of clients that our graduate students are getting experience with, the diversity of our graduate students, the diversity of our faculty. Those things are limited to race, ethnicity, traditional kinds of ways.

This participant did not center race or ethnicity as important identities in the search. Instead, she described it as "those checklists that everybody has." She went on to discuss the historic lack of racial diversity at her institution, and the subsequent need to broaden the scope of diversity to satisfy national standards. She shared, "We ran into some concerns from the national organization around this issue. Our argument was that diversity in [our state] is reflected in things like, in particular, socioeconomic circumstances and certainly the diversity of disability." Thus, when asked how she defined diversity, Dr. Valen expressed, "I think of representing difference and the whole of humanity, the whole of being as people."

Dr. Valen's response was echoed throughout the interviews. Namely, when asked to reflect on how participants' identity influenced their understanding of diversity, race was rarely mentioned. Rather, participants referenced their gender, religion, nationality, or field of study most often. Although race was a peripheral focus, some faculty still centered the concept of equity. For instance, Dr. Hosler, a White female assistant professor drew from her social

identities to shape her interactions with diverse candidates and other search committee members, expressing:

> I think coming from a state that's more diverse, and also being female, I probably was more ... I was hopefully more sensitive to diversity issues than other folks might be, if they're just growing up in [this] rural [state] and not aware of those kinds of things.

In her interview, this participant acknowledged that her identity as a woman coming from an urban setting helped her recognize not only diverse perspectives, but issues of equity as well. Ultimately, whether it was the institution's rural location, or participant attributes, time and again, faculty drew from personal narratives and institutional factors to inform the ways in which they conceptualized diversity and equity during their searches. These conceptions invariably affected how they talked about and valued diversity and equity in their search chair role.

The Search Chair Role in Advancing Equity

The majority of participants believed that HR and EO were responsible for ensuring an equitable search process. However, we found that regardless of faculty status, participants reported that role senders external to the search committee (i.e., EO, HR, and college administrators) did not provide consistent clarity for the search chair role with regard to advancing equity. For example, Dr. Watkins, a White male full professor explained that he knew "what *not* to say and do" with diverse candidates but lacked tools and practices regarding "what should be done" from an equity perspective. Several other participants felt that EO and HR failed to teach them how to tailor their recruitment approaches to be specific to diverse candidates. Others communicated that their understanding of the search role, in terms of diversity and equity, was minimal at best. Ultimately a clear breakdown emerged in communication and expectations between institutional role senders and the search chair role.

It is important to note that not all participants received EO search training prior to serving as the chair. However, individuals who had participated indicated that no one from EO distinctly identified how the search chair was supposed to advocate for including diversity as an important evaluation criterion, how to recruit diverse candidates, or practical ways to intervene if bias emerged. Further, Dr. Jenson, a White female associate professor, said the training focused on providing strategies on "how to keep ourselves from being sued" with regard to engaging with diverse applicants. While most search chairs acknowledged that inequitable practices could have interfered with the evaluation of minoritized candidates, they often expressed confusion when asked how to fully engage in an equity-minded search. For example, Dr. Arres, a Hispanic male lecturer, explained his experience stating:

> [EO and HR] never talked about how to [equitably engage with diverse candidates], they just tell us what we can't ask. They don't give us any other kind of guidance, how do you ask questions, what should you be looking for. ... It seemed like they wanted us to fill out all this stuff [candidate pool demographics], but then there was no reporting back about all this stuff that we collected.

Dr. Matheis, a White male lecturer, had a similar experience, stating:

> I don't think there was a direct focus on specifically doing that [engaging in equitable practices]. I think it's a question that we try

to use inclusive language when we're just in general, when we're trying to deal with people.

Essentially, while most search chairs expected EO or HR to provide strategies to search members to support an equitable search, this outcome was rarely expressed in the interviews.

