



**Final Report**  
**Of**  
**The Campus Climate**  
**Focus Group Research Project:**  
**Faculty, Staff, and Administrators**  
**Fall 2011**

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“To commit ourselves to the work of transforming the academy so that it will be a place where cultural diversity informs every aspect of our learning, we must embrace struggle and sacrifice. We cannot be easily discouraged. We cannot despair when there is conflict. Our solidarity must be affirmed by shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth.” (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* 1994:33)

### **Introduction to the Study**

The Campus Climate Focus Group Research Project was initiated at the request of the Campus Climate Committee (CCC), a Presidential advisory group composed of faculty, students, administrators, and staff. This study examines campus climate at SJSU based on data collected from thirteen focus groups composed of administrators, faculty, staff, and students. The initial impetus for this study came from findings of the 2006 Campus Climate Survey conducted by the CCC. As is common practice in social science research, this research project was designed as a “follow-up” study to offer a deeper understanding of the survey results (Morgan 1996). The primary goal of this research project was to explore experiences of campus climate through the lens of race, gender, sexuality and rank. Data collection began February, 2009 and ended November, 2009. The thirteen groups included in this study were: African American, Asian American, International, Latino, LGBT, and White students, and African American, Asian American, Latino, LGBT, and women faculty and staff, lecturers, and administrators.

### **Introduction to Focus Group Methodology**

Focus group methodology is, “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1996:130). Focus groups are generally small (6-10 people) and are convened for a one-time discussion of a specific topic

(Reinharz 1992). The logic of focus group methodology resides somewhere in between inductive and deductive approaches. The groups are typically convened around a specific topic and are guided by an interview schedule, however, the research questions can also be treated as merely “probes” and the discussions allowed to range freely.

The advantage of focus groups (as compared with individual interviews) is that they can create a deeper exploration of complex topics as they allow participants ask questions of and explain themselves to one another. Carey and Smith (1994) have termed this phenomenon “the group effect.” The emphasis on interaction between participants allows for the opportunity for contradictory ideas to be expressed, and “the information that is produced is more likely to be framed by the categories and understandings of the interviewees rather than those of the interviewer” (Montell, 1999:49). The analysis produced from these data, therefore, is “grounded” in the social world of study participants (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

## **Study Methodology**

### **Data Collection**

Data collection began in spring 2009. Ten groups were initially identified for inclusion in the project: African American, Latino, Asian American, LGBT and women faculty and staff, and African American, Latino, Asian American, International, and LGBT students<sup>2</sup>. As the analysis proceeded, lecturers and administrators were added to the list in order to collect data relevant to issues of rank. At some point in the process it became evident that the initial formulations of this project fell prey to the “invisibilities of whiteness,” in that this group was

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<sup>2</sup> Though faculty, staff and students with disabilities were clearly identified in the CCC survey data as warranting further study, at the initiation of this study another team of SJSU researchers were conducting focus groups with this population. People with disabilities were not, therefore, specifically targeted as one of our focus groups.

not initially considered for inclusion in the racial focus of the study (McIntosh, 2009).<sup>3</sup> At the point of realization, the principal researcher added a session with White students to the study.

We used a variety of techniques to recruit participants for these focus group sessions. We advertised through the use of flyers posted throughout campus, we made direct appeals to students in upper and lower division General Education classes, and we made use of campus email lists targeting specific groups. No compensation was offered to any participants beyond pizza and drinks provided by the Office of the President. As each session commenced, participants were advised of their rights as research subjects, each signed consent forms, and each agreed to keep confidential the statements made by others in the session. Each session was digitally recorded.

Five different researchers acted as primary facilitators for the focus group sessions. In several sessions we had additional facilitator/observers present who took observational notes. Whenever possible we tried to “match” the relevant “characteristics” of focus group facilitators with participants (Queer to queer, white to white, women to women, etc.). Focus groups sessions lasted from 1 to 1.5 hours. Facilitators were given interview schedules with questions designed to focus the group discussions around specific phenomenon (see Attachment A for sample interview schedules). Facilitators were instructed to minimize their participation in each session, allowing participants to have “free ranging” conversations in response to each probe. Recordings were sent to an off campus transcriber.

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<sup>3</sup> As of Fall 2010 White students represent 27% of our student population, the second largest racial group of students on campus. For a breakdown of SJSU student enrollment by gender and ethnicity see, <http://www.oir.sjsu.edu>.

## **Analysis of data**

To ensure accuracy of the data, all transcripts were reviewed (and re-transcribed) by the principal researcher. For purposes of this preliminary report each focus group was analyzed separately using the following analytic techniques. Written transcripts were initially hand-coded, then coded into NVivo 9 software for qualitative analysis. These data were then analyzed using a combination of principals drawn from Becker's (1970) discussion of "quasi-statistics," Glaser and Strauss's (1967) formulation of "grounded theory," and Katz's description of "analytic inductive" methods. Analytic coding occurred in two stages: initial coding and focused coding. Using the NVivo 9 software, data from each transcript was initially coded into "free coding" categories. Each "free coding" category was then analyzed, compared with other free codes, and eventually moved into more abstract coding categories ("tree codes"). As initial codes shifted into more abstract codes, the analysis moved into more focused coding. Theoretical memos (Glaser and Strauss 1967), were developed from the categories created through focused coding. These memos were then compared with one another, built into the overall analysis of these data, and eventually compared and contrasted with existing theory. The end results of this analytic process are the reports contained herein.

## **Ethical Concerns: Confidentiality**

To ensure confidentiality of participants in this study, all references to specific departments, divisions, or people have been removed from qualitative examples given in this report. No persons (or committees) have had access to the original transcripts other than the principal investigator and those that assisted with initial data collection.

### **Scope of this Study: Contextualizing the Findings**

The findings from this study are constrained by the confidentiality offered participants. We asked people to give detailed examples of their daily experiences on this campus relative to their membership in particular identity groups relative to race, gender, sexuality and rank. We also assured them that in the reporting of our findings we would disguise their responses in such a way that they and their department or division on campus would not be identifiable. At the same time, San José State University is a very large campus and the various departments and divisions can really be likened to micro-climes. The politics of race, gender, rank, and sexuality vary depending on the local context of these micro-climes. Local context varies by demographics (what people are present), by power structures, by available resources, by disciplinary context (e.g. male-dominated verses female-dominated disciplines), and by environmental factors. While information at this local level might be compelling, given the confidentiality extended to participants, these analyses will not extend to this level of analysis.

In other words, this is not an “investigation” of racism, heterosexism, sexism, and power relations at SJSU. This study is not about finding those spaces on campus where these isms reside; indeed (as will be seen) they are everywhere. Instead, the objective here is to convey a deeper sense of how these phenomena manifest on a daily basis, such that current members of the campus community will be able to recognize and confront campus climate issues in situ.

### **A Final Note of Acknowledgement and Thanks:**

While I accept full responsibility for the analysis contained in this report, I certainly could not have completed it without support and assistance from a number of sources. First, I would like to thank Wiggys Sivertsen, the Campus Climate Committee, and the President’s

Office for initiating and supporting this research project. Dr. Rona Halualani and the Campus Climate Committee were instrumental in the initial design phase of this research project. Thank you also to Chris Cox, Dr. Rona Halualani, Minna Holopainen, and Sunny Malatesta for their assistance with data collection. Thank you to John Briggs and Kim Aldridge for their assistance with statistical data. Finally, I am greatly indebted to Chris Cox, Julie Dixon, Dr. Amy Leisenring, Dr. Carlos Garcia, Dr. Henry Gutierrez, Dr. Angela Krum, Dr Marcos Pizarro, Dr, Preston Rudy, Hyon Chu Yi-Baker, and Dr. Ruth Wilson for their comments on specific reports contained herein.

And finally, this study would not have been possible without the willingness of the administrators, faculty, staff, and students who participated in these focus group sessions. As a community we owe them our gratitude for sharing their stories.

**Findings from Faculty and Staff Focus Groups**

Asian American and Pacific Islander

Black/African American

Gay, Lesbian Bisexual, Transgender

Latino/a

Women

## Asian American Pacific Islander (API) Faculty and Staff

The API faculty and staff focus group was composed of women and men across all divisions on campus. Ranging in age from 31 to 70 some members of the group had been on campus for less than a year, and some for more than 35 years. Focus group members identified as Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and “other Asian.” Three central themes emerged from this discussion of campus climate for API faculty and staff: 1) cultural misunderstanding and discrimination, 2) recruitment, retention, and promotion issues, and 3) motives for staying at SJSU.

For many of the long term faculty and staff in this focus group, the current state of the campus climate for API faculty and staff was constructed in reference to a more welcoming past:

*“... I feel more welcomed when I was just hired. At that time, [late 80s] I feel kind of a warmth on the campus. You know, just for a few years. And the multicultural is often talked about. You know, ‘we’re hiring multicultural [positions]’. But then later, I gradually feel like that kind of atmosphere kind of fade away. Also in [Division]. In the past, I don’t know what’s become of that. I don’t know exactly a specific thing that can explain that situation. But I just feel that atmosphere is gone. Yeah, you can’t feel it anymore.”*

Here the faculty identifies “campus climate” as a shifting experience from “*a kind of warmth on campus*” punctuated by an emphasis on “*multiculturalism*” to a gradual loss of this feeling. While it is impossible to know whether her initial experience of “*warmth*” reflects a substantively different emphasis on inclusiveness on campus during the late 80s and early 90s (or simply a “honeymoon period” in her employment), the key finding here is in the statement about

her current experience of campus climate, “*But I just feel that atmosphere is gone. Yeah, you can’t feel it anymore.*” Perhaps even more telling than her comments, were the nods of assent from the other group participants in response to this statement.

Campus climate has been defined in the academic literature as, “*a term used to describe the culture, habits, decisions, practices, and policies that make up campus life,*” (Harvey, 1991:128). Maintaining a “hospitable” campus climate for all the various populations on campus encompasses wide-ranging and continuous structural (*practices, policies, and decisions*), and interactional (*culture, habits, and decisions*) efforts. Much has been written in the academic literature about the critical role that campus climate plays in the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff of color (Aguirre 2000, Alfred 2001, Stanley 2006). For the API faculty and staff in our study, the current campus climate appears to be chilly.

### **Cultural Meaning and Misunderstanding: “*Like a stab into the heart.*”**

Throughout the focus group session there were numerous references to experiences of API cultural values being “misinterpreted” and cast as professional liabilities when viewed through a Westernized cultural lens. For example, early on in the focus group discussion a staff member started talking about what she saw as necessary for the campus:

*“I would say a deeper understanding or respect for different cultures. For example, there was a meeting. The presenter was talking about the bamboo ceiling<sup>4</sup> of API and this is from a person from another culture. And this person just say, “You Asians need to be less*

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<sup>4</sup> According to the Asian American and Pacific Islander work group Report of the U.S Employment Opportunity Commission, the bamboo ceiling refers to, “a situation where there are high numbers and perhaps overrepresentation of Asian American employees in lower rungs of the organizational ladder but disproportionately low and sometimes nonexistent representation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the highest ranks of the organization”pg. 5 (Commission 2007). For a deeper discussion of Asian American faculty and the “glass ceiling,” see (Lee 2002).

*shy." I was like, "Uh, No." That person was in a higher-up position. And that's like a stab into the heart, that the API traditional culture of being thoughtful, thinking about the group and collaborating, cooperating and respecting, is being misunderstood as shy or not competitive."*

Two critical points are raised in this example, first that there is a perception among API faculty and staff that there is a lack of cultural understanding among administrators on campus, and second that being “*thoughtful, group centered, collaborative, and respectful*” is frequently “read” as being shy. Both points surfaced multiple times during the focus group session. Paralleling the comment from the staff member above was a similar characterization by a faculty member:

*“And also, another thing is that, it's the misunderstanding of the API cultural values from the higher up that's very disappointing. For example, being respected. Being respecting, being reserved, being thoughtful, has been misunderstood as shy and not wanting to be-- taking responsibilities. And that is a problem that is pervasive in many organizations. But here, I witness several times that when the API faculty is trying to be accommodating, thoughtful, and think about big goals, they are kind of like pressed down.”*

Here again is the expectation that those in leadership positions take it upon themselves to be educated about those they lead. With “inclusive excellence”<sup>5</sup> as one of the key elements of

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<sup>5</sup> From <http://www.sjsu.edu/president/strategicplanning/definitions/index.html> “Inclusive Excellence refers to SJSU's commitment to leveraging the rich diversity of its faculty, staff, student, alumni and community connections as a resource to achieve academic excellence for all students. Diversity is an educational resource and knowledge domain for students that contributes to their academic success. Examples include: a warm, supportive, inclusive campus climate, an ongoing engagement with diversity topics in the curriculum and co-curriculum, and success and excellence are equitably achieved by all students.”

San José State’s current educational and organizational mission, comes the expectation that those “in charge” of the mission are leading by example. The attribution of “shyness” to persons of Asian and Pacific Islander descent is particularly problematic as “shyness” runs counter to Western definitions of leadership. Faculty and staff who are read by their colleagues and supervisors as “shy” rather than “*thoughtful, group centered, collaborative, and respectful*” might not be given the consideration they deserve when opportunities for promotion or advancement arise. An example of this is offered by an API faculty:

*“I would say people in power who are not API tend to not want -- because they're biased, the halo effect<sup>6</sup>-- they tend not to want API to represent something. So, for example, when there are opportunities for going to a presentation or going to a conference, they are looking at the first people who speak out or who can represent the department. I saw some data which suggested that it is not usually given to the API people.”*

In this example the faculty applies the “halo effect” to phenotype and the cultural attributes ascribed to those identified as API. The “*people in power... tend not to want API to represent [the University?],* instead when opportunities arise they “*are looking at the first people who speak out.*” In all likelihood, “*the first people who speak out,*” will not be those whose cultural values center on respect, humility, collaboration, and community.<sup>7</sup> As an API staffer described:

*“... those that know me know that I'm pretty vocal, I like to talk. But I find myself in these kinds of settings [trainings] feeling really agitated, because when I do want to speak, it's*

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<sup>6</sup> From the *Economist*, Oct 14, 2009 “The existence of the so-called halo effect has long been recognized. It is the phenomenon whereby we assume that because people are good at doing A they will be good at doing B, C and D (or the reverse—because they are bad at doing A they will be bad at doing B, C and D).” Retrieved 12/23/11 <http://www.economist.com/node/14299211>

<sup>7</sup> The other side of this phenomenon is the “tokenism” experienced by faculty and staff of color (C. S. Turner 2002) where they *are* called upon to represent the university as “diversity experts” pg. 704 (Stanley 2006).

*always the white people jumping in. And then not even raising their hands. And it's always that one white guy in the room that has to take up like 15 minutes of the Q and A session and then there's only like two minutes left for everyone else. And so, I just get so agitated. So, [SJSU employees] need some kind of training around how do you respect and understand different communication styles and that, you know, some people wait because they're trying to be polite.”*

In this case, the cost of the (presumed) lack of cultural competence is a lost opportunity to get one’s questions answered. In other cases, the cost of cultural misunderstanding can be much higher for both individuals and the larger institution. This is especially significant to the process of recruitment, retention, and promotion of API faculty and staff.

## **Recruitment**

Issues of recruitment surfaced as a key concern among API faculty and staff. This group perceived there to be a general “*lack of awareness*” on campus regarding: 1) the need to recruit more Asian American and Pacific Islander faculty and staff, 2) the process of finding minority candidates, 3) the composition and communication process of recruitment committees, and 4) the cultural assumptions surrounding the actual interviews.

The perception that there is a lack of awareness regarding the need to recruit more API faculty and staff was accompanied by the idea that there is a lack of API representation among the administration of SJSU. As one API staff woman commented:

*“I’d like to follow up what she said about the awareness of the need to recruit more people with API backgrounds. In the unit we are working at, all the people in the supervisory positions or administrators are white except one. We have about one*

*hundred people in this unit. And many of us, we are extremely capable, doing very well, maybe even better than other people. But so far, only one in a supervisor or administrative position is not white. So is the campus is aware of this kind of distribution, is there a program to educate or to make campus aware about the distribution? We have seen a couple of very well qualified candidates come in for interview. But they were not hired. So, I kind of wonder why.”*

Similarly, an API faculty member explained:

*“I want to make a comment about when I said to hire more API background faculty. That doesn't mean only hire API. I want to hire the most qualified no matter where ever they are from. I'm not talking about whether this person is this or that. I want [SJSU] to hire the person most qualified for that position, that's most important. But at the same time, since we do have a lot of overqualified API background faculty members, when the higher administrative jobs open up, they should be considered and they are not. So, I wondered how can we improve that kind of situation?”*

Underlying both of these comments is the idea that there have been opportunities to hire affirmatively – to hire well-qualified API faculty, staff, and administrators – and these opportunities have been overlooked. While it is impossible to know what specifically transpired in any of the situations referred to above, a cursory glance campus demographics does support the perception of a lack of representation of API faculty, staff and administrators in comparison with the composition of our student body. During the Fall 2010 semester, Asian American students (including Filipino and Pacific islander) made up 30% of our student body – the largest

single racial-ethnic pool of students<sup>8</sup>. During that same semester, 17% of SJSU faculty identified as Asian American or Pacific Islander with only half of the 17% being tenured or tenure-track. During the 09/10 academic year, only 13% of SJSU administrators identified as API<sup>9</sup>.

