Research Article

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Deciding Together as Faculty: Narratives of Unanticipated Consequences in Gendered and Racialized Departmental Service, Promotion, and Voting

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Abstract: Workplace inequalities scholarship often assumes making people aware of problems will lead to change, although gendered and racialized organizations theories show systemic problems beyond individual awareness. Still, not enough research analyzes the narratives of savvy organizational actors – like university faculty aware of inequalities – to understand the mechanisms operating against leveraging that knowledge for change. Data consist of 10 group interviews with 45 faculty across departments in one US public university, supplemented by content analysis of 56 departments’ written bylaws. Findings focus on three common shared decisions: committee service, hiring/promotion, and voting practices. We find awareness of inequality may actually reinforce the status quo when narratives about gendered and racialized processes feature decoupling from formal bylaws, and when narratives about outcomes relate to multiple layers of unanticipated consequences favoring whiteness and men. Specifically, inequality is reproduced when narratives about gendered and racialized unanticipated consequences: 1) highlight the imperiousness of change, as in the difficulty of allocating service work equitably, 2) lack reflexivity and shift responsibility to ‘other’ groups – ‘faculty’ or ‘administrators’ – as in unequal hiring and promotion decisions, and 3) focus on standard old boy stories which obscure other inequalities, as in faculty voting where non-tenure track rank inequality obscures race/gender inequalities. When unanticipated consequences

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narratives have dimensions of fatalism, finger pointing, and blindness to intersectionality, white men may continue to benefit. This study shows how formal policies and awareness of inequalities may still fail to produce change.

**Keywords:** decoupling; faculty governance; gender equity; intersectionality; racial equity; unanticipated consequences

1 **Introduction**

During one of our faculty focus groups, Samantha,¹ a white woman full professor, gave an example of what inequality in her department’s decision-making process looks like. The formal hiring process was meant to promote faculty diversity, including a job ad that prioritized hiring in a subfield with more women PhDs. Yet an informal clique of tenured white men faced no barriers to going around formal governance channels. She said:

> We’re supposed to be hiring for one thing. And these guys are like, ‘Well, no, it should be this other thing.’ And despite the job ad they will push through their agenda. And the dean’s office doesn’t stop them, which is something that really bothers me. So, there is a general high level of dissatisfaction… and this has been going on for as long as I’ve been here, so we haven’t made any progress in solving that problem.

Samantha expressed frustration with durable inequalities which appeared immune to formal departmental governance processes. Like Samantha, faculty participants across our study demonstrated a critical awareness of gendered and racialized inequalities in shared decision-making.

An underlying assumption of much work on gender and racial equity in workplaces is that making people aware of the problems will lead to change (Nelson and Zippel 2021). Yet this assumption is misguided, as awareness alone seldom creates institutional change. Organizational sociology has made strides in theorizing how organizations themselves are gendered and racialized, pointing to systemic problems beyond individual awareness (Acker 2006; Wajcman 2004; Wingfield and Alston 2014; Wooten and Couloute 2017). Still, not enough empirical work has analyzed the narratives of savvy organizational actors – like faculty with some level of critical consciousness – to understand the organizational mechanisms operating against leveraging that knowledge for change. Our study fills a gap in previous work on gendered and racialized organizations by demonstrating how qualitative analysis of inequality narratives can help us develop theory in important ways; this paper focuses on a new conceptualization of an old concept: unanticipated consequences.

¹ All names of people and organizations are pseudonyms to protect respondent confidentiality.
We frame our findings employing two classic organizational theory concepts: decoupling (e.g. Meyer and Rowan 1977) and unanticipated consequences (e.g. Selznick 1949). Faculty’s decoupling narratives highlight the process by which informal decision-making practices expose a large gap with the formal written bylaws. Faculty’s unanticipated consequences narratives center the outcomes of racialized and gendered decision-making. For savvy organizational actors aware of gendered and racialized inequalities, we develop a new definition of unanticipated consequences narratives as intersubjective agreements that formal organizational goals have been subverted in some meaningful and unexpected way.

In the United States context, higher education organizations vary (Brint 2022). Our study focuses on the corner of US higher education populated by state-funded (public) research universities where faculty are represented by labor unions. We interrogate the durable inequalities among faculty in this US higher education context, where much effort and resources are expended on increasing gender and racial equity (Bozeman and Gaughan 2011; van den Brink and Benschop 2012). By durable inequalities, we mean persistent systematic inequalities in life chances based on categorical distinctions including gender and race (Tilly 1998). In addition to hiring/promotion decisions, faculty also discussed service work and voting practices as two other routine decision sites for organizational inequalities.