Faculty Status and the Search Chair Role in Addressing Bias

Despite insufficient guidance from role senders, some search chairs discussed addressing implicit and overt bias. Notably, findings suggested that faculty status influenced the ways in which participants successfully regulated fair decision-making discussions. In general, participants reported that their faculty search committees were usually composed of a mix of junior and senior faculty. The findings reflected that search chairs primarily reproduced the existing state of power dynamics within the institution, meaning those with higher faculty rankings possessed and exercised more decision-making power in the faculty searches. According to Bess and Dee (2008), the search chair, as the role receiver, should have a clearly defined role from the institution to exercise both the power and authority to monitor the search process and make important decisions about hiring. Due to the role conflict and powerlessness experienced by junior faculty, these participants were not able to exercise their expected duties and responsibilities as search chairs, while safeguarding their faculty role. This theme did not emerge for the senior faculty in our study.

When participants carried lower faculty status, many of them expressed less agency. In particular, junior faculty noted that their faculty status remained their dominant role throughout the search process. In function, the search chairs were tasked with the duties and responsibilities of the search chair. Behaviorally and interpersonally, however, participants reported that they were still treated according to their faculty status at the institution. Likewise, the findings reflected that the chairs treated others on the committee according to their faculty status at the institution, regardless of who served as the search chair. The overriding authority of the faculty hierarchy influenced how decisions were made and the ways in which bias was addressed or avoided.

Participants in junior faculty positions expressed contention about how to address the biased behaviors they witnessed. For example, Dr. Watkins, now a full professor, reflected on his time as a junior faculty member in a search:

> The only thing and I don't know that … this happened a long time ago, bugged the hell out of me, and probably taught me a lot about how to be a chair of a search committee. I was on a search committee when I was an assistant professor, so you don't have any power. You also have to protect yourself, when you're an assistant professor, and so the chair [tenured faculty] was very sexist, biased and so I felt our top candidate was a woman and a couple of other people … he did not want to hire her, so it was a battle. Of course, he was the chair so we lost. It really angered me. He had his reasons, but it was clear that he was being biased, sexist biased. I was very disappointed in the whole thing.

Similar to other participants in the study, Dr. Watkins discussed his struggle with advocating for equity but felt a lack of autonomy and role conflict as an assistant professor. In this experience, he highlighted how the academic hierarchy perpetuated inequity in two ways. First, he ended up deferring to the authority of the higher-

ranking faculty. Second, he knew the institution would protect the bias of the higher-ranking faculty. Despite recognizing bias, he concluded that he had to prioritize himself.

Many of the participants mentioned that the normalized faculty hierarchy dominated behavior and decision-making during the search process, regardless of the alleged function of the search chair. This hierarchy forced junior faculty into feelings of helplessness, which led them to avoid challenging the status quo or advocating for equity. Instead, most participants in this position expressed the need to protect their own well-being over other priorities. Participants who wanted to challenge the status quo or report bias disclosed experiencing professional and psychological backlash, discontentment within the department, leaves of absence, and lack of support from EO. For example, considering his status as a junior faculty, Dr. Arres shared the following experience of discomfort advocating for equitable practices:

> I was conscious that it seemed like we have this subconscious way of thinking of men more importantly than women that were in the pool, and the kinds of, when the discussion would come up and you would see candidates that seemed to be equivalent, some folks might use more positive language to talk about the men as opposed to the woman. … I never specifically said anything about trying to be gender neutral in the search. And again, this was the first time I'd ever chaired a search committee, or ever been on a search committee. So, I might have been naïve.

Dr. Arres reported that he never directly intervened to correct the bias he observed but tried subtly to mitigate it. Throughout the interview, he communicated that the decision would ultimately be made by the senior faculty. He was unaware of any tools available to assist him to address the bias and conceptualized his responsibility as chair to carry out the search, but not in having authority over decision-making about hiring.

Dr. Raines, a White female associate professor, recognized bias in her search experiences but chose a different path than Drs. Watkins and Arres. Undeterred by the risks, Dr. Raines challenged the faculty hierarchy and the institutional status quo. This choice had negative repercussions on her well-being, as she reflected on the pitfalls associated with her advocacy role. She stated, "I'm not fearless, I'm not fearless. I have fear … I have fear and I have anxiety. This job causes me so much stress that I had to take a medical leave for a semester." Dr. Raines emphatically shared the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of challenging the status quo, which was a finding echoed by other junior faculty search chairs. In both function and behavior, junior faculty felt that their role as search chair faltered against the power of the faculty hierarchy.