Another concern regarding the lack of representation and the recruitment process had to do with the outreach efforts made to ensure a diverse candidate pool. As one faculty member questioned:

*“And why do we have so few administrative people in positions? I think that's the biggest question we have to ask. And in terms of recruitment, what kind of effort they have put in order to reach qualified underrepresented group to apply for this position. Is it because we are not friendly? So people won't apply? Or is it something else. I mean we need to find out why.”*

And a staff queried: *“But in terms of recruitment, I don't know how much effort has been made in order to reach minority groups.”* There is much evidence in the academic literature to support the notion that the hiring of diverse faculty of color requires “aggressive hiring strategies” (Turner and Myers 2000). As Smith et.al. (2004) note, “While it is clear that there are a number of factors involved in the issue of diversifying faculty, the literature reports that, in order to achieve greater success, search processes must change” pg. 136 (Smith, et al. 2004).

Among the “changes” suggested in the literature are increased outreach efforts (as raised by the API faculty above), stronger institutional commitment to diversity, targeted job descriptions, an examination of recruitment committee composition, and the use of “special hiring strategies” (Caldwell-Cobert 1996, Aguirre 2000, Smith, et al. 2004). Several of these

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.oir.sjsu.edu/cognos8/cgi-bin/cognos.cgi> for statistics on racial ethnic and gender composition of SJSU's faculty and students for fall 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Data on the racial-ethnic composition of SJSU Administration comes from SJSU Human Resource office.

changes were also discussed in some detail during the focus group session. Specifically, the API faculty and staff in our study were concerned about both the composition and internal dynamics of recruitment committees:

*“I think on an individual level, I know folks, when we have a position open within our division, that we reach out to our community to try to increase the diversity here on campus. But I don't think on a division level there's anything formal or structured or even encouraged. You know? And so, I try to sit on as many search committees just so I can represent and make sure that there is a voice for the API community. But I don't get the sense that that thought is intentional when they think about search committees, that they're thinking about the diversity of the committee and making sure that there is a representation from all communities.”*

Here the faculty member calls into question the intentionality of the “division’s” hiring practices regarding the composition of the search committees. The underlying argument here is that a diverse committee is more likely to hire diverse candidates. Though not conclusive in their findings, in their study of successful strategies for hiring diverse faculty, Smith et. al. (2004) found, “that diversity on the search committee may increase the likelihood of a diverse hire” (p.146).

When San José State API faculty and staff *are* on recruitment committees, some report being “*silenced*,” “*feeling ignored*,” or just not having their recommendation taken up by those with the power to hire. As above, it is in these key interactional situations where the consequences of negative racial stereotypes can have the greatest impact. For example, as one API staff member reported:

*“Well, when they say that Asian people are shy or-- I don't feel so. But when comes-- what should I say, if a person, let's say for instance, in the recruitment process, whose voice is larger then he is always the favorite. And although API candidates have the same equal qualifications, usually I'm on a committee sometimes, I just feel my voice cannot be heard. Yeah, that's my feeling.”*

In this case the staff member attributes the fact that her, “*voice cannot be heard,*” to inappropriate interpretations of her as “*shy.*” Interactional norms favoring loud, assertive, and quick responses render thoughtful, contemplative, respectful, group-centered behaviors less effective. In other instances, API faculty report “*feeling ignored*” on recruitment committees even while holding some institutional power. In response to our question about whether focus group members felt safe on campus, we recorded the following exchange:

API Faculty 1: *“I'm safe. However I'm ignored. Again, for example of the recruitment committee, I always become a minority. I don't know why. I'm always the only person on the other side. And so, whatever I have said is ignored. You know? So that's my feeling.”*

API Faculty 2: [to previous speaker] *“You have also served as the chairperson – and the chairperson is suppose to have some say.”*

API Staff 1 : *“That's even more strange. Very strange.”*

In bureaucratic hierarchies, like SJSU, it is generally assumed that the voices of those higher up in the hierarchy have more weight in decision-making processes. In the example above, as in additional examples given during the focus group session, the API faculty and staff in our study perceive that their voices are given less consideration – regardless of rank.

Moreover, this discrimination is not imposed solely on recruitment committee members, but

extends to those being interviewed as well. In her analysis of the discrimination facing API job candidates, one of the faculty members argued:

*“The whole culture of recruitment is very Western focused. So, you go through the interview, you're supposed to brag about yourself. You're supposed to talk up your accomplishments. So, the whole interview process itself is set up against a traditional Asian culture. You know, a traditional Pacific Islander who's more humble. Who's relying on other people to talk about their accomplishments. Really, that's part of the culture, you know? So, when we're talking about going to an interview where we have to again, brag, it's a process that's counter-value.”*

It is a process that is “*counter*” to traditional API “*values*” and also one that can be “counter-productive” when the “model minority” stereotype is applied to API candidates that embrace Western cultural values (Commission 2007).

*“In the recruitment process, usually API people always do a very good preparation, right? Prepare for the interview. Get a lot of documents. If we publish something, we organize them together in a big binder or something like that. When the interview comes, we show our evidence of what we have done. But this kind of work, to me, is very good work. Very good preparation for the interview. However, other people think, over-prepared, don't you think so? They say ‘this person is over-prepared for his interview.’”*

The “model minority” stereotype applies a perception of “excessive” competence to API workers. This seemingly “positive” attribution of being a “model” worker has been used to, “pit Asian Americans against Hispanics and African Americans” pg. 5 (Commission 2007). And, as above, it transposes valuable acts and actions into liabilities – for example, when “being

prepared” becomes being “over-prepared.”

### **Retention and Promotion Issues**

A variety of retention and promotion issues surfaced during the focus group session. Several items discussed involved factors that might contribute to the retention of faculty and staff of color, and several might explain why they leave or perceive they are “overlooked” for promotion. In our focus group session and in the academic literature (Aleman 2000, C. S. Turner 2002, Jackson 2004), mentoring arose as a key component of academic and professional success. While this is especially true when faculty of color are isolated in predominantly White institutions (Alfred 2001), it is also the case when faculty of color are isolated within their own disciplines. In her interviews with women of color in academe, Turner (2002) presents an example of mentoring work described by an Asian American faculty member:

“I know a woman who’s Chinese. She’s in the [name of department] so we have no overlap in the field, but I and another woman in my college who’s in computer science have sort of taken it upon ourselves to keep her from getting isolated. We’re not even in her college, but we have lunch with her – I like her a lot, so she’s become my friend, but we started this by just trying to keep her from being so isolated over there in the [name of department]. I feel so strongly about trying to combat isolation...” (Turner, 2002:84)

In our study we found similar initiative being undertaken by API faculty women at SJSU:

*“Well, in our department in the past there was nothing in place to help newly hired. But last year I volunteered to be the facilitator for the mentoring program--faculty mentoring. So far, I think it works pretty well, because we realize there's a need to do some kind of mentoring. Especially for new hires. This [department] is very weak. And everything*

*depends on the administrator. Some of the administrators are more supportive than others. Like she mentioned. We don't feel the support anymore. Not at all. So, when we realized this change [in campus climate], significant change, we realized we just have to do something for ourselves.”*

In both these examples, API women faculty recognized a need among faculty and staff – a need not being addressed by the university administration -- and “*take it upon themselves*” to meet that need: “*we just have to do something for ourselves.*” And, clearly the need for mentors in academe is present, as the following statement by a staff person exemplifies:

*“I think for the most part, [SJSU] is a good place to work. I guess for me, where I've felt a lot of frustration is the lack of being mentored and trying to seek mentors on my own. And, even trying to find mentors that have qualities, not necessarily because they're API, but qualities that I want to be able to reflect in my own work.”*

Though this staff member does indicate that she seeks certain “qualities” in a mentor and not necessarily racial-ethnic symmetry, there is much evidence to support the idea that within-group mentoring is especially beneficial to faculty of color (Aguirre 2000, Aleman 2000, Caldwell-Cobert 1996). In her summary comments on the issue of mentoring women of color in academe, Turner (2002) recommends:

“Colleges and universities can facilitate opportunities for faculty women of color to get together. For example, colleges can host social gatherings and academic activities targeted at promoting networking among its faculty women of color. Such activities can include: providing seed money for collaborative research of interest to women of color across disciplines, hold national or local conferences with the intent of bringing together

faculty women of color, and host open forums that showcase research conducted by faculty women of color” (pg. 85).

Focus group members offered a variety of additional suggestions about how SJSU might help retain API faculty and staff including: more startup support for newly hired faculty, more attention to the needs of “dual-career” families (assistance finding employment for spouses), and more assistance with the challenge of balancing work needs with family responsibilities.<sup>10</sup>

A final concern raised in this focus group that might explain, in part, the difficulty of retaining faculty and staff of color in general – and API faculty and staff in particular – had to do with discrimination. Much of racial discrimination discussed by this group – as in the discussion of cultural “misinterpretation” discussed above -- can be likened to Yamato’s characterization of “unaware/unintentional racism” (Yamato 1988). Some of it however, comes closer to her analysis of “aware/covert” racism. Such is the case below, captured in a response to the question, “Do you feel safe on campus?”

*“Safe in terms of being supported, being understood. Not safe in terms of credit being taken away by people who are higher up. And all the work you did was just something else. And it's-- my colleagues have seen me being creative and [having these things I create] being taken away and credited to someone else. And it's a lot. It's a lot.”*

Here and elsewhere API faculty and staff described experiences wherein their ideas, their projects, and “their work” was appropriated and credited to someone else: *“There are occasions in meetings, different departments, different meetings. The phenomenon of my opinion later being attributed to a non-Asian American Pacific Islander.”* This type professional misconduct

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<sup>10</sup> For a deeper discussion of the challenge of “workload and family responsibilities” see the section of this report concerning women faculty and staff.

– while not obviously racist (to some) – is perceived, in part, to be attributable to cultural misrepresentation and racist stereotypes that render persons of Asian descent as “docile,” “shy,” “humble,” and unwilling to fight back. This type of analysis is illustrated through the following exchange:

API Staff 1: *“To follow on your comments, you say you feel that credit was taken by your higher up because of your API background? Is it attributed to that because APIs are supposed to be humble and modest and basically people can afford to be aggressive with you?”*

API Faculty 1: *“I think it's a combination of a lot of things. Research has shown that people feel really more comfortable, or overlook-- okay, for example when you do things and the API culture is that we are humble. We only ask for our credit. One thing I taught my student was most people when they catch a fish, they say, "The fish is this big." In this culture, people say, "I caught a fish this big." For API, they say, "The fish size is this." Here they say, "This is my fish.”*

In this example, humility – *“the fish is this size”* -- is read as docility. And docility (presumably) is read as an opportunity for appropriation – *“This is my fish.”* This type of professional misconduct, wherein someone with more power takes credit for the work done by someone with less power, can create insurmountable barriers to promotion. If you are unable to claim credit for your accomplishments, then you are unable to make a case for your own promotion.

To be successful in an academic career it is necessary to be aggressive, competitive, and self-promoting. The retention, tenure, and promotion process relies on a candidate’s ability to

promote their own expertise and worthiness. For candidates whose cultural values run counter to this self-aggrandizing practice, the RTP process might prove especially difficult.

### **Why We Stay**

The API faculty and staff were unequivocal in expressing their motives for remaining at SJSU. The underlying theme running through all their discussion was a deep commitment to serving the needs of our students. While framed in a variety of ways, by both faculty and staff, the underlying sentiments are exemplified in the following statement by an API staff member:

*“But the main motivation, it's our students. Because we do a lot to prepare our students. And those students really appreciate our help. And I feel they're innocent. They have no other support from the department or whatever. And so when they come for help, they really show their appreciation about how much support we offer them. I think that's the biggest motivation for them to stay here. And that's maybe the best part of my job too.”*

## African American/Black Faculty and Staff

The African American faculty and staff focus group was composed of women and men across all divisions on campus. Ranging in age 25 to 65 some members of the group were in their second year of employment and some were in their thirtieth. Focus group members identified as both Black and African American and thus these terms are used throughout the analysis that follows. Four central themes emerged from this discussion of campus climate for African American faculty and staff: 1) structural diversity 2) institutional racism, 2) everyday racism, 3) and feeling valued.

### **Structural Diversity**

*“What I would like to see in the university’s quest for diversity is a very specific focus on the Black community. The African American community here is so small in terms of numbers that when they’re looking at diversity, we still get lost in that diverse group. When you look at women or men of color – there are a lot out there. But when you look specifically at the Black population, our numbers are very, very small and that’s something that should be addressed.” (Black staff woman)*

Structural diversity refers to the numerical representation of various racial, ethnic, and gender groups within an institution, occupation, or organization. (Hurtado et. al. 1999). An examination of campus enrollment and employment statistics supports the contention that San José State University is structurally diverse *for some groups*. During the fall 2010 semester, the racial ethnic composition of the student body was: American Indian .3%, Black 3%, Asian 30%, Hispanic 20%, White 27%, and Foreign 8%. During the same semester the racial ethnic composition of faculty was: American Indian .5%, Asian and Pacific Islander 15%, Black 3% Filipino 3%, Hispanic 6%, and White 63%. In comparison with data from other studies on

campus climate (Aguirre 2000, Alfred 2001, Cole 2007, Jackson 2004), SJSU appears to be a structurally diverse campus. When it comes to issues of representation – at least for Black students and faculty - the percentage of Black faculty is roughly equal to the percentage of Black students. Structural diversity, however, is more than simple representation.<sup>11</sup> As the quote above alludes to, the “small number” of Black people on campus as compared to other racial ethnic groups -- regardless of their “representativeness” -- is troubling. In this case, the staff member argues that the small numbers cause the concerns of the Black community on campus to: “*get lost in that diverse group.*”

Academic research supports the contention that structural diversity is more than a case of numbers. From the perspective of prospective students, for example, “having sufficient racial/ethnic enrollments gives potential recruits the impression that the campus is hospitable (Hurtado et. al. 1999): ‘No matter how outstanding the academic institution, ethnic minority students can feel alienated if their ethnic representation on campus is small’ (Loo and Rolison 1986, p. 72). The same goes for faculty and staff as Hurtado et. al. (1999) also note, “a more diverse faculty and staff serve to create a more comfortable environment for faculty and staff as well.” So while structural diversity is partially about having a faculty that mirrors the composition of the student body, the percentages alone do not tell the whole story. As another African American staff person exclaimed:

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<sup>11</sup> Representation refers to percentages of each group as compared with their percentage in some larger surrounding population. For example, in 2010 Black people made up 3.2% of the population of the city of San José, 6.2 % of California, and 12.6% of the U.S. population. See: [http://www.sanJoseca.gov/redistricting/2011redistricting/ocdata/DP-1\\_San\\_José.pdf](http://www.sanJoseca.gov/redistricting/2011redistricting/ocdata/DP-1_San_José.pdf) and <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06000.html> for complete information on percentages of all racial ethnic groups.

*“And in the area of [discipline], you have probably 65 faculty members. And out of the 65, one is Hispanic, and one is Black. And after nine years I – every time I walk around, I feel that my race is dumber than everybody else’s because they have every single race there but mine.”*

This quote illustrates one possible response to the lack of a visible Black community. In the absence of a structural explanation, people can employ a “blame the victim” strategy to explain injustice – with this psychological response then becoming part of the campus climate (Hurtado, Clayton-Pederson, et al. 1998). Clearly then, “within group” comparisons alone do not tell the whole story. For example, though Black people make up 3% of the student body, 3% of the faculty, 4% of staff, and 6% of administrators, a comparison of these same figures for whites unveils a different formula of representativeness (white students 27%, white faculty 63%, white staff 40%, and white administrators 65%).<sup>12</sup> Neither do enrollment numbers speak to the larger issues of retention and graduation.

While Black students may make up 3% of our student body, the graduation rate for Black male students who enter as first-time freshmen is among the lowest for all racial ethnic groups.<sup>13</sup> For the Black faculty in our focus group this figure was both shocking and shaming:

*“Well, I want to state a couple of points. First of all, it’s a shame that the graduation rate for African American males is so poor. That is not something new. And yet, I’ve not seen or heard of any emergency measures to try to reverse that. I don’t see anything. And this has come out in a report done by folks who were hired to come in and scrutinize the university, yet the university should have been aware of that without having to read it in a*

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<sup>12</sup> Figures for racial ethnic breakdown of staff and MPPs come from SJSU Human Resources.

<sup>13</sup> Figures from the Office of Institutional Research for “6<sup>th</sup> year Graduation Analysis: First time Freshman” who entered SJSU in 2005 show: Black male students with a graduation rate of 29.2%. Those same figures for Hispanic males are 27.2%, white males 40.5%, and Asian males 44.3% ([www.ori.sjsu.edu](http://www.ori.sjsu.edu)).

*report. Academically, I'm embarrassed. I'm ashamed, because I think San José State can do better than that. What is going on here? It's hard enough being a person of color. Sure, granted that degree is not going to guarantee you you're going get that job or that promotion anyway, but you know what, it is some insurance. And when I see a population such as the African American males, those figures are just – it's scary."*

Here the "shame" for this faculty member is about her membership in an academic community that is clearly failing one of its constituencies: "*Academically, I'm embarrassed. I'm ashamed because San José State can do better than that.*" It is also possible to infer that her observation concerning the university's response to these graduation figures: "*...the graduation rate for African American males is so poor. That is not something new. And yet, I've not seen or heard of any emergency measures to try to reverse that. I don't see anything,*" constitute part of her experience of campus climate. We recruit Black students, yet fail to retain and graduate most of them.

