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REMAINING AT THE MARGIN AND IN THE CENTER

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INTRODUCTION

Looking up the terms *center* and *margin*, synonyms found for *center* are “the middle, nucleus, heart, core, hub” and synonyms for *margin* are “the border, edge, boundary, fringe, periphery.” These terms and their synonyms prompt me to ask questions about the concepts of “margin” and “center” as related to higher education. Questions such as: What are the challenges and benefits of being at the margins in the academy? What are the risks and benefits of moving to center? Can faculty of color move to center and continue to remain forces for change in the academy? Are there ways in which one can remain at the margin and in the center simultaneously?

In addition to the above questions, the words of bell hooks and Gloria Ladsen-Billings provide inspiration for this essay. They underscore the importance of innovation emerging from the margins in order to change what is considered the center.

bell hooks (1990) embraces the margin as critical for change and innovation:

I was not speaking of marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center -- but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds. (pp. 149-150)

Gloria Ladsen-Billings (1997) further emphasizes the importance of those coming from the margin to challenge old assumptions:

More women of color are defining and redefining their roles within it. New ways of thinking about teaching and research have provided spaces for women scholars to challenge old assumptions about what it means to be in the academy... (p. 66)

My experiences as a first generation student and a first generation faculty woman of color informs this essay, which continues with a description of where I entered higher education, a presentation of current reflections on being at the margin and in the center simultaneously, and concludes with messages on lessons learned.

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ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION

I entered the environment of higher education from a marginalized position. I grew up on a farm labor camp in Hollister, California. My parents emphasized the importance of opportunities emerging from getting a good education. As a first generation student, not knowing what college was, I entered an environment that was alien to me. In the early 1960s, I was a UC Davis student at a time when financial aid was minimal, when very few students from the no collar, poverty class attended the University of California, and when the Farm Labor Movement as well as the Civil Rights Movement challenged the “center.” Acknowledging all who provide support along my educational journey, I may now be located at the center. I have extensive experience, spanning almost five decades, as a faculty member and an academic administrator on eight university campuses of different sizes and missions, located within four state contexts. In 1968, I was one of the first counselors for the inaugural UC Davis Educational Opportunity Program and my first publication in a peer reviewed journal was published in 1974. Recently, I served as Interim Dean of the College of Education at California State University, Sacramento and as President of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) (Turner, 2015; Turner & González, 2014).

Having moved from margin to center, I realize that I never left the margin. In 2016, I was the recipient of both the Yolo County Mexican American Concilio Pilar Andrade Award for Community Service and the University of California, Davis School of Education Distinguished Alumni Award, acknowledging continued commitment to advocate for and support first generation students of color and first generation faculty of color within local community neighborhoods as well as within the higher education community.

REFLECTIONS ON BEING AT THE MARGIN AND IN THE CENTER SIMULTANEOUSLY

Research over the last decades resulted in interviews with many students and faculty of color who felt that:

to succeed in academe requires them to leave themselves, who they are, at the door of graduate education and the tenure process. [However, findings indicate that:] Who you are shapes the types of questions you ask, the kinds of issues which interest you, and the ways in which you go about seeking solutions... Although doctoral student and faculty socialization processes are very strong, we must not lose ourselves in the process of fitting in... (Turner, 2000b, p. 133)

I believe that during transitions, such as leaving our communities of origin to attend college and becoming a professor, one must not lose sight of knowledge gained during early life experiences at home. Our intellectual development from childhood to the present is of great value and must be wholly drawn upon. It is important to intentionally remember where we come from and how this affects our approaches to our work as researchers. Those from the margins can and do make a difference.