When participants were in a senior faculty position, they expressed more comfort exercising agency, autonomy, and discretion in the chair role. This finding played out in two decisive ways. If the faculty member had a personal commitment to diversity and equity, they expressed more freedom to advocate openly during the search process. For instance, Dr. Rogers, a White male full professor, said it was his job to "referee" the search committee. Citing support from the provost, he felt very comfortable championing diverse candidates and promoting diversity initiatives. He went on to discuss how his status helped him serve as an advocate for equity in his department stating:

> It's about how do you change the world you know. Change requires a champion, and if you're willing to be that champion, then and you know, you've got your doctorate standing behind this so, that's

important. You know it's not just me waiving a flag saying come on guys, good idea. You know, that doesn't happen.

Dr. Rogers had expressed early on in his interview that diversity and equity were important to him due to the personal experience of having a racially diverse family and experiencing discrimination. Accordingly, he felt his personal positioning and professional status allowed him to advocate for equity in the search process.

At the same time, some senior faculty members did not see it as their role to mitigate bias or advocate for equity. Rather, they simply assumed the best in everyone's behavior. For example, when asked if he felt the need to discuss bias prior to conducting the search, Dr. Pollard, a White male full professor reported:

> I guess my sense as chair is that I had a really good committee. Like I said, my female colleagues that were on the committee, I mean diversity is right up at the top of their list. Yeah. I guess I didn't feel like I needed to [advocate for diversity or discuss bias]. I just felt like we all were on the same page with respect to these issues.

This chair simply trusted the university's status quo process. Implicit in this process, Dr. Pollard assumed that EO or HR were responsible for addressing biases or inequities during the search. In addition, the committee members may or may not have received EO search training, as it was not a requirement to be part of a search at that time. According to other participants in this study, EO and HR did not consistently monitor searches or regularly support search chairs, nor did the trainings adequately provide strategies to mitigate bias. Thus, while it is possible that the hiring outcome was equitable, a lack in accountability on the part of the search chair allowed for potential bias to influence the search. Ultimately, relying on status quo hiring practices revealed weaknesses in this type of search.

Senior faculty consistently utilized their authority to move the committee in a direction that coincided with their perceptions and values. Even with good intentions, it is important to note that senior search chairs did not discuss how their personal biases or positional authority may have affected decision-making. Based on these findings, it was clear that faculty status affected equitable hiring practices. Specifically, if a senior faculty search chair valued diversity as an asset, the search was conducted with equity and diversity in mind. Alternatively, if the senior faculty search chair did not see the value in centering diversity or equity in the search, the likelihood of bias influencing decisions increased.

For participants who possessed senior faculty status within the institution, acting as a search chair fell within the bounds of their normal faculty role. This autonomy gave them the ability to make decisions based on personal preference while facing less professional or personal conflict. Conversely, given their precarious status within the normative faculty hierarchy, junior faculty often experienced the search chair role as a position of frustration, conflict, and stress. Interestingly, search chairs who were in senior faculty positions did not see conflation or conflict in their two roles. These participants did not articulate how their faculty status may have influenced the decisions or the trajectory of the search process, nor did they believe that their tenured faculty role and search chair role were invariably intertwined. Their beliefs about the separation of their two roles mirrored institutional messaging about the function and behavior of the search chair, which implied that the two positions were independent. In practice, however, search chairs' interpretation and mobilization of their responsibilities as chairs

differed depending on their faculty rank and lived experiences. As a result, junior faculty experienced less power, role ambiguity, and role conflict. They recognized issues with the power dynamics operating during the search process and expressed feeling silenced or afraid to confront bias due to their junior faculty status.