At a glance, it appears that this university is structurally diverse, but the numbers themselves are not indicative of the diversified academic journeys our students are having. In reference to campus climate, African American faculty and staff perceive of these graduation figures and the university's response to them as contributing to another aspect of institutional racism:

*"So, what are the inequitable practices that are institutionalized in the university? It's much deeper than [promotion practices], because when we look at issues of inclusion and diversity from a high level –what we don't look at is the fact the pool is diminished. So, if you don't have a pool of people to draw from, you don't have people who can go up – who can rise to those positions of management. So, when you talk about African*

*American males dropping out. What are the institutional factors that cause African Americans to drop out? Because if they continue to drop out, you don't have the pool to look for who will eventually become Fortune 500 CEOs or professors, or whatever. That's an institutional barrier...."*

In this case, the faculty member makes an argument that ties the situation facing Black students to the larger problem of recruitment, retention, and promotion of Black staff and faculty. As an institution, the failure to retain and graduate so many African American students contributes to the larger problem of unemployment and underemployment facing the African American community. This latter issue then manifests in the institution's difficulty in hiring and retaining African American faculty and staff.<sup>14</sup> Underlying all these issues of structural diversity are the institutional practices that perpetuate inequalities. The academic literature identifies institutional practices that perpetuate inequalities as institutional racism (Jackson 2004, Stanley 2006, Turner 2002).

### **Institutional Racism: "Flying under the Radar."**

In his structural theory of racism, Bonilla-Silva argues:

"...racial practices that reproduce racial inequality in contemporary America (1) are increasingly covert, (2) are embedded in normal operations of institutions, (3) avoid direct racial terminology, and (4) are invisible to most Whites." (Bonilla-Silva 1997:476).

The Black faculty and staff in our study perceived, "racial practices that reproduce racial inequality" at San José State University to be embedded in the hiring and promotion practices that constitute the "normal" operations of the university. The following example by an African American faculty member illustrates this type of "racial practice":

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<sup>14</sup> This difficulty is not simply about a smaller pool of candidates to pull from because there are qualified people out there. The additional challenge is in retaining Black faculty and staff in an employment situation where they are few in number and face the kinds of challenges described in this report.

*“...let me just give you kind of a broader perspective, a high level perspective of how things get perpetuated by institutional practices. For instance, seniority. Seniority is there to keep people who weren't in the system out of the system once they get into the system. And I'll give you a couple classic examples. The first one has to do with hiring practices. If you're looking for a dean, for instance, in order to be on that committee, you have to be in the higher rankings of university. So, you have to have been an associate professor, or professor, tenured, right? So, it locks out anybody else who might be interested. And that's what seniority does in the K-12 systems. Seniority in the K-12 systems, when you talk about teachers who have been in the system versus newer people, they more than likely tend to be Black and Latino, because it took a longer time to get into the system. What it does, is perpetuate people who have been in the system. It's the same thing. So, the people who have the mind set of maintaining the status quo are the people who get put into positions to do that, because newer people don't have the opportunities to get involved.”*

In this illustration, the institutional practices of “ranking” in the university or “seniority” in K-12,” are seen as mechanisms that in effect can be used to maintain the status quo (a racial hierarchy). Moreover, they meet all the criteria set forth in Bonilla-Silva's (1997) definition of racial practices. They are “covert” in that they are embedded in an ideology of meritocracy, they function as the “normal” steps for movement up the hierarchy, they avoid racial terminology, and are likely to be invisible to those at the top who are invested in seeing their own success in reference to individual merit (65% SJSU Administrators are white, and 63% of tenure and

probationary faculty are white).<sup>15</sup>

The invisibility of institutional racism -- especially for those in a position to do something about it – make it extremely difficult to confront (Stanley 2006). Throughout the focus group session faculty and staff tried to explain their present reality in reference to history as a way to “unveil” the current racial climate at SJSU. For example, as a Black faculty explained:

*“[SJSU/ CSU] is designed to maintain things exactly the way they are. It’s not designed to innovate and change. And so, these practices that – we rarely examine practices like hierarchy, seniority, tenure. Those things perpetuate inequalities. I always use the example of when the 1964 and 65 Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts got passed. Prior to that – and I’m gonna use Black people because that’s pretty much who they were designed for – but prior to that, Black people were not in certain positions. They weren’t in certain jobs. So, when the law was passed, you had to become an equal opportunity employer. But what they did was to raise the requirements in order to get that job. So, a job that only required one year experience, now required three. And if I’m not in that position prior to that, what it does is it locks me out, and perpetuates a status quo. That’s an institutional barrier. Those institutional barriers are here, right? And they pretty much are invisible. They fly under the radar.”*

Institutional practices operating as “racial practices that perpetuate racial hierarchy,” often manifest as “normal” practices that are otherwise invisible to those outside certain target groups (Wellman 1993). Part of the invisibility of racism has to do with the way we talk about racism. In educational settings, in particular, rather than talk about “racism” we “celebrate diversity.” While the underlying motives for talking about either can be the same, the public

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<sup>15</sup> See [www.oir.sjsu.edu](http://www.oir.sjsu.edu) for data on faculty. These figures for faculty come from Fall 2010 “Distribution of All Faculty by Gender and Ethnicity with Tenure Status Breakdown. Figures for administrators were obtained with special permission from the Office of Human Resources.

discourse generally coalesces around “diversity talk” (Yamato 1988, Stanley 2006). Even with the rhetorical substitution, however, “diversity” remains a controversial topic. The African American faculty and staff in our study perceive the “top leadership” responding to “diversity” in ways that reveal underlying institutional racism. Two opposing themes emerged from the focus group discussion concerning this issue. On the one hand, Black faculty and staff perceive negative consequences for those who pursue “diversity” work in their careers, and on the other, they feel there are little or no consequences for those who fail to consider diversity issues in hiring and other practices. The former point is best illustrated by the following statement by a Black women staffer:

*“There is a group of people on campus throughout the top leadership positions who, when you try to pursue diversity issues, if you raise – and even Caucasians, it doesn’t matter – if you are white and you try to pursue diversity issues, open them again, you get black balled. And you may not get promoted, or you may get on some list. And so, the environment is not comfortable for people who want to pursue diversity and– and say fairness. And we want to talk about it, but we don’t have an environment that’s open to that.”*

This same theme is present in a statement by a Black faculty member in response to a question about feeling “safe” on campus:

*“I’m going give you three reasons why I have not felt safe on this campus in the past 13 years. Because if you play by the rules, you’re assuming there are certain rewards. And when you do those things, if it’s being involved in diversity issues, if it’s speaking and being critical...the rewards are not forthcoming.”*

In other words, the climate on campus appears to be somewhat inhospitable for those

who pursue issues of “diversity” (read: racism). Academic literature concurs that this “inhospitable climate” extends beyond service contributions, and that diversity research may also, “...be differentially valued within the promotion and tenure systems because of its political repercussions,” p. 92 (Fenelon 2003)<sup>16</sup>. At the same time, there is an idea that departments or managers who don’t act affirmatively in their hiring practices, for example, receive no consequences for their failure to consider diversity. Some of the focus group members discussed the lack of accountability at the departmental level:

*“On this campus, the top leadership – they don’t change and they don’t push for change. And there are no consequences for not changing. Let me give you an example, take the issue of race. I attended some training in a department recently. They really talked about and were serious about race, and ‘how do we deal with race?’ Many departments if you raise that question, you become black balled for making such a request. Some of the departments deal with it openly, but most departments don’t even address the issue.”*

While others pointed out how the failure to make individual managers accountable is reflective of an infrastructure that enables such behavior.

*“There should be consequences for people who do not pursue the university’s mission of inclusion. When managers do not engage in diversity training, when they don’t change, nothing happens to them. They might talk about it, but they don’t take action. ‘What are the consequences [of doing nothing] if I’m white? If I talk about it, but don’t do anything about it? I’m white. If I don’t change, nothing’s going to happen to me. My job is secure.’ This is why people say the infrastructure is there to perpetuate white*

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<sup>16</sup> As Gregory (2001:129), notes in her study of Black women scholars in the academy, “[o]ther studies indicate that research by minority faculty members on minority populations—a common focus of many minority academics’ research—is rarely considered relevant within their fields or deemed significant contributions to the academy, and therefore is not widely recognized as scholarly work” (Epps 1989, Wilson 1987) (Gregory 2001).

*superiority. And that's basically where you get that from, because there's no consequences for those managers who say, "I'm not going to do anything at all." So, we need to make sure that when the people don't change, we do something with them."*

In short, the institutional climate regarding racial issues as experienced by the Black faculty and staff in our focus group seems best represented by the following comments:

*"...I don't feel safe, because if you're in an environment that, if it's raining, and everybody knows it's raining, and everybody's saying it's raining, and you say, "Well I'm gonna get my umbrella out." And somebody says, 'What do you need an umbrella for?' You're soaking wet, but people say, 'No, it's not raining, you're just sweating a lot.'"*

### **Everyday Racism**

There were a plethora of examples of interactions, situations, and departmental enclaves where the African American women and men in the focus group experienced both "subtle" and "blatant" racism. Most of the examples of day-to-day racism were described by Black staff, rather than faculty<sup>17</sup>. Some of these moments were very personal, as was the experience of a Black male staffer:

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<sup>17</sup> I suspect this has something to do with the lower hierarchal status of staff verses faculty in the university setting. This not to say that Black faculty don't also experience blatant racism, but rather as one Black faculty member currently working in a management position pointed out:  
*Male Faculty: "My experiences are completely different. And I think there's a different value system for Blacks on campus. We're [managers] treated quite differently... I think we tend to get, for lack of a better term, a little better treatment, or more respectable treatment because I don't have those negative contacts. And some of it has to do with my position, I think. There's a difference, you know, when I talk to the other folks."*

*Facilitator: "So, you think it's because you're in the management structure?"*

*Male Faculty: "Yeah, right."*

*“I’ve been accused of being homeless and trying to steal a computer by one of the administrators in the [university] department.”*

Or, the experience of a female administrative assistant:

*“And I just think it’s what department you’re in. Some of the departments condone that behavior. I know my area does. And there are times when they say things to me like, “You don’t sound like all the others,” or “How can somebody like you afford a coat like that?” Or “You’re lips are not as big as the Black people that I’m used to,” or “You must be from somewhere else, because you don’t sound Black.” And these are from faculty and [managers].when I was [in specific department].*

Other racially charged situations are more public, occurring within the context of “normal” discourse (though equally damaging). For example, another Black staff member recounted a recent situation he encountered:

*“There are some things you can say that one doesn’t even realize that they’re racist, right? Or that they’re insensitive. There was reception for a minority group on the campus. And the individual who was welcoming the group, ‘glad that you’re here, and trying to pursue your academic dreams, and make sure that you pursue some things – and support your culture.’ And the individual ended by saying, ‘And make sure that you learn something about European culture also, because that’s an important culture to remember.’ Now, he’s a top official not realizing the whole darn system is European filled anyway.”*

Here the staff member expresses his incredulity at the lack of racialized understanding expressed by this “*top official*.” Even though the speaker is not “blatantly racist,” his comment to “minority” students, ‘*And make sure that you learn something about European culture also,*’

believes the reality that “European” (aka: white) culture *is* the dominant culture and permeates every aspect of social life (Mills 2003). The problem here is both in what is being said, and in the reality that it can be said without consequence. A racial climate that permits “top officials” to make racially charged comments without realizing they are doing so, does not provide a safe context for confronting racial issues.

In those instances where Black staff did raise concerns about the racism they were experiencing, the responses were less than satisfying.

*“And nobody – when I was having issues in that department, nobody ever called me and said, you know, ‘Let’s sit down and talk about what’s going on with you.’ I would hear stuff like – the [employee] couldn’t say racist words to the [student], so they’d say stuff like, ‘Take your little braided ass back home.’ Or, you know, ‘You’re here for [athletics].’ And when I tried to explain that to other people that I thought would be there for me, they weren’t. I remember going into offices crying when I had bad experiences with white faculty and staff. And they would say, ‘I’m in a meeting right now, I’ll get back to you.’ They never do. Or, ‘I don’t have time,’ they said, ‘That’s not true.’ And you don’t have any power. So, you get black balled if you try to have an opinion saying that I believe in my heart that the department I’m in has racial issues.”*

The theme of negative repercussions was woven into all aspects of campus climate for the Black faculty and staff in our study. As with the example of Black faculty fearing repercussions for engaging in “diversity” work, so too does this Black staffer fear repercussion for making the charge of racism. The articulation of this climate of fear is best illustrated in reference to the focus group discussion of “meetings” on campus.

Several times during the focus group session references were made about the perception

by others of what it means when Black people get together. Whether it be for a focus group session, a meeting of an official campus association, or just two or three Black faculty or staff “getting together,” there was a sense among focus group members that such behavior is interpreted negatively. In reference to the focus group session for this research project, a faculty member said:

*“And if you voice a concern or have an issue, that’s when people kind of feel threatened. And that’s where it goes back to what you’re saying, you know, about people won’t even attend something like this. You know, any time we gather, it’s never associated with something positive. It’s always associated with something negative. You know, when that’s not the case. We may meet and just talk about nothing.”*

Similarly, there was reference to the trepidation experienced by both staff and faculty who contemplate attending (or attend) a meeting of an official campus association:

*“Some African American people have said, ‘I’m afraid to come to meetings because what will my supervisor think?’ There was the one person who said his supervisor – once he’s come to a meeting, and he comes back to work, and his supervisor asked him, ‘What do you guys discuss in those meetings? You come back here all,’ he said he doesn’t act any differently, but the perception of his Caucasian supervisor, ‘What do you guys discuss at those meetings? You come back here all energized and you know, maybe you shouldn’t be going to those meetings, if you’re gonna come back like that.’ Whatever ‘like that’ is. So, if you have an environment – we’re not talking about just the staff. There are also faculty members saying, ‘I’m really afraid to come to meetings.’”*

Putting this experience in historical context, one member of the focus group commented, “It’s almost like slavery time when you say that. I’m afraid – it reminds – when they started the

*NAACP<sup>18</sup> in about 1909, 'I'm afraid to go to this meeting because of what the white people are going to think.'"*

Individual level racism - as illustrated through the examples above - goes hand in hand with institutional level racism. The presence of structural institutional-level racism coupled with its "invisible," "covert," "normalized" character make it difficult to confront. Its unacknowledged presence sets the stage for more personal, blatant racist moments to also go unchallenged. As Christine Stanley (2006), commented in her discussion of the racist experiences of faculty of color in predominantly white universities:

"One might ask: 'Why didn't these faculty members stand up for themselves? I certainly would have.' The answer is simply 'because speaking the truth to power assumes many things.' Among the assumptions we often forget are that there is an equal playing field, there will be no risk associated with engaging in the conflict, and, even more important, we will be heard and supported by our majority White colleagues when we break the silence" p.725.

### **Black Community Relations: Feeling Valued on Campus.**

Like the other groups on campus we interviewed, Black faculty and staff were asked to recall a time when they felt their identities as African Americans were valued by the university or in a university setting. All of the responses to this question centered on the same theme: that the African American faculty and staff in our focus group have felt most valued by their African American colleagues and the students they serve.

Several people talked about experiences where they felt valued in specific relationships with other Black people in supervisory or managerial positions. For example, one Black woman staffer talked about her experience with a manager who was also Black:

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<sup>18</sup> National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

*“I did have an experience like that, but I wouldn’t necessarily say it was the university that made the experience good for me. I was in [department/division] from 90 to 99 and I was the [staff position]. And [African American man] was my supervisor at the time. I often made reference. I would tell him, I said, “What was your reason for hiring me? Was it because I was Black and you needed one?” Because at that time, [there were no other Black faculty or managers, or staff working in department/division]. And he didn’t make me feel different; there was not one time within those nine years that I was with him that he made me feel different because I am Black. But those people are rare. And I haven’t had an experience since that and he’s been gone for about nine years, and it’s just been downhill for me.”*

This experience illustrates the paradoxical complexity of racial identities – that they are both meaningful and meaningless. Here, the staff member felt simultaneously valued for her identity as a Black person, *“I was Black and you needed one,”* and valued for the irrelevance of her Blackness to the actual relationship, *“there was not one time within those nine years that I was with him that he made me feel different because I am Black.”* In another example, a staff member talked about her relationship with a “high-ranking” African American woman in her [department/division]:

*“My positive experience was when I had a role model of the highest African American woman on campus at that time, who obviously gave us a lot of attention – managers. She would take us out monthly and just have a little session in a little local restaurant, and talk to us. How’s it going? What do you need? What’s happening? She was in a position of power. She was an African American woman, just like myself. Outside of that, I can’t – I’m sitting here trying to think, I can’t. But that was extremely strong, and so for three or*

*four years, however long she was here, I felt on top of the world, you know? I'd go to meetings, division meetings, and you know, here was this African American woman up there. People had different things to say about her. But for the African American women in the division, it was like, Barack Obama is to the world, you know what I mean, it was like wow. You know? So, I can't really speak outside of that though, which is sad for me."*

In this case, as found elsewhere in the academic literature (Aguirre 2000, Aleman 2000, Caldwell-Cobert 1996), this woman felt valued through her mentoring relationship with another African American woman. The value of her own racial identity is indicated by the attention she recalls receiving in this mentoring relationship, "*she gave us a lot of attention... She was in a position of power. She was an African American woman, just like myself.*" At the same time, this staffer seems to be drawing a deeper sense of value from seeing someone she racially identifies with in a position of power: "*...But for the African American women in the division, it was like, Barack Obama is to the world.*" In this case, her "racial status" is uplifted by the institutional success of another Black woman.