Women faculty of color often cannot refuse extra demands for advising and service work relative to white men coworkers because mentoring aligns with personally held values to center historically marginalized groups. Women more often face the invisible labor of caring for organizations (Trotter 2020). Differential institutional expectations of faculty by race and gender block career paths in a racialized/gendered setting designed for and by white men (Hirshfield and Joseph 2012; Melaku 2022). For example, Moore (2017) writes, “As a young Black woman who believed in ‘lift as we climb’ and ‘each one teach one,’ I saw many of these activities as part of a social responsibility I owed to the many marginalized groups that claimed me in their membership. What I failed to realize was that I lacked a concrete plan for how to advance in the academy while also performing this type of service work”

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2 Although there are field differences, the US has seen a sea change in gender representation of PhD recipients over several decades, and a more recent rise in racial diversity of PhDs. Although 46% of US doctoral recipients are women, and 14% are Black, Latinx or Native American (NSF 2021), durable inequalities remain among faculty, especially in research universities. While women earned enough PhDs in the life sciences to have gender parity since the 1990s (Schiebinger 1999; Smith-Doerr 2004), women still hold only 30% of the tenured positions at 4-year institutions (NSF 2021). An educational and career ‘pipeline’ cannot explain this outcome (Branch 2016; Smith-Doerr 2011).
Routine practices inadvertently produce patterned, intersectional differences among faculty when individuals follow established organizational norms. To study how narratives about unanticipated consequences in democratic governance reproduce durable inequalities among university faculty, we focus on departments. In almost all US universities, faculty act autonomously in departments to determine performance standards, collectively deciding on colleagues’ tenure and promotion, and annual merit pay raises (AAUP 2021). However, compared to individual unconscious bias, the relationship of shared decision-making processes to equity remains understudied in higher education (Nelson and Zippel 2021). Shared decision-making is a kind of collaboration experienced by faculty in unequal ways (Misra et al. 2017).

Our data consist of 10 group interviews with 45 faculty across various university departments, supplemented by content analysis of 56 departments’ written by-laws. We asked groups of 4–6 faculty members about their department’s actual procedures of decision-making, including where participants perceived that processes deviate from the formal bylaws in ways to include or exclude women faculty and faculty of color. Focus groups never included faculty from the same departments, so the conversations (held as videocalls in 2021–2022) created fertile space for faculty to compare and react to norms in other departments.

This faculty sample produced narratives readily showing awareness of gendered and racialized inequalities in departmental decision-making. Yet these narratives are not associated with disrupting durable inequalities. We find awareness of inequality may actually reinforce the status quo in organizations when narratives about gendered and racialized processes feature decoupling from formal bylaws, and when narratives about outcomes are related to multiple layers of unanticipated consequences favoring whiteness and men. Specifically, inequality is reproduced when narratives about gendered and racialized unanticipated consequences: 1) highlight the imperviousness of change, as in the difficulty of making service work allocation decisions more equitable, 2) lack reflexivity about organizational positions and shift responsibility to the ‘other’ group – either ‘faculty’ or ‘administrators’ – as in narratives on unequal hiring and promotion decisions, and 3) focus on standard old boy stories which may obscure inequalities outside the model, as with narratives on faculty voting where non-tenure track rank inequalities obscure race/gender inequalities. When unanticipated consequences narratives

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3 Sociologists have studied and critiqued performative diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in organizations, including higher education (Berrey 2015; Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006). Our focus is not on formal DEI programs but on organizational routines, and how critically conscious faculty make sense of decoupling of decision-making from formal bylaws and gendered/racialized unanticipated consequences. Our analysis speaks to what happens when “strategic diversity plans” come into contact with the backstage decision-making of faculty governance.
contain dimensions of fatalism, finger pointing, and blindness to intersectionality, white men may continue to benefit if narratives tend to diffuse collective action by organizational members aware of racialized and gendered systems. Our qualitative study shows how formal policies and awareness of inequalities may still fail to produce change in gendered and racialized organizations.

2 Approaching Organizations Intersectionally

Our analyses draw on two classic concepts from organizational theory—decoupling and unanticipated consequences. We view decoupling and unanticipated consequences as concepts that go hand in hand but are analytically distinct. Decoupling is about the process of creating gaps that distance informal practice from formal rules. Unanticipated consequences are about the outcomes of informal organization, including decoupling.

In their foundational definition of decoupling, Meyer and Rowan (1977) note how rules function as myths for the environment that provide organizations with resources, legitimacy, and stability. But internally within organizations, activities become decoupled from the mythic rules. Another key concept in the sociological study of informal organization is unanticipated or unintended consequences (Merton 1936). Selznick (1949) pointed to the most common unanticipated consequence: when the informal organization modifies the organization’s formal goals. Selznick demonstrated this point in analyzing the Depression Era federal Tennessee Valley Authority project, where the formal goals included a “grass roots” local approach to forest conservation and supporting poor farmers, but cooptation of the TVA by national agribusiness interests led to goals in their favor. So, while the concept of unanticipated consequences always contained analyses of power (Gouldner 1954; Selznick 1949), institutional theory largely has failed to consider race or gender as systems of power in organizational life. In other words, institutional theory has taken class into account, but does not delve into how organizations like universities themselves are masculine and white spaces (Anderson and Colyvas 2021; Wooten 2015).