The differences in faculty rank sometimes led to power struggles. In the findings, junior faculty discussed that role conflict created a situation in which a senior faculty member may have tried to usurp control of the hiring process, or an uncomfortable dispute ensued. Dr. Raines reflected on a critical incident below:

> So, one of the members that was there wasn't supposed to be there. He was an ex-officio member, it was the [department] chair … So, he was an ex-officio member but not a voting member of the committee, as we had established it. He was coming to meetings, he was voting, he was influencing decisions and I didn't think it was proper. Then, when we were finally coming up with our shortlist, I had a method for scoring … Based on the ad itself, based on the inclusive language of the ad and the way that we had laid it out, I had come up with a spreadsheet with all of those criteria that met the needs of the department. … The person who was [department] chair came in and said, "This is how we're going to do it, we're going to go like this. We're going to do it like that." I said, "Well, no, I have a method that I've just established that we've emailed about, that we've agreed to." [He said] "No, we're going to do it this way." He took over the meeting, he did a certain, like, quick voting method. He got his candidate that he wanted on and then he said, "Okay, I'm done, I'm leaving, the meeting's over," and he left. He basically just took over the whole meeting … completely disrespectful. He wasn't even the chair of the search.

The quote above demonstrates how the search process reproduced the power dynamics of the faculty hierarchy, which privileged the voices and decisions of those with institutional authority and marginalized those with less positional power. This was in stark contrast to the expected function and behavior of the search chair role.

In our study, we found that the individual's positionality and personal views determined how they used their power and authority to engage with diversity and equity. Findings also highlighted how power distribution within the institutional faculty hierarchy was either maintained or disputed within the search committee format. Regardless of holding the role of search chair, in general, the normative power structure within departments and the institution persisted. That is, those who exercised power within the department or institution, continued to wield this power in the search process, whether they held the title of the search chair or not. Our study demonstrated how the search chair role, within the context of this power structure, influenced hiring practices in both positive and inequitable ways, which we explore further in the discussion.

Discussion

Despite efforts to diversify academia, higher education faculty are still primarily homogenous in race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ability (Collins, 1998; Patton, 2016; Trower & Chait, 2002; Turner et al., 2008). Accordingly, there is a need to provide evidence-based practices for faculty recruitment and policy reform to meet the goal of recruiting a more diverse pool of faculty (Griffin, 2019; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Smith, 2000). Due to the paucity of recent scholarship on the topic, this study makes an important contribution into how hiring practices, faculty identity and status, and the academic hierarchy affect the search committee process.

The Role of Race in Faculty Searches

Faculty have been socialized to reproduce the normative faculty hierarchy of the institution in their institutional roles, which promotes a racialized organizational culture that privileges White culture (Bess & Dee, 2008; Liera, 2020a, 2020b; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Because they must operate in this interlocking network, they may not be well suited to challenge or see issues within the hierarchical, hegemonic, and biased structure of the university while serving in their dual role as a search chair and faculty member. Research indicates that faculty hiring decisions are not value-neutral and often guised in colorblind ideology that supports racism (Liera, 2020b; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Findings from this study corroborated this scholarship, demonstrating that both the institutional context and search chairs' racial identity affected how participants discussed race.

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) maintain, "If there are no peoples of color present, race remains unnamed and is not presumed to be an organizing institutional factor" (p. 560). The findings in this study aligned with this statement, as most search chairs and committee members were White. The lack of racially diverse individuals as chairs, committee members, or even candidates often led to an erasure of race as a focus of diversity in the search. Instead, search chairs primarily drew upon their own salient identities to inform their conceptions of diversity, which privileged other identities over race. To ensure a fair process, Liera (2020b) posits that White faculty need to go beyond additive and "nice" rhetoric about diversity by challenging the colorblind discourse that drives faculty searches. To shy away from these difficult conversations would implicitly perpetuate the status quo, which has overwhelmingly benefited White culture and perpetuated racism.

Advancing Equity as Search Chairs

Even though most faculty in our study did not focus on race in their interviews, we found that some participants drew from other oppressed identities to support and advance equity in their searches. This finding had serious implications for hiring decisions, as chairs who had personal involvement with diversity or had previously experienced bias, reported calling out preferential treatment, intentionally using inclusive language, or drawing on resources to help recruit more diverse candidates. On the other hand, chairs who did not center diversity or equity in their search process were ambivalent about the value of diversity in their pool and expected institutional actors, not themselves, to ensure a fair process.