The other side of feeling valued as a mentee, is the experience of being valued as a mentor to others. For many of the faculty and staff in our focus group their most valued contributions were those made to Black students, and other Black employees. Typical of these comments was one made by a relatively new staff member who was also a former SJSU student:

*"...definitely there's people within the African American community that see me and where I'm working and are having a bad day and want to talk to me. And if I pull from my [student] experiences to give some encouragement, or from the staff experience that I*

*have, I feel that me being in that place at that time, being a role model, you know, was a positive experience for them and for me.”*

Here the student turned employee recognizes her own value in being able to help others who face some of the same barriers she encountered as a Black student:

*“[I feel value when] I get to say to another person in my culture, ‘Hey, you remember me a couple years ago walking around campus stressed out, well I graduated and made it through,’ saying, ‘I was able to get through it. You can do it too.’ That makes me a positive role model.”*

Being seen by others, being mentored by someone who shares your social location, giving encouragement, and being a positive role model are all experiences most people can relate to. For the Black faculty and staff in our study, these moments and others like them form the core of what they value about being at San José State University. Understanding the larger historical, structural, and institutional contexts surrounding these interactions, unveils their deeper significance in the struggle to continue building a supportive and inclusive community on campus.

### **Latino/a Chicano/a Faculty and Staff**

The Latino/a Chicano/a faculty and staff focus group was composed of men and women across all divisions on campus. Some members of the group were in their fourth year of employment and some were in their twenty-fifth. Focus group members referred to themselves as Latino, Chicano, and Mexican American and thus these terms are used throughout the analysis that follows. The analysis which follows centers on the perception by Latina/o staff and faculty of the “subtle subtext” of institutional racism at SJSU, and concludes with a discussion how this context impacts our students.

#### **Introduction: The “Subtle Subtext” of Institutional Racism**

“Institutional racism is usually entrenched in an institution’s history and is systemic and habitual. African Americans, Latina/os, American Indians, Asian American, those born and raised in another culture, and gay and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals live daily with the effects of institutional and individual racism... Many institutions value diversity, but they often do not look deep enough to ascertain how habitual policies and practices work to disadvantage certain social, racial or cultural groups (Stanley, 2006:724).”

Central to the discussion of the Latino faculty and staff in our study was an attempt to articulate the “*subtle subtext*” of institutional racism at San José State University. Hard to pin down, difficult to talk about and “invisible” to those in non-target positions, institutional racism shapes the way universities (and other educational institutions) do business (Anaya and Cole 2001, Bonilla-Silva 1997, Caldwell-Cobert 1996). As a Latino faculty member explained:

“...it’s just like a subtle subtext, you know? It’s a nice place to work, it’s a friendly

*atmosphere, people shake your hand, smile at you for the most part, right, with some exceptions. So, that's what makes it really challenging. You know, because there's other stuff that's happening, but it's underneath it. And it's really easy to not talk about it and to not address it."*

Taking on the *challenge* during their 90 minute focus group session, the SJSU Latina/o staff and faculty identified three key areas where institutional racism operates to shape the way we do business at SJSU: a) through the response to "diversity," b) during the hiring and promotion process, c)) and in the perception of Latino/a students.

### **Responding to Diversity**

From the SJSU University Homepage:

*"ACCESS: SJSU is a leader in graduating students from **diverse** backgrounds, including thousands who are the first in their family to attend college."*

*"INNOVATION: San José State pioneers global innovations in science, engineering, technology, education, business as the arts and we serve our student and the community in **diverse**, groundbreaking ways"(retrieved: November 17, 2011 from <http://www.sjsu.edu>).*

While "diversity" stands out as a key value on the university's website, the faculty and staff in our study spoke more about the *resistance* to diversity they encountered among colleagues, administrators, and students. At the departmental level, faculty spoke about curricular issues and the extent to which they had to fight to get gender and race included in course content and in departmental requirements for graduation. In recounting her first few years on campus, a Latina faculty member described the hostilities she faced:

*"When I first came here, I was the first woman of color to be hired in the department. It*

*was all white males. Another faculty member, a [white] woman was also hired at the same time. And it was a very, very negative experience, because we – immediately, she and I came together and we wanted to develop a course [including a focus] on women and people of color. But we receive so much resistance in the meetings, just because we brought up that issue of integrating diversity in the curriculum.”*

The situation described by this academic is not unique to San José State University.

There is much evidence in the academic literature to support the contention that while universities may embrace diversity conceptually, truly diverse scholarship and curriculum are not similarly embraced and rewarded (Thomas and Hollenshead 2001, C. Turner 2003). For Chicanas and other women of color academics, scholarship focusing on race or gender is often actively resisted. As Segura (2003) notes in her study of Chicana intellectuals:

*“A Chicana scholar in a mainstream department encounters a canon bounded by specific theoretical hierarchies and empirical methodologies that form the lens through which her work is evaluated and assigned value. In this environment, gaining academic value can be a formidable challenge, particularly when the Chicana scholar is engaged in emerging research on her community that departs from the established canon” (Segura, 2003:34).*

Latino faculty also described a parallel devaluation of the intellectual legitimacy of “ethnic studies” scholars and departments:

*“...there’s not an acknowledgement, really, of the benefits of diversity at an intellectual level, I think is it missing. So, when you talk about some of SJSU’s departments, you know ethnicity departments, as well as scholars in traditional departments that do non-traditional research, there’s not an acknowledgement of the necessity of that, of the vitality of that. What I see happening specific to [ethnic studies departments], people say,*

*“Oh, they’re important,” they see them as service departments. They’re providing a service to the institution kind of in a way, covering the institution’s ass. Right? But not seen as intellectually vibrant or viable, or adding an intellectual academic diversity to the institution.”*

Gaining academic value and mainstream legitimacy for scholarly perspectives that, “explore a broad and lively range of questions that inspire theoretical and empirical knowledge across a diverse cultural and social landscapes” (Segura 2003:28), is not solely a problem for individual scholars or departments. At the college level, Latino/a academics also described a resistance to the notion that all scholarship is strengthened through the incorporation of diverse perspectives. As a Latino professor recounted:

*“The first few years that I was here we had situations of budgetary cutbacks, and so we had to assess programs. And our college took a poll of: what are our priorities? And in their list of items, you know, they separated out diversity from things like excellent programs. And I took exception to that -- this is a false choice. But to me, it mirrored the attitude of the university, that it didn’t see those things as going together. And [the university] couldn’t envision the idea that part of being an excellent department is addressing diversity. Somehow diversity was a separate issue that could be separated out, and then put at a lower priority”*

A critical examination of “diversity” on campus reveals the competing realities of campus climate that Latina/o staff and faculty may encounter at SJSU. Like Stanley (2006) argues, though our university embraces diversity, our “habitual policies and practices” may work against fulfillment of this goal. This contradiction is best illustrated in a quote by a Latino faculty member:

*“Overall, there’s this kind of generic acknowledgement of the importance of diversity at San José State. And just kind of overall– ‘we think diversity is important.’ You know? We support diversity. So, there’s this generic sense of diversity, but there’s a lack of a concrete agenda to address the specific issues related to diversity.”*

The contradiction – an emphasis on diversity and the (seeming) lack of a visible plan to support diversity – creates a climate of resistance that students and faculty face every day. For some Latino/a faculty this was felt most acutely in classroom situations where students seemed to mirror institutional resistance to diversity.

*“Another impact of [the contradiction] is that I taught a course called “[academic discipline] in a diverse society”. And the majority of students in the class were [academic discipline] majors. And the majority of those students expressed outwardly that they didn’t want to be there, that they didn’t feel they needed to be there, that the class wasn’t important to them as future [academic discipline]. I think that’s the manifestation of our kind of climate, in terms of our students”*

The impact on faculty of student resistance to “diversity,” goes beyond the interactional resistance they may experience while teaching. Resistance to the diversity embodied by curriculum and professors themselves – also manifests in student evaluations of teaching (Perry, et al. 2009, Campbell, Gerdes and Steiner 2005).

As one faculty member recounted:

*“We put diversity at the center of our classes. And they’re not labeled as ethnic studies classes, so we get students from throughout the university. And I’ll use this word, in the evaluations they totally trash us. And it’s all about the diversity. They said – some*

*students asked me did I check Rate your Professor, or Rate my Professor<sup>19</sup>, whatever.*

*And I never do. They said, "You need to go look on there." And students wrote on there,*

*"Don't take this class if you're a white student. All she talks about is race."*

Discussions about racism, sexism, and heterosexism often have the effect of de-centering normative constructions of white privilege, male privilege, and heterosexual privilege. When the "unmarked" case becomes marked, those in positions of privilege can become "uncomfortably" aware of that which – to that point - they have had the "privilege" to ignore (McIntosh, 2009). As above, a truly inclusive curriculum can seem to the uninitiated one where, "*all [the professor] talks about is race [or gender, or sexuality]*" (Yescavage and Alexander 1997). When pedagogy runs up against prejudice in the form of resistance to diversity in the classroom, the results can be problematic. In addition to having to teach through resistance, the student's defensive reactions may be channeled into poor student evaluations of professors, "*... in the evaluations they totally trash us.*" Because student evaluations (SOTES) weigh heavily in the RTP process, this can have deleterious effect on faculty who center diversity in their curriculum (Anaya and Cole 2001, Perry, et al. 2009).

The "subtle subtext" of institutional racism manifest throughout the university in an ongoing resistance to "diversity." Encompassing a wide range of acts and actions from curriculum development, to classrooms behaviors, to departments and colleges, to assessment and evaluation, these acts are both invisible and very consequential. For faculty and staff of color, the consequences of institutional racism are often felt most acutely in the hiring, retention, tenure, and promotion process (Aguirre 2000, Caldwell-Cobert 1996, Thomas and Hollenshead 2001)

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<sup>19</sup> Ratemyprofessor.com is an online website where students can rank and rate their professors. Rankings include some narrative commentary. Professors are also rated for "hotness" and given chili peppers as markers of hotness.

## Hiring and Promotion

During the fall 2010 semester, Latino faculty comprised 6% of tenure and tenure track faculty at San José State University, while Latino students represented 20% of the student body. The Latino/a faculty and staff expressed concerns about the number of faculty compared with the number of students, and the potential impact of this lack of representativeness. Over the past ten years, the percentage of Latino/a faculty<sup>20</sup> has not kept up with the increasing number of Latino students<sup>21</sup> nor the increase in the number of Latino/as now residing in San José, and in California (Ponjuan 2011).<sup>22</sup> The Latino staff and faculty attributed this failure to the hiring practices at SJSU. For example, one Latino faculty member recounted his own investigation into these numbers relative to the last 20 years:

*“Recently I happened upon a report that we synthesized, that looked at data from 1990 to 2001. So that we’re looking at like, a ten or twelve year period of data that had been dug up by Faculty Affairs, and that was really, you know, kind of year by year, the searches that were done and the outcomes. Over that decade or so, the proportion of minority, or Chicano Latino faculty had declined from six point something to five. The absolute number had declined. We could show that some colleges, [names of colleges] had made, you know, seventy searches over those twelve years, and not hired a single Mexican American or Latino. Other colleges had – might hire one, two, you know, [name of college] probably had the better record, you know, but they were still tiny numbers overall.”*

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<sup>20</sup> According to figures from the OIR between 1997 and 2010 the percentage of “Hispanic” faculty members has remained static – between 5% and 6% of all tenure and tenure-track faculty.

<sup>21</sup> According to figures from the OIR, over the last ten years the “Hispanic” student enrollment has steadily increased (with exceptions in 02 and 03) from 13.8% of total student population in Fall 02 to 20.3% in Fall 11.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Census data indicates that between 2000 and 2005 the Hispanic population in California increased by 16.36% -- representing 33.59% of the state’s population in 2005.

While another talked about decline through attrition, and noted the popular “pipeline” explanation often given for a failure to hire faculty and staff of color (Smith, et al. 2004).

*“...what happened, happened gradually, and it’s very interesting, is that all the Chicano faculty either retired or went away for their own personal reasons. And other [non-Chicano] people were hired... They hired the best qualified persons, and that’s what you need to know. And some faculty, non-Chicano or un-Chicano say, “Well, you know, we really should have some more Chicano faculty.” And then they say, “Well, we can’t get them to come here. They say – you know, if you have a PhD in [academic discipline], you can go anywhere,” is what they say. I don’t know how true that is.”*

While it is certainly true that there is a smaller pool of Latino/as with Ph.D.s, Smith et. al. (2004) argue that the “pipeline” argument, though legitimate, may also be “deceptive.”

“Because of pipeline issues and because of the continued limits in the labor market for faculty (Busenberg and Smith 1997, Schuster 1995), many assume that there is a "bidding war" in which faculty of color are sought after over "traditional" White male faculty (Mooney 1989, White 1989). In this context, "ordinary" institutions believe they are not comparably rich enough, located well enough, or prestigious enough to attract the few candidates who are in such high demand (El-Khawas 1990, Harvey and Scott-Jones, we Can't Find Any: The Elusiveness of Black Faculty Members in American Higher Education 1985)... Contrary to this belief, faculty, postdoctoral fellows, and administrators of color deny that the typical hiring experience of minority scholars is one of bidding wars” pp. 135.

Citing Smith, Wolf, & Busenberg (1996), Smith et.al. (2004) make the further point that the “bidding wars” invoked by institutions who fail to hire faculty of color are more

mythological than real. Instead of being fought over by universities, faculty and staff of color often have to do their own advocacy to receive equitable salaries. What is perhaps closer to reality is the experience of one of the Latino faculty members in our study. In his case, the faculty member had to assert considerable effort to attain what he considered to be “equitable” compensation from the university. After going on the market while finishing his dissertation, he had several interviews and several offers, and then:

*“... San José State came along and I got the interview and I got the offer, and I was very happy about it. I was so happy that I kind of lost my mind and wasn't very careful about what I was doing when I was signing paperwork and doing the negotiation thing, right? And well, I didn't do any negotiation. I just – they said, ‘You know, would you like to take this offer?’ And it was a little bit more than the places in Chicago and Alabama and everybody else was offering me, so I said, ‘Yeah, I'll take it.’”*

Following his arrival on campus, this faculty member found out from his chair that he had, in fact, failed to negotiate his “worth” appropriately. After running into his chair talking with his dean at an off-campus even, the two of them got to talking:

*“And the dean told the chair, ‘You know, you're very lucky to have this guy. We're very lucky to have him, so you know, good job to you that you hired him,’ kind of thing. And he [the dean] said, ‘You know, I can't believe that he settled for what he did.’ And she [the chair] said, ‘What do you mean?’ And he said, ‘Well you know, he took the first offer that I gave him.’ And – and she said, ‘Well how much more were you gonna give him?’ And he said, ‘Well I was going go up to this number.’ And the chair came back, and she called me right away, and she said, ‘We got to do something about this. We got to get you more money.’” And I said, “But how do I do this?” And she said, “Well, you*

*know there are avenues that we can go in.”*

The first avenue the faculty member tried was to conduct research into “market equity” for his position and discipline, and make an appeal to the dean. When this appeal was turned down, he chose to go back on the market and, in effect, create his own “bidding war.” When an offer came in from another university, he then started negotiating up the chain of command. Ultimately, after considerable effort on his part (and playing “*hardball*” with the university), he was able to negotiate his way into an equitable salary.

Loss by attrition, neglect, and failure to hire affirmatively, seem to be the main explanations held by Latino/a faculty and staff for their lack of representativeness. Of particular concern was the perception that following the passing of Proposition 209<sup>23</sup> in 1996, efforts to follow Federal affirmative action mandates, declined.