Academics from underrepresented groups bring perspectives to higher education that expand and enrich scholarship. The acclaimed documentary *Shattering the Silences* (Nelson & Pillett, 1997) explores how scholars of color changed and were changed by their disciplines and institutions. One featured scholar was Darlene Clark Hine, a renowned historian and winner of the 2013 National Humanities Medal. Dr. Hine is acknowledged as a pioneer in the study of the African-American experience, with a focus on the historical contributions of African American women. In 1972, Hine was an assistant professor when she received a telephone call from a woman who asked her to write a history of Black women in Indiana. At first, Hine was reluctant, thinking she did not possess the background; she knew nothing about Black women in Indiana. But she quickly concluded that “historians can write a history of anything and anyone; the key is that the historian must decide that that thing,

event, person, or group is worthy of historical investigation—worth studying.” Referring to this study of Black women, Hine recalls, “I entered another universe, one I had never known existed.” Through her work, she helped to create a new field: African American women’s history. She believes that generating knowledge can promote social change: “If we want a new world, I think we have to make new people—students are new people in the making, and we have to teach them a new history.”

I am also impressed by new scholars such as Iloh (2017) as she supports the need for voices from the margin as critical for policy insights:

As a professor whose research focuses on college access for marginalized populations, I don’t worry about whether my work can be categorized as innovative by others. I do, however, spend a great deal of time crafting and investigating research questions that position underrepresented people as experts on their own experiences, with insights necessary for addressing educational inequities.

The academic enterprise depends on the contributions of faculty members. They design the curriculum and create, legitimize, and broaden knowledge. The expansion of scholarship in all fields depends on the ability of institutions to recruit and retain scholars who, like Hine and Iloh, have the power and independence to influence the direction of their field or discipline. By bringing new faces to the academy, new knowledge is created that affirms and reflects one’s unique experience (Turner, 2000a). Unfortunately, recruiting and retaining faculty of color remains one of the most difficult challenges facing American higher education (Turner & González, 2014).

MESSAGES ON LESSONS LEARNED

In conclusion, for those embarking on journeys from the margins, I urge that you intentionally remember your past and bring all knowledge to your present. Thereby your full power will be represented at the policy making table or brought to bear on anything else with which you have the passion to engage. By doing so, you will place value on yourself, bringing all that you are, from childhood on, to bear on the challenges that will undoubtedly cross your path (Turner, 2002). By bringing all of our forms of knowledge to the table, we validate ourselves and our communities of origin, grounding us so we can withstand critics who believe that these sources of knowledge have little or no value.

In my view, leaving the known for the unknown is always fraught with challenges because transitions require a high tolerance for ambiguity as you work outside of your comfort zone (Turner, 2017). However, simultaneously being at the margin and in the center creates new spaces to inhabit within which to grow, where one can continue using life-long sources of knowing, combining them with newly acquired ones. Still, be prepared to embrace the unknown as the center(s) is not static and continues to be reframed as the words of James Anderson reflect in his 2014 AERA Brown Lecture titled, *A Long Shadow: The American Pursuit of Political Justice and Education Equality*. He posits a dynamic of change as he asks us to consider these questions:

will [America’s citizens] choose their democratic ideals of equality or will [they] succumb to irrational prejudices. Will higher education become further stratified into private schools serving the wealthy elite and public schools serving a few of the poor?

In spite of challenges to equality as referenced by Anderson, what needs to remain a constant is an educator’s commitment to the nurturing and growth of new scholars, instilling in them the confidence and strength to believe in themselves because they will encounter many naysayers. This is a way of keeping innovation and creativity alive in a profession that heavily socializes newcomers into the status quo: a status quo that results, for example, in a glacial pace of universities to increase faculty diversity among the professoriate. One of the barriers identified in Turner, González, and Wood (2008) as hindering the promotion and retention of current faculty of color is the lack of journal

venues for publication. Diversity of editors and editorial boards is needed or marginalized faculty have to take action and start their own journals. Progress is being made. Today, scholars of color and their allies are forming other journal venues from which to publish and share their work; journals such as the *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, the *Amerasia Journal*; the *Journal of African American History*, the *Journal of American Indian Education*, the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, and, this journal, the *Journal of the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education (JSPTE)*. At JSPTE Sydney Freeman, Jr., Founder and Senior Editor-in-Chief, along with Editor in Chief, Crystal R. Chambers continue the struggle to move forward equity and inclusion in the general field of higher and postsecondary education, but also specifically, the infusion and diffusion of diverse, innovative, and engaging content for higher education programs.