We found signs that searches containing little to no conversations about the importance of diversity and equity contributed to biased decision-making. These findings are reflected in the literature as Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) argue that search committees need to have open and critical conversations about what diversity means to them and why it is important in order to avoid ambiguity and bias during the search. Further, Grier and Poole (2020) argue that "Unless the chair of the search committee is open and committed to diversity and is also aware of the range of discursive moves that protect rather than unsettle the status quo, barriers to achieving racial diversity will remain" (p. 1214). Thus, it is essential to form a baseline understanding of search committee members' perceptions of inclusivity and equitability in faculty hiring practices before conducting the search.

Findings suggested that senior faculty serving as search chairs faced less challenges in their decisions to either advocate for diversity or rely on EO and HR to diversify, which was problematic on both counts. First, it shifted the responsibility of promoting diversity and advocating for equity from the search chair to the role senders at the university. Second, it allowed search chairs to rely on a false sense of colorblind meritocracy in the search process, evading issues of implicit bias. These findings have been discussed in the literature, as Tierney and Bensimon (1996) found that senior faculty and administrators involved in faculty searches were often oblivious to "gendered and racial connotations of their conduct, language, mode of interaction, gestures, etc." as they engaged with diverse faculty (p. 76). Search members believed they were operating based on merit and objectivity, when in fact, they were perpetuating gendered, racialized, and privileged forms of language, behaviors, and interactions with diverse candidates. While Tierney and Bensimon's study was more than two decades ago, a recent study examining faculty searches through a racial lens revealed a similar account (Liera, 2020a). Liera found, however, that when search members intentionally critiqued the racialized roots of the academic search process, they were more apt to ensure equity in their hiring decisions.

The Role of Institutional Actors

In our study, search chairs did not have a consistently clear understanding of the resources, workshops, or trainings offered by EO and HR. This problem has been noted in the literature as well. For instance, in their research examining how to effectively initiate a diversity cluster hire, Gasman et al. (2011) found that most search committee members had only a vague understanding of how to hire diverse candidates. They also contended that no clear or systematized institutional process existed for targeted diversity recruitment (Gasman et al., 2011). Accordingly, there is a need to better understand how current resources are utilized and the extent to which these resources may lead to inclusive and equitable practices. In addition, we found that messaging from institutional leadership, EO, and HR left some search chairs confused about their role in recruiting diverse candidates and advocating for equity. As a result, some individuals abdicated their duty to ensure an equitable search process. Ultimately, the role ambiguity, conflict, and faculty hierarchy led to a collapse in accurate role interpretation. This meant that some search chairs excused themselves of their responsibility to actively monitor the behavior of the committee or the composition of the candidate pool.

Overall, findings reflected a lack of agency or ownership for diversifying the search pools. Furthermore, due to role conflict and ambiguity, some junior faculty search chairs failed to supervise the search for bias or intervene when bias arose. We opine that role ambiguity could be somewhat remedied by providing clear and purposeful definitions and responsibilities related to diversity and equity for search chairs. For this to be effective, however, consistent accountability, support, and guidance would be needed from university administrators, HR managers, and EO leaders. This recommendation is supported in the literature, as Gasman et al. (2011) found that search committees felt they could conduct an equitable process in part because their leaders conveyed clear messaging about the value of diversity and provided financial support for the diversity cluster hire at their institution.

In role theory, managers, such as senior faculty, should be accustomed to handling the stress and multiplicity of demands from above and below (Bess & Dee, 2008). Therefore, they ought to be skilled in navigating multiple role senders. For example, the office of Equal Opportunity may articulate a message to value diversity, while the college dean may not support this message. As a role receiver and also a role sender, a senior faculty search chair must decide how to interpret these competing narratives and move forward. This type of cross-boundary situation can provide practice for decision-making but does not necessarily mean the role senders or receivers will promote diversity. Consistent with the literature, for search chairs to advocate for diversity, they must receive well defined and consistent messaging from institutional leadership and other role senders at the institution, such as EO and HR (Tierney & Bensimon, 1996).