*“I was on the affirmative action committee for a couple of terms, and our duty and policy was to review the progress of affirmative action. We had a policy, we would review annual reports. So, on the committee, we asked for the annual reports, they could not be produced. So, it looked as if, well, we didn’t follow our policy, and the numbers were going down. So, it – you know, this was a bad situation from my perspective. And no real, concern about this on the campus. No one was concerned that there weren’t these reports. There was no monitoring affirmative action efforts, especially after the passage of 209, people just took the attitude of well, it’s all over, we don’t have to even worry about it anymore, and that was, you know, a real blow to these kinds of efforts”*

Here the faculty member argues that without the legal weight of Affirmative Action, efforts to hire affirmatively fall by the wayside. Latino/a staff also hold the belief that equitable

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<sup>23</sup> Proposition 209 – the California Civil Right Initiative – voted into law on November 5, 1996 amended the state constitution to prohibit public institutions from considering race, sex, or ethnicity in their hiring practices.

hiring practices need to be regulated by legislative efforts. One Latina staffer, for example, attributes her own employment status to the presence of the Equal Opportunity Program on campus:

*“I am the only Chicana on campus that’s an [name of position]. And the only reason that I exist is because I was hired through EOP into [name of position]. ...You don’t see a whole lot of – you don’t see any Chicanas [in my position]. I’m it. There might be a few Chicanos, but you know – and I think that when you don’t have a broad ethnic diversity in all the fields, it effects even how you [do your job], how you choose to [do your job], what you choose to focus on, and whether you make yourself available as a resource to important policies, you know, regarding Chicano Latino students.”*

Though no longer in the position she was hired into over 16 years ago, this Chicana staffer has attributed her own successful hiring to a program designed to ensure equity in employment and education. Hiring however, is only the first step. In the case of both faculty and staff, making it through the probationary period of employment seems to be of great concern. For the faculty member who served on the Affirmative Action committee, the data they uncovered seemed to support this concern:

*“And again, for that twelve year period, we could see that of those who went up for tenure or promotion, you know, Chicano Latino faculty, they were a tiny proportion. But of those who were denied, they represented like, half. So, again we were – I mean, the data seemed to indicate that, you know, we’re not hiring in numbers, and that those that we do hire have more problems making it to tenure and promotion.”*

For many, the academy is constructed as a culturally neutral space that functions as a system of meritocracy (Stanley 2006). Within this ideological space, promotion is seen as an

“individual” accomplishment or failure. The Latina/o staff and faculty perceive the employment situation for faculty and staff involving more than simply individual effort. Typical of these comments was the one made by a full professor:

*“Well, I can tell you something very specific about faculty retention. And this is from having just been on university RTP committee and seeing all the dossiers coming through. Some departments are just hell holes. And some departments are wonderful havens. And you see that in the successes in the people who are doing well, and you see it in the failures. Much of the time, when you see a faculty member who is really struggling, you can identify all the things that the department’s doing wrong. They’re overloading them with too many preparations, and excessive service. They’re making them do all these different things, and then knocking them, because they’re not getting their research done. And then other departments are quite the opposite. The deans should be seeing the failures of departments. The provost, who carefully reads the dossiers that seem to be having problems, should be very much focused on the departments that are failing their faculty, and get on the case of the dean and of the chair. That’s – that’s the kind of direct intervention that will do a lot of good.”*

Here the faculty member urges a broader lens for the RTP process and a broader scope for the university’s efforts to improve the retention rates for faculty. Another faculty member made a similar argument:

*“We need a big picture perspective. If you look at the individual faculty and say, ‘Oh, that person didn’t get tenure,’ right, but if you look at the provost level, you’ve got a responsibility to say, ‘Wait, there’s a pattern here,’ right? What are those patterns? And so, somebody needs to be identifying what are the patterns, what are the trends, what are the*

*issues, and then develop a plan for addressing that.”*

There is a plethora of academic research to support the notion that universities do not simply function as merit-based institutions (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Bowles 1976; Epps 1989; Ponjuan 2011; Stanley 2006). Several of the faculty and staff in our study affirmed this contention in their reflection on their own career paths. Both Chicano faculty and staff perceived their advocacy work on campus as adversely affecting their chances at promotion. As a staff member argued:

*“I have always sort of been a volunteer, as part of [an advocacy group], I have always participated in committees or in meetings regarding issues of Chicano Latino students. And yet, that doesn’t have anything to do with my role as – in my work world. I haven’t held back, in terms of how I felt, but I think that it has affected my promotion and all of that, because of the fact that I can’t be in the inner circle with managers– because they want people that are sort of with them, you know?”*

A similar argument was given by a faculty member who also felt excluded from the “inner circle” of campus decision makers:

*“I have a habit of speaking up. As I mentioned, I came from a background of public advocacy, and so I can’t keep my mouth shut about things that I see. And think it has cost me. I don’t think that I am included in, you know, among decision makers. I’m not, you know, brought into those kinds of circles.”*

In this case, the faculty member felt his actions, his inability to “keep my mouth shut about things that I see, cost him both inclusion in the “inner circle” and a “merit” raise. Both this example and the one preceding it illustrate the direct cost perceived by employees of their participation in equity work. Other faculty talked about the indirect costs of having to fight for

the rights of students of color at the university:

*“And I feel that as a faculty of color, you know, I have felt the responsibility to invest time in this effort [diversity advocacy work], but one of the things that happens, is that I haven’t been writing. I haven’t been doing research because of this lack in the institution. As a faculty of color, as I said, for the last five years all my energy has gone to these efforts and I haven’t published. Whereas before, I was publishing on a regular basis...”*

Turner (2002) and others (c.f. Jackson 2004) argue that given their small numbers, women of color in academe often feel compelled to act as “role models for their profession, race, and gender” p. 82. Quoting from an interview with an American Indian female faculty member, Turner (2002) writes:

“Issues of pedagogy and cultural diversity and gender are not the province of just women or just faculty of color. I think that happens too often and that puts the faculty of color person or woman on the spot, to kind of convince or persuade – be this change agent... The faculty members feel the added pressure, but are caught in a ‘Catch-22’ because minority issues are also important to them” p. 81.

The “Catch-22” in the case of the Chicana faculty above, is in her compelling need to fight for “minority issues” at the cost of her own scholarly productivity – which in turn may jeopardize her abilities to be a strong professional role model. Issues concerning the hiring and promotion of Latina/o faculty and staff are complex issues involving both institutional and interactional racialization. At the heart of their compelling need to engage in the activism and advocacy necessary to create a just university, is an absorbing sense of responsibility to our students.

## **The Perception of Latino/a Students**

Interspersed throughout the entire focus group discussion was a deep and compelling concern for our students. As a component of the “subtle subtext” of institutional racism, the “*way faculty talk about (some) students*” was seen as indicative of a “*negative perception of minority students.*” For example, a Latino faculty decodes the racialization present in references to “*linguistic abilities.*”

*“The way in which faculty talk about our students, has changed over time. Sometimes it’s subtle, and sometimes it’s not so subtle – about how people are talking about the lowering quality of students and student ability. And that seems directly tied – sometimes they’ll talk about linguistic abilities and talents, which is another way of saying you know, Spanish speaking students. Right?”*

Similarly, in his discussion of a recent survey of faculty, another member of the focus group observed:

*“And another survey of faculty that revealed that, you know, faculty had essentially kind of negative perceptions about the preparation of students who were coming here. And this was a time when the white student population was declining, and minority populations were increasing. So, we were in that point where these lines were intersecting. And the faculty attitude seemed to be that, well, this was a decline in the quality of students, because they’re now more – more minority students, that this represents a decline in the quality of students. So, there was this negative perception of the, you know, minority students among faculty.*

Equating a “lowering of the quality” of our students with a rise in minority enrollments or with “increasing linguistic challenges” is a way to talk about race without talking about race. It

draws on the ever present “blame the victim” ideology that pervades mainstream culture. It essentializes and reifies race in ways that can be more harmful than blatant racism (which is more readily recognized for what it is). Seen through the lens of institutional racism, however, it’s not the students that fail the institution, it is the institution that fails the students.

As a component of the discussion surrounding the hiring and promotion practices of the university, one of the professors argued:

*“When you have a policy [affirmative action] and you don’t follow it, and then the numbers go down, this is discrimination, you know, the basis for a lawsuit. We have affirmative action obligations - because we receive federal funds. The federal government expects us to have a plan, expects us to monitor that plan, and expects us to show progress. We can do none of that. So, to me, it’s like we’re – you know, we’re not in compliance. We’re recalcitrant. We’re not doing what we’re supposed to do, what we know we’re supposed to do... And we know the consequences in terms of our students, and our inability to accomplish our mission. Too many of our students don’t succeed here, particularly students who are minority or low-income students. And that’s a serious problem.”*

A serious problem indeed, figures from the Office of Institutional Research<sup>24</sup> for “6<sup>th</sup> year Graduation Analysis: First time Freshman” who entered SJSU in 2005 show Black male students with a graduation rate of 29.2% and Hispanic males with a graduation rate of 27.2%. Chicanos, in fact, have the lowest graduation rate of all student populations. Rather than blame these numbers on the student’s themselves, Latino/a staff and faculty argue that these graduation rates are yet another “symptom” of the, “habitual policies and practices [that] work to disadvantage certain social, racial or cultural groups (Stanley, 2006:724).”

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<sup>24</sup> [www.oir.sjsu.edu](http://www.oir.sjsu.edu)

Rather than being overwhelmed by the enormity of their task – transforming an institution – the Chicano/a faculty and staff in our study seemed well prepared for the challenge. Fueled by a strong history of Chicano activism on campus and in the larger community, these scholars are committed to the cause. Their closing request: a call for reinforcements:

*“I would like to see more emphasis on hiring Chicano Latino faculty in all departments. And I mean, substantially in every department, because once you build the faculty, you build that core group, it’ll draw more students. It will become the place to come, it will be the University of Choice for Chicanos, you know?”*

## **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender<sup>25</sup> Faculty and Staff Focus Group**

The LGBT faculty and staff focus group was composed of employees from all over the university. Some have worked at the university for less than one year, and some for more than twenty-five years. The group was composed of individuals from diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds, age cohorts, positions, and ranks. The goal in analyzing these data is to identify the ways in which homophobia, heterosexism, and gender discrimination shape the institutional and interactional context of SJSU, and to better understand the daily lives of the queer people who work here.<sup>26</sup>

Findings from this focus group indicate that while heterosexism and homophobia at SJSU operate at multiple levels, this campus is also experienced as an open and safe environment for many LGBT faculty and staff. Analysis of these data revealed three main themes shaping the lives of LGBT faculty and staff at SJSU; 1) institutionalized/ structural heterosexism, 2) micro climates of homophobia, and 3) the politics of ‘coming out’ or not.

### **Institutionalized/Structural Heterosexism**

Throughout these focus group sessions, “the University” arises as an active agent in campus politics. Similar to other focus groups, LGBT faculty and staff sometimes used “the University” and “the Administration” interchangeably. Some of the discussion centered specifically on people within the administration and the roles they might take in defending gay

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<sup>25</sup> The designation of “lesbian, gay, or bisexual” refers to ones sexual identity, “transgender” refers to ones gender identity. Transgender people can be heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The placement of these four identities together is political and based, in part, on the shared experience of gender oppression. No one in this focus group identified as transgender.

<sup>26</sup> Homophobia, “describes the fear, hatred, or disapproval of, and discrimination against lesbian, gay, and bisexual people (p. 556).” Heterosexism is “a system of power and ideology that assumes that heterosexuality is the norm. Heterosexism culturally favors heterosexuals while denigrating and stigmatizing non-heterosexual people (p. 555).” [Gender] Discrimination, refers to “the unequal allocation of valued goods and resources based on one’s social position or group membership (p. 554).” Queer refers to, “a political project and/or identity that describes people who identify or live outside heteronormative notions of sex, gender, and sexuality (p. 556).” (Ferber, Holcomb and Wentling 2009)

rights, and some discussion centered on very specific directives aimed at the larger bureaucratic structure that constitutes “the University.” Much of the time, however, the two were conflated. The blurring of these boundaries can be seen clearly in the following statement by a lesbian faculty member;

*“... to me, it’s about whether or not the institution, higher administration regardless of their orientation, is sending a strong message of inclusion. In my college my Dean does. And he (college dean) has done that repeatedly and I don’t worry that a faculty person coming into my college would feel as though their tenure is in doubt should they mention that-- that they were gay or lesbian or bi or trans. But there are other places on this campus where that would not be the case.”*

Here the faculty member conflates “*the institution,*” with the “*higher administration*” in her analysis of structural heterosexism. This statement, like so many others made during this session, exemplifies the challenge of identifying and understanding institutional level discrimination. At SJSU, most structural heterosexism arises as *the lack* of an appropriate or inclusive response, rather than as blatant structural practices of discrimination. Some faculty articulated this sense of lacking as, “*...the university not wanting to be as forthright in defending same sex rights as other rights on campus.*” Other staff members admonished the current administration for not being “*as militant*” as they could be in sending a “*stronger message of inclusion.*”

This institutional silence is perhaps best illustrated through the two examples which follow. The first example concerns the university’s response to the passage of Proposition 8<sup>27</sup> in

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<sup>27</sup> Proposition 8 was the the California Marriage Protection Act defining the only recognizable marriage in California as that between “a man and a woman.”

the fall 2008 elections. During the 2008 election, Proposition 8 arose as key legislation affecting the lives of gay and lesbian people. Political battles for and against this legislation were fought all over California, and in the Bay Area. It was a very contentious fight. Throughout the fight, neither “the University” nor the “Administration” made a public statement indicating SJSU’s position on this legislation. And while the ethos of academic freedom mandates that universities not take political “sides,” political silence can in fact be read as doing just that. As one long time gay faculty noted:

*“I perceive a huge vacuum in terms of the visibility of this group [of administrators]. [W]hat really pushed me over the edge was Prop 8 and the utter silence, what I thought was an utter and complete silence. And I don’t care whether you like marriage or don’t or whatever, there is no getting around the fact that sociologically and politically and in any other way, that was the preeminent issue of the fall election, I mean outside of the national election, but I mean in California, outside of Barack Obama. And I was frankly appalled at the response of some [administrators]. It was just like, “Well, it’s not my issue.” You know?”*

Silence, in this case, is perceived of as a lack of understanding that the “gay marriage” issue is not simply a gay issue. While gays and lesbians can register as domestic partners in the state of California and are eligible for domestic partner benefits at the CSU, the fact that the Federal government does not recognize gay marriage disadvantages gay and lesbian employees. For example, unlike their heterosexual colleagues, when a gay or lesbian SJSU employee puts their spouse on their health benefits, the employee has to pay taxes on the cost of the entire health premium for that spouse. Thus the benefit package offered to one set of employees (married heterosexuals) is qualitatively different than that offered another (gay domestic

partners) for *the same work*. The issue of “gay marriage” at both the state and federal levels is an issue that fuels institutionalized discrimination. Not taking a stand on Proposition 8 is perceived of as taking a stand, because in this case “doing nothing” means allowing this “legal discrimination” to continue.

The power of silence was also raised in reference to a speech given by SJSU’s president during the dedication of the Cesar Chavez memorial arch. As a lesbian faculty pointed out:

*“I did want to bring up something that happened earlier this year when President [Name] was new on this campus. It was the dedication of the Cesar Chavez archway. And I attended, first of all because that arched memorial is designed by lesbian artist Judy Baca... Judy Baca is quite out in southern California. But that was not mentioned at the event. And you know that’s unfortunate [because] I think that that’s the kind of support that we need.”*

In both these cases, institutionalized heterosexism manifests as a missed opportunity to build coalition where it is so badly needed. The first example offered an opportunity for the administration to at least acknowledge the heterosexual privilege conferred upon some of its employees and to urge people to get involved in this debate. In the second, the public acknowledgement of Baca as an artist, *and* as a lesbian women of color, was completely absent. Much has been said of the homophobia within communities of color and the racism within the gay and lesbian liberation movement (Ratti 1993, Hill Collins 2009, Trujillo 1991). And while queer people of color and white allies have struggled to dismantle these isms, there is still much work to be done. This is nowhere more evident than in discussions by gay and lesbian employees about the hiring practices at SJSU.

In reference to hiring practices at the university, sexual preference was not seen by gay and lesbian faculty and staff as part of the campus diversity dialogue. As a gay staffer recalled:

*“I was thinking back to a recent experience. When we think about diversity, I think sometimes this (LGBT) is a population that isn’t included in that equation. And I was thinking about hiring practices in an office that I worked at on campus. And there was a candidate who was gay and he was a contender for a position and didn’t get the position. And there may have been justifiable reasons. But when I brought to the table, ‘well, thinking about diversity and thinking about rounding out our staff and, having people here that represent our student population and helping students feel like this is an inclusive environment, etcetera,’ his diversity didn’t seem to matter.”*

While it is impossible to know what really happened in this particular case, what is relevant to campus climate is the belief that being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender is not a recognized category of difference. This belief was expressed in various ways throughout the focus group session. Moreover, the idea that queer diversity is “a blind spot,” “hidden from view,” was contrasted with race – as if diversity is a zero-sum game. When discussing another hiring incident where the openly gay job candidate did not get hired, a lesbian employee concluded, “[The experience] was so contrasted to the intentional effort made to have others-- other groups represented on the staff.” Similarly, the next sentence spoken by the gay staffer in the previous quote was, “The only diversity that mattered was, you know, color.”