While much has been accomplished, more work needs to be done. To reduce isolation, continue to network in multiple ways, face-to-face and/or through social media. Continue to write together and cite one another's work. As we mentor one another, Bernstein, Jacobson, & Russo (2010) remind us that "the goal of mentoring is not simply to teach the system, but also to change the system so that it becomes more flexible and responsive to the needs and pathways of its members – mentors and protégés" (p. 58). Each of us, in our own way, must and can use our spheres of influence to advocate for and create needed change toward the betterment of opportunities for ourselves and others.

In conclusion, given the important contributions of those entering higher education from the margins as described above, it is my hope that you would not come away from reading this essay thinking that the burden of the work should totally be shouldered by those at the margins. In fact, it is essential that those occupying the center(s) challenge higher education leaders and policy makers to hasten a shift in the field by embracing voices at the margin. For example, overall, higher education institutions have not done enough to diversify their faculties. Deeply ingrained biases based on race, gender, and academic pedigree [to name a few] hinders the advancement of this goal (Turner, 2002, 2017; Turner et al., 2008). Those established at all levels of higher education must join to address faculty underrepresentation, including senior faculty, program directors, admissions officers, journal editors, and heads of professional organizations. This is easier said than done because in order to "succeed", we have all been socialized for success by a status quo created and perpetuated by those inhabiting the center; a status quo that has maintained and continues to maintain inequalities (Turner, 2003). Nonetheless, those in the center, at the margin, and those at the margin and in the center simultaneously can take advantage of opportunities to interact with each other to jointly create a new and emerging center. All involved in this work must be open to the incorporation of unfamiliar ways of thinking with the goal of including everyone's voice. Engaging in what are likely to be difficult but insightful discussions across our differences promises a brighter future for all.

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BIOGRAPHY



Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner is Professor Emerita, Doctorate in Educational Leadership at California State University, Sacramento and Lincoln Professor Emerita, Higher Education and Ethics at Arizona State University.

Dr. Turner's areas of expertise include diversity, access, equity, and leadership in higher education. Her research is widely published in academic journals. Moreover, she has authored/co-authored and edited/co-edited several books, including *Faculty of color in Academe: Bittersweet Success*, *Diversifying the Faculty: A Guidebook for Search Committees*, *Mentoring as Transformative Practice: Supporting Student and Faculty Diversity*, *Modeling Mentoring across Race/Ethnicity and Gender: Practices to Cultivate the Next Generation of Diverse Faculty*, *Understanding Minority Serving Institutions*, *Spanning the Divide: Latinos/as in Theological Education*, *Latina and Latino students in Higher Education*, *Racial & Ethnic Diversity in Higher Education*.

Dr. Turner's awards include the California State University, Sacramento University-Wide Award for Research and Creativity Activity and the Arizona State University College of Education Faculty Teaching Excellence Award as well as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Scholars of Color in Education Standing Committee Career Contribution Award and the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Council on Ethnic Participation Mildred Garcia Senior Scholar Award. In 2016, Turner received the Yolo County Mexican American Concilio Pilar Andrade Award for Community Service and the University of California, Davis School of Education Distin-

guished Alumni Award. She was an American Council on Education (ACE) Fellow and has held academic leadership positions including serving as President of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) and serving as Interim Dean for the College of Education at California State University, Sacramento.

ⁱ In this essay, terms such as “students of color,” “faculty of color,” “people of color,” and “populations of color” are used to refer to people of African American, American Indian, Asian Pacific American, and Latino origin. In doing so, the author understands that “people of color” do not constitute a monolithic group. The author recognizes that whites are also members of a distinct racial category. And certainly by using the individual racial and ethnic categories no intent is made to imply that all persons so “designated” experience anything in a uniform way. In all cases, when speaking about any racial or ethnic population, the category used does not capture the full cultural dimensions of the people being described. As Padilla (1994) points out, more research is needed to clearly understand intra-group variability. In Green’s (1989) words, “we only hope that readers will keep their sights on the challenge and the solutions rather than the vehicle of expression. Language has its limitations, human potential has few” (p.xvii).