Smith argued, "the best search committees not only advocate for inclusion and diversity but ensure that semifinalist and finalist pools present candidates from different molds" (2016, no page [n.p.]). This can be difficult if there is no reliable institutional mechanism in place to monitor for or mitigate bias. In this study, the normative faculty hierarchy did not serve to protect against implicit or overt bias. In fact, in some cases, faculty status aided in supporting biased hiring practices. Accordingly, we argue that a new accountability system would be essential to fracturing the current institutional power structure. First, the system should be managed by an administrator external to the search committee to avoid faculty role conflict. Second, EO and HR ought to be more involved in ensuring a balanced composition of search committee members, with consideration of faculty status. Third, tying this system to institutional policies supervised by EO and HR would safeguard junior faculty search chairs needing assistance with monitoring bias. An additional step could include involving an employee of HR or EO as a member of the search committee. These recommendations would be consistent with those found in Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017) research. These authors called for a careful and concerted deliberation of the search committee composition, to avoid the "reproduction of power" generated by the normal faculty hierarchy and culture of Whiteness.

Finally, while some higher-ranking faculty espoused a commitment to diversity in their interviews, the literature notes that no one is immune to bias (Choudhury, 2015; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Fine and Handelsman (2006) assert that it is the responsibility of all search committee members to hold each other accountable and to interrogate their own biases as well as others'. Our study found that confronting equity issues within the normative faculty hierarchy was uncommon and difficult, which meant that many search chairs did not know how to safely challenge the status quo or openly confront prejudice. Thus, as Sensoy and DiAngelo's (2017) found, it would be important to include a required training about these issues prior to search committee participation. In addition, for this new process to work, university leaders would need to require resources and trainings for all search committee members on how to address bias within the context of the faculty hierarchy, as well as clarify the expectation that all search committee members, not just senior faculty, are responsible for supporting an equitable search.

Limitations

While this study illuminated important interpersonal and political dynamics in the hiring process, this study was limited to one predominantly White, land- and sea-grant institution. In addition, researchers only interviewed 17 of 41 search chairs available from the initial pool. This scholarship serves as a solid baseline for understanding the various roles, behaviors, and functions intended for search chairs in contexts similar to this study. However, more research is needed in other higher education environments to broaden the scope of the findings. Specifically, researchers should explore other types of institutions to examine how the institutional power structures impact the decision-making process and outcomes of hiring practices.

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Research

This study has implications for the interpersonal and institutional dynamics of search committee practices. For decades, higher education professionals have known that implicit bias produces inequitable hiring outcomes for diverse faculty (Adam, 1981; Collins, 1998; Liera, 2020a, 2020b; Smith et al., 2004; Steinpreis et al., 1999). While there is a breadth of research on the import of diversity, and evidence-based practices for recruiting a diverse faculty (Taylor et al., 2010; Turner et al., 2008), the interpersonal aspect of faculty hiring decisions must be further interrogated due to continued disparities in faculty hiring (Liera, 2020b). This study contributes to this call by moving the focus from what is happening in faculty searches to why it may be happening.

Fine and Handelsman (2012) discuss a range of evidence-based practices for search committee members to work together in holding one another accountable for equitable hiring processes. Approaches include building rapport among committee members, actively engaging all members during discussions, and creating ground rules that encourage fair participation from all members. They argue, however, that it is the responsibility of each search committee member to hold themselves to these same standards (Fine & Handelsman, 2006). Harvard University's *Best Practices for Conducting Faculty Searches* highlights the sharing of responsibility by all committee members to correct any imbalances of power that may silence certain members (2016). In addition, they note the problematic nature of intimidation that may occur when senior faculty disagree with junior faculty. Their recommendation assumes that the search chair can act as an "official source" for the junior faculty member's alternative perspective (Harvard University, 2016, p. 5). Because some search chairs in our study lacked this type of power, identifying a member in EO or HR as this point person could alleviate tension and empower a more equitable search process.