The idea that one’s sexuality might not be considered an asset in the hiring process was followed by an expression of fear that it might actually work against someone applying for a staff position at SJSU. As the following gay employee stated:

*“I’m a little worried now. I actually interviewed at lunchtime today for a position on campus and I made-- a reference to a response-- because it’s become part of my language, to my husband in the course of the interview. And I-- I would do again, because I think we ought to be able to speak freely about our lives and not feel like when we’re in front of a group of people who are evaluating us that we have to use the other pronoun or we’re silent about it. Whereas a straight person would clearly say, “My wife” or whatever. So it will be interesting, now hearing your stories about that.”*

Similarly, a lesbian employee who has experienced verbal harassment in her position at SJSU for being gay, stated: *“What makes me the most sad about this whole thing, is that I’ve decided - a job opened up in the [university] department very similar to what I do right now. And I actually considered just re-closeting myself, just in case, you know.”*

Reading institutional silences as a lack of support and understanding for queer issues, pitting gay liberation against racial diversity, and fearing that one’s gay status might hinder employment prospects all arise – in part- as a response to the current institutional climate surrounding GLBT issues at SJSU. This lack of a clear message of queer inclusion at the institutional level is perceived by faculty and staff as responsible for the persistence of homophobia at the level of face-to face interaction. As a gay tenured professor stated, *“...if the university really sent a strong message institutionally, it would aid us considerably in terms of making this a welcoming environment for everybody.”*

### **Micro-Climates of Homophobia**

In the daily round of interactions that construct the university, homophobia plays out in more confined and localized spaces. Throughout this focus group session it became evident that while, *“we are one campus,”* we are in fact composed of multiple departments, divisions, and

units separated by time, function, and physical space. So while some LGBT faculty and staff feel safe and supported in the contexts of their own working lives, as is the case with this gay staff member,

*“My own experience has been fairly positive. I come out of [university division ]. And-- it’s a very—you know, we do a lot of education around diversity and difference and so we’re creating a climate that we want to be in and to educate students in”.*

Other gay staff members had just the opposite experience, seeing themselves as both marginalized and cut off from the rest of the university, *“I’m just staff and I’m over here and it is, it’s a different world than San José State, in general, it’s very different over here.”* The difference in this case was that this employee had experienced daily ostracism from fellow workers once she “outed” herself as a lesbian. And while faculty work in a more privileged work arena than staff (even when they work side by side), academic departments also vary in their openness and acceptance of GLBT faculty. As exemplified by comments from one tenured lesbian faculty;

*“But there have been a couple faculty members that I’ve tried to get to some of the [queer] functions, including this one. A couple I know would come, gladly. But there’s one that’s over in-- I won’t name the department, but she’s pretty out in general but not really so much here at work. And so I’m-- I’m puzzled by it because she seems-- I mean she has a partner and has been out, probably ten, 15 years. And still for some reason, and I think it’s really more about her department than it is the school itself.”*

The underlying message is clear: the “welcome” one receives as a GLBT person at SJSU is dependent upon the specific arena one enters. In those cases where queer faculty and staff are not welcomed, their experiences of homophobia tend to mirror those found in the dominant

culture. In the case of the staff person above who felt ostracized after “outing” herself to colleagues, the most blatant negative response was religious in nature:

*“I mean everybody’s nice to me and then they find out I’m gay. And then it’s like-- and then it’s like my cubical has an ice castle around it with a lot of people, down to when Prop 8 was going on it was really frustrating because, you know, there’d be people saying, “Well, you know, god says they can’t do that.” You know? In the office they’re saying stuff like that. And I thought, Wow, that’s really inappropriate. You know, there’s free speech and then there’s, well, I have to sit here for eight hours a day. You know?”*

Similarly, GLBT faculty talked about overhearing homophobic comments in relation to other political debates concerning gay people, having their students say homophobic things in class, and sensing that while *they* felt safe, homophobia is still lurking out there for others. These experiences and perceptions are common within the U.S. context as the political and religious battles over gay marriage (NY Times 2011), gays in the military, Olympic sex testing in sports, and employment discrimination (ENDA) legislation, dominate public discussions of queer people. In addition, widely publicized cases of violence against gay and transgender people (Staff, "Six Trans Women Killed in Honduras in Six Months" 2011) and the death penalty debates in Uganda (Rice 2009) underscore the existence of a malevolent and homophobic “other” out there.

In the case of GLBT employees, these micro climates of homophobia appear far more threatening to staff than faculty. As one gay staffer commented,

*“The staff already feel vulnerable. They already feel as though they’re not treated as full human beings by a lot of the faculty and the administration. And if you feel vulnerable*

*because you're also having to keep a part of yourself secret because you don't know if you can trust those who are your supervisors, I think that's really alarming."*

For many queer people, "*keeping a part of yourself secret,*" or not, is an underlying challenge that continues throughout life. "Coming out" as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender is not a one-time event. Instead, it often manifests as daily, sometimes hourly, decisions about what to say to whom. When being gay means who you live with, who birthed your children, who you went to the movies with last night, who you cooked dinner with, who dropped you off at work, who your emergency contact is, etc., being gay is about *who you are*. When being transgender is about childhood recollections as the other sex, about official documents that contradict your gender expression, about regular hormone shots, about family that embraces you, and family that rejects you, being transgender is about *who you are*. The politics of being out or not is one of the central themes shaping the experiences of GLBT faculty and staff.

### **The Politics of 'Coming Out' or Not.**

To "come out" is to disclose ones sexual identity in the case of gay, lesbian, or bisexual people, and to disclose ones sex and or gender identity in the case of a person who is transgender. Because we live in a culture that assumes heterosexuality and assumes everyone's sex matches their gender expression, the decision to come out, especially in the university context, is an ongoing concern for most GLBT people. Academic life means a constant flow of new people (students) into the workplace. Academic life in a large bureaucracy like SJSU, means a constant turnover in positions as staff make upward and lateral movement in their jobs. Each semester can bring about a whole new work environment for academic employees, and with it a whole new heterosexist landscape to transverse.

Many of the GLBT faculty and staff that attended the focus group session discussed their experiences with being out in their departments and divisions. People talked about their departments being open and gay friendly, *“where I work it’s not an issue. The gays and lesbians are everywhere and welcome and totally out and-- all the straight people seem very accepting of it.”* While others described almost idyllic work situations, *“I’m able to be exactly who-- I don’t necessarily stop and think about outing myself. I just consider myself to be out and not necessarily look at-- or watch pronouns or anything like that. I-- I speak about my partner and people are very supportive around that.”* Interestingly, in much of this discussion, both faculty and staff attributed their openness about being gay to the sense of acceptance they received from students. Such was the case with this gay staffer;

*“And I think a lot of that [people being out in his department] has to deal with the fact that we’re dealing so directly with students.... And a lot of them are exploring their own ideas and, although they may not necessarily be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, I think they’re very open minded. And I really appreciate, in my experience, this generation. As the generations continue to come through and cycle through, I feel like they’re just getting more and more open to different ideas.”*

Faculty also mentioned examples of straight students choosing GLBT topics for their research endeavors, finding past cases of employment discrimination against gay and lesbian employees *“incomprehensible,”* and taking GLBT themed courses because they, *“couldn’t imagine graduating without knowing something about this population.”*

However, while some GLBT faculty and staff find allies in their departments, divisions, colleagues and in this new generation of students, for others, the closet doors remains shut. And, as one faculty pointed out, the juxtaposition of “being out” and “being in the closet” is an

ongoing reality on campus, as exemplified by the blocked addresses on the email list for the SJSU GLBT Faculty and Staff Association. Clearly, being out or not, is a personal decision circumscribed by time, context, situation, and relevance. At the same time, however, one's personal choices can have public consequences. Though the GLBT faculty and staff perceived that their straight students seemed to be getting an inclusive message about the queer community, they expressed concern about the experiences of our gay students if faculty and staff remain in the closet. This concern is exemplified in the following quote by a lesbian professor:

*“If we as faculty or staff we are still afraid to have our names out there, to be on certain lists, how can we not expect the same thing from our students? I definitely can tell you there are students in my classes who are gay or lesbian who, you know, don't identify or are afraid to identify. And I think that having somebody who is out that they can go and talk to, would help.”*

The students look to faculty and staff for guidance, support, education, acceptance, and approval. And in the case of GLBT faculty and staff some are in a position to provide the kind of support our queer students might need and some are not (and, in fact, are in need of support themselves). Those that are, recognize the privilege of their positions, and the responsibility engender by that privilege. As exemplified by the words of one gay faculty member, *“I have always considered my ability to be out to be a privilege. In the political background that I come from, privilege is to be used to extend the privilege to others, not to, you know, not to impose it on others, but to use it as an opportunity.”*

### **Findings from Women Faculty and Staff Focus Group**

The women faculty and staff focus group was composed of women from all over the university. Some of these women have worked at the university for less than one year, and some for more than twenty-five years. The group was composed of women from diverse racial-ethnic backgrounds, age cohorts, sexual orientations, and ranks. While the dynamics of gender discrimination and sexism operate differently, depending upon one's age, race, class, and job title, this analysis seeks to identify the common gendered experiences that appear to cross these categories of difference.

Analysis of these data yielded three underlying themes shaping the campus climate for women faculty and staff: 1) gender discrimination and sexism, 2) workload and family responsibilities, and 3) physical safety on campus. The analysis which follows discusses each of these in turn.

#### **Gender Discrimination and Sexism**

Gender discrimination and sexism operate on multiple levels. The most visible indicators of gender discrimination and sexism manifest as instances of verbally abusive and sexist comments directed at women faculty and staff by men with whom they work. At SJSU this includes descriptions by both faculty and staff of being “screamed at,” “yelled at,” and subject to “sexist comments” by well-placed men faculty and administrators. Instances of blatant sex

discrimination<sup>28</sup>, while deeply troubling, were not the main forms of sexism discussed during this session. Far more common were moments of subtle-sexism (Benokraitis 1997).<sup>29</sup>

For the women at SJSU, subtle sex discrimination manifested in a variety of ways. For some, discrimination issues centered on the body and the extent to which colleagues and students feel free to comment on or even touch women's bodies. For example, as one faculty member recalled:

*"And you know, when I was pregnant-- I had two kids here in the process of going through tenure-- I would get comments about my pregnancy. You know, "Hey, Mama," was one of the things. Or comments on how I dressed."*

Similarly, others talked about cases where the narrative portion of the SOTE evaluations included commentary both on their "failure" to dress appropriately, or their degree of desirability. One staff member described an interaction where she was patted on the head by a colleague:

*"I can't say if this is a gender issue, but in retrospect, I wonder if she would have done it if it was a male. It was the first month I was here, we were in a management meeting. And my new colleague looked over at me and she sat next to me and patted me on the head and said, "Oh, I'm so glad you're part of this division." And I just remember thinking, 'Oh my gosh, she just patted me on the head, it's just so insulting.' And I think she saw*

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<sup>28</sup> For purposes of this study I refer to Benokraitis's (1997) definition of blatant sex discrimination "the unequal and harmful treatment of women that is intentional, quite visible, and can be easily documented" (pg.7),

<sup>29</sup> "Subtle-sex discrimination is the unequal and harmful treatment of women that is typically less visible and obvious than blatant sex discrimination. It is often not noticed because most people have internalized subtle sexist behavior as "normal," "natural," or "acceptable." Subtle sex discrimination can be relatively innocent or manipulative, intentional or unintentional, well meaning or malicious" (Benokraitis 1997:11).

*the look on my face and invited me to go out to lunch with her later that week, and apologized actually. I wonder if she would have done that if it was a young man.”*

In this instance (and more generally with cases of subtle sex discrimination), the characterization of this behavior as gender discrimination is even somewhat confusing to the person involved, *“I can't say if this is a gender issue, but in retrospect, I wonder if she would have done it if it was a male.”* Such is often the case in hierarchical situations where “power over” is the modus operandi – it makes it difficult to discern which status is the target. What make these cases recognizable as *gender* discrimination (and not simply rude and condescending behavior) is when the substitution of one gender for the other is unthinkable.

An even more subtle instance of sex discrimination discussed by faculty women has to do with the forms of address that students and staff sometimes use to refer to them. Whereas men faculty are almost always addressed as “Dr.” women faculty often become, “Miss” or “Mrs” in daily forms of address:

*“She [another colleague] shares an office with a man and they'll come in and say, "Oh hi Doctor," to the male. And then they'll say, 'Oh hi, can I call you by your first name?' to her. And they call me by my first name too. Or Mrs. Something. So, those kinds of things show the way in which we're treated.”*

In these cases, it is not the fact of being incorrectly addressed by a student that is troubling to women faculty. It is, instead, the understanding that the student misperceptions are in fact cultural expectations about women’s proper place (Coontz 1995). Bypassing women’s professional achievements and identifying them in relation to heterosexual marriage is just one more troubling piece of the gendered landscape in which they work.

Subtle sexism also manifests in response to structural arrangements that situate one gender in the majority position over the other (Kimmel 2008). While there are roughly equal numbers of male and female faculty employed at the university,<sup>30</sup> the distribution of faculty (and staff) across the university often results in unequal gender ratios within departments and divisions. In this case, the demographics of the university are one aspect of campus life that shape the gendered experiences of those working and attending school here. For women faculty and staff, working in “all male” or “mostly male” divisions or departments, can have several deleterious side effects. This skewed gender ratio, while common in most departments and divisions twenty years ago, is still representative of some areas of the university today. Responses to the experience of being “the only woman in an all-male environment,” made women feel both invisible (isolated) and too visible (targeted) (Zimmer 1992). Such is the experience of one faculty woman who discussed the interactional experiences she has with one of her male faculty colleagues:

*“I’m the only female in the department and the only one (faculty member) who gets screamed at. Aside from the staff, who again, are all women. Mostly it’s the women who get yelled at. It’s challenging.”*

Another outcome of having fewer women than men in an academic department is that the women who are present often experience tokenism:

*“When you’re in a department or a college where there aren’t very many women, and it’s actually changing a little bit. But what happens is they need to trot out the women. So, every time there’s a thing [departmental business] that needs to happen, you get called*

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<sup>30</sup> As of Fall 2010, the Office of institutional research reports 793 female faculty and 800 male faculty. See: [www.sjsu.edu/oir](http://www.sjsu.edu/oir) for more statistics on faculty by gender and race.

*upon. And in the beginning, you don't mind. And then you start realizing that you keep saying yes and it becomes this sort of burden. And again, it's getting better now because there are more. But in the beginning, there were none."*

As articulated here, the experience of tokenism can be both beneficial – giving faculty the public recognition they need to negotiate the RTP process – but it can also be a burden – unduly saddling these faculty members with campus responsibilities that don't, ultimately contribute to their professional advancement (publication and high SOTE scores) (Zimmer, 1992).

Subtle sex discrimination also arises in the differential expectations that students have for female-bodied professors. Women professors are seen by students through a culturally gendered lens that transposes “authority” into “bitchiness.” As one junior faculty member discussed:

*"But yeah, it's also-- you're trying to be, you know, a person of authority, and then they -- students and other faculty members -- perceive you as , "Oh, well, she's a bitch because she's too strict." But I don't think it has anything to do with actually being strict, it's just the perception of a youngish looking woman being an aggressive teacher. I guess you would say, just [being] somebody who doesn't bend the rules. Doesn't give in to the students when they don't want to work. You get blamed for that. And I worry about that affecting things like tenure and promotion because I'm not giving in."*

And, as echoed by her more senior colleague,

*"I've been here since '87. There is an issue with students. If you have a male faculty teaching one section, holding strict standards, and a female teaching another section holding equally strict standards, the female is looked as being unfair, not giving appropriate grades, not being compassionate, not being caring. It does come through in*

*the SOTES. And yet if you put the two side by side the male faculty member gets absolutely no flak. Zero. None. Really, I do mean none. And the female faculty gets endless grief over holding to standards. And not even just being aggressive, but holding to standards and holding students accountable and having deadlines that you maintain.”*

What makes these instances of sex discrimination so problematic is the extent to which they impact the RTP process. When students “score” professors through a gendered lens, women and men engaged in the same behavior will be scored very differently. This becomes problematic when, during the RTP process, these scores are read as “objective” and “gender neutral.” And, this becomes even more troubling when the lens is racialized as well as gendered. In response to the comment above, a woman faculty of color chimed in: *“And add racial minority on to that and it’s like, ‘what the hell kind of voice are you supposed to have in determining my grade. YOU have no right.’”*

### **Gendered Division of Labor: Workload and Family Responsibilities**

Excessive workload is an issue for faculty and staff alike. Workload issues cut across gender, race, sexuality, and rank. For faculty, workload discussions generally start with teaching:

*“I think a 4/4 [teaching load] is way too much. I know some of my colleagues have 3/3s across the campus, across the CSU system. I think it's a really important part of campus climate, and it needs to be addressed, especially the four-four load. It's unreasonable, the hours that we're expected to work. It goes past constant.”*

Reading deeper into these comments, however, reveals the larger issue - of which teaching is just a part:

*“If I don't just take the four/four, and the supervision, and all the additional tasks that are required of me, then I'm viewed as not a committed educator. If I had two less courses or one less course, I would do ten times better work in my research, in my advocacy. I would make so much more of an impact. It eats me up. It really does. And I'm in a field right now that I feel like there are very few people who research what I research. And I just feel like there are so many better ways to contribute to society than to teach two extra classes of the same exact thing.”*

Essentially the point is that having a 4/4 load, “*working past constant*” makes it very difficult to find time for other professional responsibilities – for both men and women faculty. Gendering exacerbates workload because faculty women perceive that they spend more time with students than men who are professors. This perception is typified by the following comments made by a tenured faculty member:

*“I do think there's a gender gap, at least in my department, in terms of how men and women deal with the different amounts of time we're willing to spend with students. I find myself constantly going beyond-- you know, I have my assigned office hours and my class times. My male colleagues pretty much stick to that. And if a student wants to make an appointment and it's not your office hour, too bad. Whereas, I notice that I, and the other women in my department, tend to be willing to go outside of those regular office hours. So, our boundaries are less strict and that creates a workload issue. Because when my male colleagues are off, not doing consulting with students because it's not their office hours, they're getting other things done. Whether it's their family or whether it's writing their scholarly articles or whatever it is they're doing, they're having that time.”*

Here the faculty member is describing a gendered division of academic labor wherein women faculty perceive they do more “care work” with students compared to their male colleagues (Cancian and Oliker 2000). In addition to this gendered division of labor at work, the women faculty and staff in our study also felt that a gendered division of labor existed in their family lives as well (at least for those who are heterosexual). There is a plethora of research supporting the contention that mothers who are full-time workers spend far more of their time engaged in family care work than fathers who are full-time workers (Coltrane 1996, Hochschild and Machung 1989, Kimmel 1985).