Scholars argue that higher education institutions need to develop specific equity-minded trainings to improve institutional policies and practices for hiring diverse candidates (Gasman et al., 2011; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Yet, if higher education leaders continue to support colorblind discourse, the efforts being made to diversify the professoriate will produce lackluster results. In addition, if the trend becomes junior faculty serving as search chairs, protective mechanisms will need to be in place to truly ensure fair hiring practices ensue. We suggest that applying an equity-minded framework may be helpful in transforming faculty search processes (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). Specifically, this approach would support faculty in critically reflecting on their conceptions of equity and diversity in order to consider how they can openly challenge traditionally oppressive practices embedded within

academia (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017). This approach could lead to a direct discussion of the dangers of privileging certain forms of identity over others. Moreover, instead of claiming or assuming searches are objective, this framing would allow for intentional conversations about how to transform the biased policies, practices, and climates that are currently reifying disparities in faculty hiring (Center for Urban Education, 2019).

Whether recognized or not, faculty searches exist in racialized contexts. Thus, it is imperative for all committee members to understand the ramification of power dynamics, status quo hiring practices, and implicit bias on searches. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) provided a wealth of strategies to help ensure a more equitable process. They suggest, "one of the most powerful actions an academic unit can take up when beginning a hiring process is to mark the invisible aspects of dominance that are embedded yet go unnamed in the position description" (p. 562). Informed by their approach, we argue that an equity-minded search training ought to include the following central questions: (a) How are we defining equity and diversity in the context of this search? (b) How do we communicate our value for diversity and equity to all candidates? (c) Whose views of diversity and equity ought to be utilized in the search? (d) How do we ensure an equitable process? These questions can help search committee chairs and committee members identify potential biases and openly discuss promising practices that exist within the literature to support fair hiring. This type of training can also allow for a deliberate conversation about accountability related to equity.

In their seminal research on implicit bias, Banaji & Greenwald (2013) found that it is nearly impossible to eradicate the "mindbugs" that lead to hidden biases (p. 149). Instead, these authors claim that developing "evidence-based guidelines to eliminate discretion from judgments that might otherwise afford opportunity for hidden-bias mindbugs to operate" will significantly lessen hidden biases (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013, p. 167). Our study demonstrated that implicit bias influenced faculty searches. Thus, we suggest that searches conduct initial blinded review processes that each member completes prior to engaging with each other. This process ought to include evaluative criteria that incorporate diversity as a value. Future practical action steps could include education offered by the institution, which focuses on how to recruit underrepresented candidates, and how to address tensions related to bias and power structures during searches.

The search chair is a position that has the potential to challenge the norms of the academic hierarchy by infringing upon the roles, responsibilities, and power structure of the institution (Grier & Poole, 2020; Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). If the search chair does not feel empowered to interrupt these organizational norms, there is a choice to keep the status quo of power within the institution or break from it and risk personal retaliation. Thus, the institution should provide a description of the search chair role, within the context of the faculty hierarchy, to ensure a clear understanding of the responsibility to all stakeholders in the hiring process. Institutional leaders also need to identify role conflict and provide support and clarification for how search chairs can navigate these tensions without fear of punishment or retaliation. Furthermore, attention must be paid to the competing demands already placed on faculty, and the time constraints to engage with tools and trainings. Possible solutions could include offering monetary incentives for individuals willing to attend trainings and highlighting the benefits of education geared toward equity and diversity.

There are several ways this study can inform policy decisions regarding how to diversify the professoriate. Based on participants' perspectives, we found that while HR policies and EO trainings denounced bias and discrimination in hiring, messaging was unclear as to how to mitigate these issues in a search. Communication about the importance of diversity and equity was also inconsistent from these role senders, leading to the likelihood of bias lurking within some searches. These concerns signal a need for more transparent communication, support, and implementation of policies focused on equity in faculty search processes. Griffin (2019) notes that decentralization in institutions of higher learning may contribute to inconsistent interpretations and application of diversity policies. Thus, institutional leaders across campus need to communicate that these policies take precedence over the embedded faculty hierarchy and traditional hiring practices that have privileged inequitable outcomes.