The issue for women faculty and staff is trying to find a balance between the responsibilities of home and work. For women, more so than men, finding adequate time for both is a zero-sum game. The toll this game takes on women workers is captured in the following quote by a long-time SJSU staffer:

*“And so,[it’s both] the stress on the marriage, and having to communicate with my husband. And we’ve been together for a long time, so he understands the nature of my job. But once you actually have a family, it’s a completely different story. Trying to manage and balance, not just your home life, but then coming to work and trying to be perceived as someone who still has her game and can still perform at the level that I did prior to having a child, sometimes I’m just so overwhelmed that I can’t-- I’m really struggling.”*

Here (and elsewhere) the challenge is expressed as the need to be both a good spouse and parent and, “be at the top of one’s game” professionally. SJSU faculty and staff women expressed a variety of adaptive strategies in response to this work and family balancing act.

Some women contemplate not having children, *“I'm recently married and I'm actually very seriously considering not having children. Because, I can barely keep my head above water right now with the work load.”* While others resort to lying about their responsibilities;

*“...let's say you have to go pick your kid up at daycare. I used to always say, ‘I have another meeting.’ Well, the meeting was with my two-year-old, but I would just say, ‘I have another meeting, I gotta go now. And I can't miss this meeting.’ And I would say that. But I mean, I should be able to say, ‘Look, I got a kid, I gotta go pick him up.’ I shouldn't have to lie.”*

Generally, the women in our study felt both isolated and silenced around this issue. In part, the isolation can be attributed to the dearth of “accessible” campus-based care-giving services for faculty and staff. The major care-giving issues that arose in this focus group session centered on nursing and breast-pumping facilities for new mothers, child care needs, elder care and sick child responsibilities, and, for faculty, adequate and clear policies that support maternity leave.

Birth mothers who want to breast feed their children after returning to work need to pump their breast milk a minimum of one or two times in an eight hour period. For faculty, who can easily end up working 10 to 12 hours a day, they need to pump even more. While the LGBT and Women’s Center do allocate a space for women to pump, the space is not well advertised, not very private (it is for use by faculty, staff, *and* students), and not convenient for faculty and staff working elsewhere on campus. Working mothers are left on their own to find places to pump their breast milk. As one staff member recalls, *“For a while, we used our office bathroom space to allow for women to pump. But it's not an adequate space. It's not clean, it's not sanitary. It*

*doesn't have a sink.*” For faculty women, who share their offices and may only have 15 minutes between classes and office hours, a bathroom stall may be their only choice.

The lack of readily available and convenient facilities for breast-pumping (and storing breast milk once it is pumped), impacts campus climate for women faculty and staff in that it send a message that this is not a priority issue on campus. Similarly, though SJSU does have a child care facility on campus, the child care services do not meet the needs of all the working parents who require them. There are not enough openings in the center to accommodate all the working parents on campus (the center is for faculty, staff and students, with students having priority over faculty and staff), and the center closes at 5:30. As one untenured faculty discussed:

*“Childcare definitely needs improvement, mostly associated with hours. As new faculty, we are expected to teach graduate classes, but if you have small children you don't have childcare in the evenings. So, that's definitely something that is a big issue for me as a new faculty member.”*

As these issue disproportionally affect more vulnerable SJSU employees (untenured faculty women and probationary staff), it makes it more challenging for them to advocate for their needs. As these women are being judged by the same criteria as the men with whom they work, who likely do not have the same care work responsibilities, it makes for a very uneven playing field. Adding elder care and care for sick and disabled dependents to these responsibilities widens the gap even further between employees who engaged in care work and those who do not – and extends it throughout ones career.

*“The other thing that I noticed just recently, actually, I got a survey online about women faculty and childcare issues. And I filled it out. And you know, it was fine, it was a good survey. But one of the things I'm dealing with, and I know a lot of female faculty members are dealing with, is elder care. You know, when you get to be my age, it's not kids, it's elders that we're caring for. And I spend two or three hours every single day with my mother who's 94. Now, I know I don't have to do that, but I do it because that's important to me.”*

### **Feeling “safe” at SJSU**

Safety was the one issue we explored directly with all the focus groups. In the faculty and staff focus group sessions we included the following question in the interview schedules; “Thirty-three percent of women and twenty-four percent of men said that they feared for their physical safety on campus. How would you explain these statistics? Do you feel safe here?”<sup>31</sup>

By far, the most common response to this question from faculty and staff women had to do with their experiences on campus at night and on the weekends. For faculty women this issue was of greatest concern when they were scheduled to teach night classes, for example, an untenured faculty stated;

*“I have to say, that's my single greatest fear of teaching graduate classes. Because they're all in the evenings, they go till nine o'clock at night. My personal safety is the biggest reason that I worry about teaching that late. Because, there's not many people around at nine o'clock. I also park in the Tenth Street Garage. It doesn't feel secure. It*

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<sup>31</sup> These statistics come from the 2006 Campus Climate Survey data. For an executive summary of the results of the Faculty portion of the 2006 Campus Climate Survey see: <http://oir.sjsu.edu/Assessment/projects/campusclimate/2006CampusClimateExecSum-Faculty.pdf>

*feels dark. You know, you're going up into that elevator alcove to go to your car. It's not safe. And I don't know if the campus has any type of escorts."*

And while *there is* an escort service available to walk campus members to their cars, many women on campus are not aware of the service, and for others it does not really solve the problem:

*"And when a class is over, you have maybe 15 minutes pack-up time. And even if you can get an escort to your car, you're still at night in a building, perhaps in a secluded room far away from mainstream. And so even getting from the classroom to your office where you then call for an escort, that's a worry."*

Staff women had similar concerns, especially those whose positions require them to be on campus late at night and on the weekends.

*"I'd also say that this applies to the weekends and when the building is abandoned and there's no one else. When I first started working here, I was commuting from Monterey Bay. And there were times [when I had back-to-back events] that I thought, "I'm just gonna sleep in my office." I was really freaked out... even if I screamed as loud as I could, no one could hear me unless they were in the room next to me. And I find that even with the other buildings. When no one else is in the building, my sense of fear goes up a little bit more. Because I don't think there is anything in the buildings, there's no emergency button."*

Safety issues can also have repercussions for career advancement. Campus women, (including the students), were unified in their responses to this issue, as detailed above. If teaching night classes, having access to one's office during weekends and holidays, and being

present at night and weekend campus events are critical to one's job performance (or academic success), then not being able to do them or doing them under duress can effect job performance outcomes. These data indicate that the men and women of SJSU walk around on very different campuses.

### **Findings from the Administrator Focus Group**

The administrator focus group was composed of administrators from four of the five Divisions on campus including, Academic Affairs, Administration and Finance, Student Affairs, and University Advancement. The Administrators ranged in age from 41 to 60, and included straight, gay, and bisexual administrators. The focus group included administrators that self-identified as white, Latino, Chicano, and mixed-race (Hispanic, Mexican-American & European-American).

The decision to include administrators in our study was twofold. On the one hand we wanted to understand how administrators perceive campus climate as experienced by various identity groups on campus. In other words, we wanted a clearer picture of how those “in charge” perceive the campus climate for those groups they are (ostensibly) “in charge of.” On the other hand, we were interested in the administrator’s own experiences on campus. To accomplish these two objectives we asked the administrative focus group two different sets of questions – one about the experiences of other groups and one about themselves. We also introduced our study differently than we did for the other twelve focus groups:

*“We have developed two sets of questions to ask you tonight. As some of you know we have been conducting campus climate focus groups with various groups of students, faculty and staff over the past year and a half. In these groups we have been asking them about their experiences at SJSU as African American, Latino, White, Asian American, gay, lesbian, and transgender faculty, staff, students and lecturers. So in our first set of questions we want to get your impressions on the campus climate for each of these*

*groups, and in the second half of the focus group we want to know more specifically about your own experiences working on this campus (MPP focus group Introduction).”<sup>32</sup>*

The analysis which follows includes findings from both sets of questions. Starting with their responses to questions about campus climate for various groups on campus, the analysis concludes with an exploration of the experience of campus climate for SJSU administrators.

### **Perceptions of Campus Climate**

Though we asked administrators to comment on campus climate for all the other groups included in this study, we did not ask specific questions about each group. Rather, we approached the session by referencing some of the focus groups and then asking a general question about their perceptions of campus climate for these groups:

*“MODERATOR: Okay, I’m going to go ahead and start with the first question. It’s really about your perceptions of the overall campus climate for the groups we’ve already talked to. Staff and faculty of color are one large group we looked at, also female faculty and staff, LGBT faculty and staff, and students of color and LGBT students. We wanted you to have an opportunity to talk about your experiences, about your experiences with these groups in terms of campus climate. Observations you’ve noticed, encounters you’ve been privy too. What have you noticed about the overall campus climate for those groups based on being an MPP here?”*

The discussion that followed this question (and our “follow-up” probes) centered on concerns for two populations: faculty of color, and students – with the discussion of students taking up most of the time.

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<sup>32</sup> For a complete list of all the questions we asked this focus group, see Appendix A.

## Faculty of color

The administrators in our study talked about faculty of color in reference to their having to negotiate the racial mapping of SJSU.<sup>33</sup> During the fall 2010 semester, out of 1593 faculty<sup>34</sup> (including tenured, tenure-track, and lecturers) the racial-ethnic composition was as follows: American Indian .5%, Asian and Pacific Islander 15%, Black 3% Filipino 3%, Hispanic 6%, and White 63%.. What these numbers indicate is that faculty of color – especially American Indian, Black and Hispanic faculty – can often find themselves in situations where they are in the numerical minority. As perceived by the administrators in our study, the campus climate for faculty of color includes instances of isolation, marginalization, and the need to understand and negotiate racial meanings.

Isolation and marginalization centered on instances where faculty of color worked in departments or divisions as sole members of their racial group. As administrators, the focus group's members felt a sense of responsibility for getting these faculty members connected to supportive networks. Typical of these comments was the one made by the following administrator:

*"I've had some concerns about faculty of color. In terms of having enough mechanisms available to connect with people on campus. So, for instance, you might have an individual within a department, so a single individual with a particular ethnicity that's in*

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<sup>33</sup> My use of "racial mapping" comes from Olsen's (1997) discussion of immigrant students. Olsen's analysis, in turn, arises from Omi and Winant's (1986) analysis of "racial formation" and the idea that, "the social order in our nation is highly structured by race, and our public life is engaged in shaping racial relations.... The state (meaning our political and public institutions) is a site of ongoing struggle over racial meaning and power. Schools are institutions of the state and are involved in this struggle"p. 260 (Olsen 1997).

<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.oir.sjsu.edu/cognos8/cgi-bin/cognos.cgi> for more information.

*a department, and in terms of what kinds of resources are available to them in terms of social networking that is sometimes very challenging.”*

Also challenging is the need to support faculty of color as they encounter racist stereotypes. Such was the observation of a newly arrived administrator:

*“I’ve noticed, I mean, there’s a group that seems to be to feel most like a minority still -- most separated from other groups are still the African Americans or Black people. I think we only have three Black, or three African American people working in [Division]. We have one faculty member, one faculty who’s Black working in [Division]. One of the other African Americans is my assistant, and they were very close friends. So they hung out together all the time. And the faculty member, you know, the African American one-- people always used to confuse her with my assistant who had lower status. And so, [the faculty member’s] comment to people was, “I’m the other black woman in the [Division].” So, I just noticed that compared to a lot of other groups, I still I think, feel-- I noticed that - for example there are none in this room, African Americans still feel like, for various reasons-- maybe for good reasons. More, I think distant from main culture.”*

In this case the administrator describes the “tokenism” experienced by a Black faculty member wherein she is both highly visible as the only black faculty member (“*I’m the other black woman in the [Division].*”), and invisible in that she is continually mistaken for someone of a lower rank (“*people always used to confuse her with my assistant who had lower status.*”) (Turner 2002, Zimmer 1992). In the latter case, the faculty member is seen as having to negotiate existing racial stereotypes about Black people (Flores 1999).

Still other administrators expressed concern about international faculty of color arriving on campus and having to negotiate existing U.S. racial maps. In addition to international faculty

having to negotiate new racial meanings and stereotypes, one administrator raised the issue of the “fit” between these faculty and their students:

*“The other issue that I’ve noticed is some real differences in terms of the academic backgrounds of our faculty where many of our faculty have come from international backgrounds and been at very prestigious universities and then transitioning to here. And may have an ethnicity in common with the students, but there may not be a resonance for the students because their class and their other aspects-- and I don’t know then how the students are responding to the faculty. I think there’s often a high expectation of what they are going get from the faculty, versus what the faculty can deliver just based on their personal experiences.”*

Underlying their concerns for faculty of color, was a deeper frustration at the lack of resources available to administrators to assist faculty through these problems. As will be seen below, the best part of their jobs as administrators were those moments when they were able to help others. So their encounters with problems (like racism in the academy) that exceed their own resources and power, tend to leave them feeling ineffectual. As one administrator stated in reference to the question of feeling valued by SJSU:

*“... in terms of not feeling valued as a manager, I would say that it has to do with-- and I don’t direct this personally, nor do I think this is personal. Because whether or not it was me, the facts would be the same. But, having limited authority to-- move policy decisions...”*

This dissatisfaction with their limited authority while evident in their relationships with faculty, was even more central to their concern for students.

### Concerns for Students

The administrators in our focus group expressed a wide range of concerns for various student groups. Their discussion covered issues related to student's daily lives and also touched on deeper structural concerns related to accessibility and impact. Their focus on student's daily lives covered a variety of topics, including comments related to student safety:

*"I heard a young woman report at one of the [diversity] welcomes, and she was a Muslim woman, and she reported being at the light rail waiting for a train along with a random group of people, and being accosted about-- you know, anti-Muslim accusations of terrorism and stuff like that. And so, she reported that she felt threatened-- and nobody did anything. You know, so it was traumatic experience for her."*

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

*"You didn't mention disabled, but I think that's one of the categories. I've been hearing-- I haven't experienced it myself but that, a number of students have challenges with faculty understanding accommodations and what needs to happen with that. And-- and it seems worse this year, and I think that probably the furloughs and everybody feels more put upon and I think that may be one of those last straws, I don't know. But, I think that that is something that came under campus climate and it is-- and-- it's a continuing challenge for disabled students to both get the services they deserve and require to have, and be able to maintain their dignity in the process."*

The Writing Standards Test (WST) and the barrier it can create for ESL students:

*"I think one group, the international students, we can talk about a little bit-- where English is their second language. There are some big challenges here dealing with writing and being able to pass the WST. I was talking just this week to a woman from Korea and a young man from the Philippines, and they both maintain that in their own*

*native countries, they didn't have direct essays even in their own languages at school.*

*This was a new thing for them. They're both really adept I think in quantitative skills, but they were-- the WST scares them, and they're really worried about it."*

In this example, and the two preceding it, the administrator's "stories" about the SJSU students they encounter all share an underlying theme; each story unveils a potential impediment to student success. Whether indicating racism, ablism, or access to academic support services, each observation can be interpreted as idiosyncratic of a wider ranging problem. And, as in their response to situations confronting faculty of color, the administrators in our focus group really want to be in a position to provide students (and faculty) with substantive responses to the problems they identify. As one administrator observed:

*"One of the things I've noticed about campus forums is that students will often ask questions or make statements that need a comprehensive response, but in the forums, they're not able to receive those responses, so I don't know what mechanism we have in place to then-- approach those students later and give them more what they're looking for, because I-- I see the students, and they always look very frustrated with the response that they've received. Because the response is usually, you know, something that you could answer in a few seconds and doesn't really fulfill their need."*

Similarly, in reference to his encounter with a former AB 540 student,<sup>35</sup> one administrator recounted:

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<sup>35</sup> Assembly Bill 540, effective January 2002, created a nonresident tuition exemption for undocumented students who meet certain additional criteria. The students attending university as a result of this law are sometimes referred to as "AB 540 students." For specific information on the legislation and the eligibility requirements see <http://www.sjsu.edu/registrar/services/students/ab540.html> .

*“I’ve had an interesting exchange just today with a student who stopped me on the walkway, and this is a student who-- a Latino student who is very involved on campus and who was formerly undocumented, he is now a permanent resident. And he was telling me about a recent campus forum he attended. [At the forum] he asked ‘what is San José State doing for AB 540 students?’ And evidently, I wasn’t there for this, but the answer [the student received] was, “Well, [Campus Diversity Center] attends to those type of issues.” Well, I think for me, on the issue of underrepresented ethnic groups specifically with respect to AB 540 undocumented immigrant students, ‘there is a diversity place,’ you know-- that’s over simplification. The fact is that, Cal State Long Beach, Cal State Dominguez Hills, San Francisco State-- several other CSU campuses have paid comprehensive attention to the issues of undocumented immigrant students. So, it’s not just: “go see [Campus Diversity Center]”. ... I’m still looking for substantive responses like to this young man. Like Cal State Long Beach does. They have a manual that covers from admissions to registrars, to financial aid, counseling, academic units, and it’s in writing.”*

In this case, the administrator -- who ironically for many on campus represents “The University” – expresses frustration at “The University’s” response to the student’s query about the plight of AB 540 students. Implied within his comparison to other CSU campuses is idea that, if these other campuses can provide comprehensive responses to the challenges faced by AB 540 students, why can’t SJSU?