Institutional messaging could include role senders clarifying and openly providing backing for junior faculty who serve as search chairs in making controversial decisions. Further, administrators could create a reward structure integrated into the tenure review process that benefits junior faculty for engaging in equity trainings at the university. HR and EO offices also need to create explicit and well-documented channels for communication with search chairs in case there are questions related to bias in hiring policies and procedures. With these supports in place, we opine that search chairs would better understand equity-oriented policies and be able to feasibly implement them during search processes.

In terms of research, scholars should continue to examine the resources and trainings offered by institutional mechanisms such as offices related to equity, equal opportunity, and human resources. Based on this study, these sites could serve as important instruments for the dissemination of policies, resources, and trainings regarding diversity and equity, but little is known regarding their importance as role senders in diversifying the faculty. Another promising area of inquiry would be to examine the impact of institutional power dynamics in relation to decisions made about hiring diverse candidates. Currently, scant research exists examining the trend of junior faculty serving as search chairs. Accordingly, further scholarship ought to analyze the ways in which decisions made by junior faculty may be influenced by senior faculty involved in the search process. Finally, additional research into diverse faculty candidate experiences during the search process could provide a critical view into how messages regarding diversity and equity may be inadvertently perceived. This perspective could also shed light on how interpretations of institutional policies and practices are being conveyed to candidates.

A wide breadth of methods exists related to recruiting, hiring, and retaining a diverse professoriate through an equity lens. Noted in Griffin's (2019) *Redoubling Our Efforts: How Institutions can Affect Faculty Diversity*, we encourage search chairs to draw upon examples set forth by Harvard University, Brown University, Boston College, and California Lutheran University. These institutions have leveraged research and resources to establish extensive faculty diversity procedures, which could be transferable to other organizations. Recommendations for search chairs that emerged from our findings include requiring participation in the search committee training for all members, blinding the initial candidate review process, facilitating reflexive conversations about power, privilege, and implicit bias with committee members, and involving

Offices of Equal Opportunity or Human Resources if bias emerges in the search process. Supported by our study and reflected in Harvard University's (2016) *Best Practices for Conducting Faculty Searches* and Fine and Handelsman's (2012) *Guide for Search Committees at the University of Wisconsin-Madison*, we suggest that search chairs create ground rules for fair committee member participation, maintain a record of committee meetings, making note of group dynamics and bias, and review the national faculty candidate search pool data to ensure equitable rates. Additionally, Griffin (2019) asserts that search chairs ought to advertise position descriptions in venues that appeal to underrepresented faculty candidates, actively advocate for underrepresented faculty candidates throughout the search process, and openly articulate diversity and equity as a value in the evaluation criteria.

In order for search chairs to fully promote equity and diversity in the search process, our study demonstrated the need for institutional backing and equity-minded education. Existing scholarship supports the need for institutions to require search committee trainings that include critical discussions on diversity, bias, power dynamics, and equity (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Center for Urban Education, 2019; Gasman et al., 2011; Griffin, 2019; Liera, 2020a; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2017; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). To supplement this training, we propose that institutional role senders (i.e., administrators) provide a clear description of the search chair role, inclusive of feasible strategies to combat implicit bias, address discrimination, and confront faculty derisiveness. We also recommend that institutions assign an administrative advocate committed to providing support for search committee chairs in navigating the academic hierarchy, managing conflict, and mitigating bias. Finally, we advise that offices of Equal Opportunity and Human Resources regularly review search chair meeting notes to safeguard against inequities.

The findings from this study encourage leaders in higher education to contemplate the significance of equitable hiring practices within the context of search committees. We found that role conflict and ambiguity led to inconsistent implementation of equity-oriented hiring practices for some search chairs. The study also indicated that the faculty hierarchy often superseded decision-making power given to search chairs if they were junior faculty. This problematic structure led to implicit support of biased hiring practices and decisions about hiring that were not necessarily aligned with institutional policies or equity aims. Given these troubling findings, we hope this study highlights the significance of institutional leaders moving beyond rhetorical support for diversity and instead critically examining how search chairs can advocate for equity and diversity in faculty searches without retribution.

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