The statements of this administrator exemplify the paradox evident throughout the entire discussion of their perceptions of SJSU’s campus climate. On the one hand, as administrators (upper level managers) they are positioned within the SJSU bureaucracy to be able to see

“problems” from a structural perspective. As administrators they are privy to the politics, negotiations, and compromises that constitute the business of running this university. On the other hand, as administrators of only *one* of the 23 campuses that compose the California State University system, they see themselves as having limited authority to effect policy that might ameliorate some of the problems they perceive. At the same time, at the local level they are held accountable -- by faculty, staff, and students – for the acts and actions that constitute the running of this university. The campus climate *as experienced* by these administrators reflects this paradox.

### **Administrative Campus Climate: “Pot Shots and Appreciation”**

*“And so, you know, we really do live in the world both ways, we get the pot shots and we also lots of appreciation for the small things that are done that are actually just sort of civil in terms of listening and interacting”* (Female Administrator).

San José State University operates as a bureaucratic hierarchy with those at the top holding the most institutional responsibility, overseeing the greatest number of employees, and generally receiving higher compensation than those below.<sup>36</sup> Responsibility, power, and compensation operate to legitimate managerial authority. This legitimated authority is necessary to the successful functioning of social institutions (Blau 1967). The authority endemic to administrative positions is, therefore, located within the positions, and not necessarily within the personalities of those who occupy them. However, in the day-to-day life of any organization *the perception* of power is transitory – sometimes it resides in the person and sometimes in the larger bureaucratic structure.

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<sup>36</sup> See <http://www.sjsu.edu/president/admin/orgcharts/> for the University’s Organizational Chart

For the administrators in our focus group this confusion over the locus of power sometimes resulted in them being recipients of negative commentary. As one administrator shared:

*“My sense is that there’s a ton of anger that’s floating around and if we’re dealing with political correctness, administrators don’t count and so, it’s almost like it’s a permissible way to make negative comments and-- but I don’t think in general that they’re actually directing it to people, because somehow it becomes an entity, not people. ... and, then people will sort of say, “Well, I didn’t really mean to pick on a person.” But still, they wanted to have-- it’s this kind of thing where there’s some invisibility that people occupy administrative jobs, and you know, I’m not sure how much people-- because it is that kind of entity that people are pushing back at . I don’t feel like people are picking on me, but they really are picking on this kind of entity.”*

Here the administrator highlights the problems that occur when the “entity” that is the university gets conflated with the “people” who “occupy administrative jobs.” The erasure of humanity from the institutional positions creates the opportunity for people to engage in behavior that might otherwise be seen as unacceptable. In this case, the administrator goes on to describe what happens when administrators become entities:

*“...so negative comments can be expressed, say, in a room like this with not the sense that they’re actually sort of zapping the administrator or few administrators in the room, but freely saying things in a very negative way. And part of it might just be because of the sort of overwhelming frustration, but the-- willingness to sort of jump on something that might be an error, the willingness to quickly fire off an email that’s just sort of “blah blah blah” that’s really caustic, you know? And so hurtful.”*

This sense of invisibility creates a dilemma for administrators whose jobs are often bound by rules of confidentiality. As another administrator explained:

*“It’s an interesting feeling to be sitting at a meeting and have people maligning the administration, and kind of feel invisible. It’s-- like, maybe I was part of the decision, or connected to the person who made that decision, and-- you know, made in confidence, so it’s kind of like okay, so do I defend that decision? Do I let it go? Do I explain it? It’s often an awkward time. And, do I want to choose to be invisible at that moment that they’re acting as though I am invisible? It reminds me a little bit of being Jewish, because sometimes people will say anti-Semitic comments and not realize I’m Jewish—and do I step up at that time?”*

For the administrators in our study, campus climate can, at times, be characterized as hostile. And though for most it is not seen as personal, at times – most especially during economically challenging times – the attacks can get personal:

*“It’s almost as if you have to do everything perfect because you’re constantly being watched all the time by people. So if there is anything wrong they can jump on it and say, “Look what that administrator did.” But I’m also starting to feel this year that it’s even gotten more personal. That it’s not so much-- whereas in the past, it did seem to be more the large-- you know, administration as this huge entity, but now I’m actually starting to hear from employees where it’s specific people, you know. And especially when you get into things like salaries, where people are getting salary cuts, or talking about layoffs and things like that. It’s getting negative.”*

Clearly this is not a situation unique to San José State. During economic hard times, when laying-off employees becomes “necessary,” someone has to take responsibility for laying

them off. To those whose jobs are threatened, the distinction between the person handing you the pink slip and the person who drafted the pink lip, is often immaterial. Dealing with the emotional lives of employees is part of the ‘labor’ of being an administrator (Hochschild 1983). The administrators we studied knew this to be part of their responsibility and could see beyond it such that they were able to do their jobs:

*“And one of the-- almost necessary parts of this is that all the people don’t express themselves as civilly as they should. But-- they have to let you know what’s wrong with the organization, because you’re in a position often times to correct it. So, that’s where a lot of this flack is coming from. And you probably all experienced the student or the faculty member that comes in raving, and when you do the smallest little thing to correct their problem-- or just call somebody, or direct them where they need to go and then-- you know, they’ll do a complete 180. They’ll come back and say, “Thank you for that. I know-- I appreciate it. I was at my wits end in this bureaucracy trying to figure out how to get this done. You know, can you help me, can you listen to me-- whatever.” So it’s-- and it goes with the territory.”*

This comment exemplifies the understanding that being in management necessitates handling the “potshots” and also highlights the part of their administrative duties that bring the greatest rewards for the people we studied: the opportunities to help others. As one administrator commented, and several others concurred:

Male Administrator 1: *“I feel valued when as administrator I can cut this red tape with somebody, and I can give them the answer and help them with it-- and there is a thank you. And-- that’s a good feeling”*

Male Administrator 2: *“That’s the most rewarding part of the job.”*

Female Administrator 1: *“It is, absolutely.”*

Taking into account the larger entity of the CSU, of which San José State University is only a part, positions the administrators we studied as “middle managers.” Responsible to uphold the bureaucratic decisions (the “red tape) generated by the Chancellors office, the Governor, and the voters of California, these administrators are challenged to appease two very different – and often conflicted-- constituencies. While their work sometimes leaves them feeling invisible and unappreciated from those below, there are also those times when they feel less than valued from above.

### **Feeling Under-Valued by CSU**

The administrator focus group session was conducted in November 2009 in the midst of economic upheaval in California and in the rest of the country. During this time the California State University System was laying-off employees at all 23 CSU campuses. In response to the question, “Tell us about a time when you felt your identity as an MPP was NOT valued/ appreciated by SJSU?” the discussion centered on the circumstances surrounding these layoffs. Two main concerns arose from this discussion, first was the incredulity of administrators whose employees received letters regarding potential layoffs without the administrators ever having been notified that the letters were coming:

Administrator 1: *“... the people that work for me got this letter, and I had no idea that this letter was going out to them.”*

Administrator 2: *“Exactly. We had to have an emergency, a quick meeting to tell us about how to respond after that letter that came out.”*

The second concern had to do with the instruction they did receive after the notice went out to employees:

*“After the notice that went out to union folks a couple of weeks ago, our division held a meeting with all MPP’s and supervisors telling-- kind of instructing us and giving us information on how to respond to our staff about that particular letter and then what was to come down the pike. But nobody addressed our position. Nobody said anything to the rest of us-- who’s going to take care of us? How does our manager talk to us about the way we’re feeling about our positions. And-- it was very shaky amongst my colleagues and my peers that we could be let go at any time, but our staff could be here for 90 more days after they get notice, and their job is a little bit more secure. Many of the MPP’s in our division are feeling that way, especially since we’re all so busy and working. Unless we have a one on one, or a meeting with our managers, we don’t see them much, so we’re not getting that touchy-feely thank you kind of support as much as we’re supposed to give our staff. So, it’s-- that’s how I took the question to be.”*

And finally, for the one administrator that said his division *was instructed* on the possibility of MPP layoffs, his experience was not one that left him “feeling valued”:

*“[In response to the question of feeling valued] I immediately thought about being valued by the CSU University as a whole. One thing that made the MPPs in [the Division] feel a little bit less valued by the CSU recently was a meeting with the HR department where, you know, the MPP’s were told “You could be laid off without any notice, without any kind of severance package...”*

### **Issues of Discrimination**

As with the other focus groups, we asked this group a specific question based on findings from the 2006 Campus Climate Survey. Toward the end of our focus group session, we asked:

*“In the last campus climate survey, we found that 30% of female administrators and 50% of GLBT administrators and Latino and African Americans reported experiencing discrimination based on gender or race or ethnicity or sexual orientation. To what extent does this finding kind of resonate with your experience of other-- of yourself, or of other administrators that you have interacted with?”*

The initial response to the question was silence. The moderators (there were two of us) then offered five “prompt” comments to initiate a response. Only two of the administrators ultimately responded to the question – both of whom were white and straight. They both responded that they had not seen such discrimination, but were empathetic, *“I don’t-- I haven’t experienced that. Haven’t seen it myself or in any of my coworkers. But at the same time it saddens me to hear it, that it’s there, that it was reported.”* They also indicated that “not seeing” such discrimination did not mean it was not there: *“I feel like I don’t see it, and when I talk to people at times I’ve heard them report it. So, and I realize that I-- it may not have been in my purview or I may have been blind to it.”* There is a plethora of research that supports the notion that those in “non-target” positions are often unaware of discrimination experienced by those in “target” positions (Alfred 2001, Lewis 2004, A. Hurtado 1996). From these few comments the discussion then segued onto an analysis of the question itself (the original survey question) and how it might have been worded in such a way as to reflect experiences of discrimination that occurred 10-15 years ago, not currently.

During this discussion, there were gay people in the room and there were people of color in the room – none of whom responded to the question. While it is impossible to assess what “silence” means – whether it reflects ‘no response’ or ‘too much of one’ – given the findings from the GLBT faculty and staff focus group and the faculty and staff of color focus groups, the

latter explanation seems more probable. Perhaps the silence represented one more moment of “self-censorship” endemic to the position of responsibility felt by those “in charge.”

*“I think as an administrator, you do a lot of self-censorship. You know, you ask of yourself, ‘are you free to speak up?’ Yes and no-- I don’t feel fearful about speaking up, but I know it’s unwise in a lot of situations. You say what you think, people will think that represents the [official] position. You have to always be mindful of the role that you’re playing and the fact that you represent the university. Otherwise, I’d always tell people what I thought.”*

**Appendix A**  
**Sample Interview Schedules**

## Faculty of Color Focus Group Questions

### Introductory comments:

*Thank you all for agreeing to participate in this focus group on your experiences as [African American, Asian American, Latino faculty/staff on this campus. We want to assure you that your discussion today is confidential. None of you will be identifiable - nor will this group be named – in any future write up of our research. **Hand out Consent forms.** We also want to remind you to treat everything that gets shared in today’s session as confidential. We will be recording the session and my assistant will be taking notes to assure that we get the most accurate representation of your thoughts.*

*I have some general questions to prompt the discussion today, but I really want you to think of this experience as a conversation between all of you. We are interested on getting a wide range of thoughts on these issues. Please feel free to talk to one another, ask each other questions, and even disagree with one another. Where it is appropriate (and not obvious) it would be helpful if you could frame your comments in reference to being a staff member, or faculty.*

- What have your experiences been like as a \_\_\_\_\_ at SJSU? Describe this for us. (grand tour question; description of experiences, details, context, the “how”)
- Tell us about a time when you felt your identity as a \_\_\_\_\_ was valued/appreciated by SJSU (or here at SJSU – is it the institutional treatment we are looking at; or the social relations/treatment that are part of the institution but also involve other factors?) (their interpretation of the “positive aspects”; how they deem “positive treatment” of their identity)
- Tell us about a time when you felt your identity as a \_\_\_\_\_ was NOT valued/appreciated by SJSU (or here at SJSU). (their interpretation of the “negative aspects”; how they deem “negative treatment” of their identity)
- How would you describe your interactions on campus? In class? W/staff? Other students? Professors?
- Do you feel “safe” (intellectually, physically) in your own departments, colleges? (free to express yourself)
- Have you ever experienced sexual harassment on campus?
- What would you like to see SJSU do to improve the experiences of all \_\_\_\_\_? (request for their ideas of responsive action; using identity as expertise)

## LGBT Faculty/Staff Focus Group Questions

### Introductory comments:

*Thank you all for agreeing to participate in this focus group on your experiences as LGBT faculty/staff on this campus. We want to assure you that your discussion today is confidential. None of you will be identifiable - nor will this group be named – in any future write up of our research. **Hand out Consent forms.** We also want to remind you to treat everything that gets shared in today's session as confidential. We will be recording the session and my assistant will be taking notes to assure that we get the most accurate representation of your thoughts.*

*I have some general questions to prompt the discussion today, but I really want you to think of this experience as a conversation between all of you. We are interested on getting a wide range of thoughts on these issues. Please feel free to talk to one another, ask each other questions, and even disagree with one another. Where it is appropriate (and not obvious) it would be helpful if you could frame your comments in reference to being a staff member, or faculty.*

### LGBT Faculty/Staff Focus Group Questions

- What have your experiences been like as a \_\_\_\_\_ at SJSU? Describe this for us.
- Tell us about a time when you felt your identity as a \_\_\_\_\_ was valued/appreciated by SJSU (or here at SJSU).
- Tell us about a time when you felt your identity as a \_\_\_\_\_ was NOT valued/appreciated by SJSU (or here at SJSU).
- How would you describe your interactions on campus? W/ other staff? With other faculty, with students? With administration/management?
- 25% of gay, lesbian, or bisexual faculty and 46.2% of gay, lesbian, or bisexual staff reported that they were discriminated against “occasionally” or “frequently” because of their sexual orientation. How would you explain those statistics? Have any of you experienced discrimination because of your sexual orientation, or gender presentation?
- 55% of glb faculty and 25% of glb staff reported feeling uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientation on campus. How would you explain that statistic? Are you “out” (on campus, with other faculty, co-workers, student, administrators)? If not, why not?
- Do you feel “safe” (intellectually, physically) in your own departments, colleges, in your work environments? (free to express yourself)?
- 15 % of staff and 27% of GLB faculty reported that they personally experienced sexual harassment at SJSU. How would you explain this statistic? Have you ever experienced sexual harassment on campus?
- What would you like to see SJSU do to improve the experiences of all \_\_\_\_\_? (request for their ideas of responsive action; using identity as expertise)

## MPP Focus Group Questions

### Introductory comments:

*Thank you all for agreeing to participate in this focus group on your experiences as MPPs on this campus. We want to assure you that your discussion today is confidential. None of you will be identifiable in any future write up of our research. **Hand out Consent forms.** We also want to remind you to treat everything that gets shared in today's session as confidential. We will be recording the session and my assistant will be taking notes to assure that we get the most accurate representation of your thoughts.*

*I have some general questions to prompt the discussion today, but I really want you to think of this experience as a conversation between all of you. We are interested on getting a wide range of thoughts on these issues. Please feel free to talk to one another, ask each other questions, and even disagree with one another.*

*We have developed two sets of questions to ask you tonight. As some of you know we have been conducting campus climate focus groups with various groups of students, faculty and staff over the past year and a half. In these groups we have been asking them about their experiences at SJSU as African American, Latino, White, Asian American, gay, lesbian, and transgender faculty, staff, students and lecturers. So in our first set of questions we want to get your impressions on the campus climate for each of these groups, and in the second half of the focus group we want to know more specifically about your own experiences working on this campus.*

### General Campus Climate Questions:

This set of question relates to specific groups on campus – we really want your impressions as campus leaders. If however, you are also a member of any of these groups please feel free to respond also from your member's perspective.

### Faculty of color, Women Faculty & Staff, Lecturers, LGBT Faculty & staff, Students of color, LGBT students

- How do you perceive the overall campus climate for \_\_\_\_\_.
- Describe an incident/interaction that you think represents an experience of \_\_\_\_\_ being valued/appreciated by SJSU.
- Describe an incident/interaction when you that you think represents an experience of \_\_\_\_\_ NOT being valued/appreciated by SJSU.

### MMP Questions

- What have your experiences been like as a \_\_\_\_\_ at SJSU? Describe this for us.
- Tell us about a time when you felt your identity as a \_\_\_\_\_ was valued/appreciated by SJSU (or here at SJSU).
- Tell us about a time when you felt your identity as a \_\_\_\_\_ was NOT valued/appreciated by SJSU (or here at SJSU).

- How would you describe your interactions on campus? W/ other administrators/ managers? With faculty, with students, with staff? With people outside the university?
- This year – and next – are very stressful and unique in the history of this university – how has your experience of the climate changed as a result of the economic crisis?
- Do you feel “safe” (intellectually, physically) in your work environments? (free to express yourself)?
- In the last campus climate survey we found that 30% of female administrators and 50% of GLBT administrators and Latino and African Americans reported experiencing discrimination based on gender or race or ethnicity or sexual orientation. To what extent does this finding kind of resonate with your experience of yourself, or of other administrators that you have interacted with?
- What would you like to see SJSU do to improve the experiences of all \_\_\_\_\_? (request for their ideas of responsive action; using identity as expertise)

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