Hence, we turn to theories of gendered and racialized organizations, to develop an intersectional conceptualization of decoupling and unanticipated consequences.

4 Parvin and Pollock (2020) make a compelling case for using the original term “unanticipated consequences” rather than “unintended consequences,” noting that unintended consequences has come to be a catch-all term “used to dismiss vital ethical and political concerns.” It has all but replaced unanticipated consequences (De Zwart 2015). In the spirit of re-inhabiting institutions, and attending to power inequalities, we return to the original term.
Black feminist scholars (Collins 1990; Hooks 1984) remind us how consequences serving powerful organizational actors also serve the systems of gendered and racialized inequalities. The general lack of attention to racialized and gendered oppression in organizational theory (Acker 2006; Ray 2019; Wingfield 2019), necessitates intersectional theory.

2.1 An Intersectional Lens on Decoupling and Unanticipated Consequences

Central to an intersectional approach to organizations is understanding how race and gender create concrete obstacles for women of color, including their experiences confronting systemic gendered racism (Melaku 2022; Wingfield 2019), that creates a system of oppression reflecting multiple, “intersecting” forms of discrimination (Collins 1990; Crenshaw 1990). For example, Black women working in white organizations must perform additional labor that is unrecognized and uncompensated (Abad 2019; Hirshfield and Joseph 2012; Melaku 2022). While racism has become more subtle through colorblind racist ideology (Bonilla-Silva 1997), organizations remain racialized in their structures, hierarchies, and processes to privilege whites over marginalized racial groups (Ray 2019; Wingfield and Alston 2014; Wooten and Couloute 2017). Organizations also rest on assumptions of gender difference to favor men while marginalizing women, with practices, processes, and meanings reproducing “inequality regimes” of gender, race, and class (Acker 1990, 2006). Organizations are not neutral, and even those publicly affirming commitments to diversity utilize routine organizational practices that maintain racial-gender hierarchies advantaging white men over people of color and white women (Berrey 2015; Melaku 2022; Wooten and Couloute 2017).

Although decoupling might sometimes unfold in ways that moderate the harmful effects of intersecting inequalities (e.g. Mueller 2017; Turco 2012), most scholarship points to how decoupling is racialized (Ray 2019) and gendered (Acker 1990) in ways that disadvantage minoritized organizational members. “Objective” rules might be enforced in ways that perpetuate white advantage (Ray 2019), and anti-discrimination policies often lack effective enforcement mechanisms (Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006; Roscigno, Garcia, Bobbit-Zeher 2007). Bias can infiltrate formal institutional procedures to disadvantage women such as in hiring or pay decisions, when informal reliance on personal connections reproduces gender inequalities in networks (Nielsen 2016; Roth 2006). In the most extreme cases of “bureaucratic harassment,” formal rules may be purposefully manipulated by individuals with institutional power to undermine colleagues’ careers and cause harm to those with less power, including women of all races (Bonnes 2017).
Decoupling leads to many “unanticipated consequences” that are both gendered and racialized, such as when anti-discrimination policies provide cover for the very discriminatory practices they create (Byron and Roscigno 2014; Castilla and Benard 2010), or when organizations shift responsibility for improving diversity onto a few Black professionals, rather than devoting appropriate resources (Wingfield 2019). Given the entrenched, overlapping systems of racial and gender inequality, decoupling and these unanticipated consequences may create the strongest barriers for women of color in organizations.

While the development of theories of gendered and racialized organizations have been an enormous step forward in our understanding of workplace inequalities, what still needs further development in this literature is an intersectional lens that focuses on organizational members who are aware of inequalities. How do introspective organizational actors understand decoupling and unanticipated consequences? This study centers the perceptions of such people in a higher education context, and how their narratives characterize both the process (decoupling of decision-making practices from bylaws) and the outcomes (unanticipated consequences of faculty governance) as gendered and racialized. Thus, our conceptualization of unanticipated consequences in this study focuses on perception; how critically conscious faculty collectively perceive the outcomes of faculty governance. We define unanticipated consequences narratives as intersubjective understanding of how formal policies and goals of written guidelines (i.e. the anticipated consequences) are subverted in gendered and racialized ways. What we find surprising and concerning from our analysis is how these very narratives—about routine decoupling from formal written rules and unanticipated consequences—may reinforce the white, masculine status quo. We analyze narratives about routine faculty governance in three common types of work that came up in our data: shared decisions about service work, hiring/promotion, and voting guidelines.

### 2.2 Inequalities in University Service, Promotion, and Voting

We draw on literatures about inequalities in higher education to show how white privilege has many “unanticipated consequences” for faculty and students of color. Most U.S. universities are white institutional spaces (Smith 2016; Wooten and Couloute 2017), defined by the historical and continuous absence of Black women (Berrey 2015; Melaku and Beeman 2023; Wooten 2015) and guided by white, masculine ideals (Hart 2016; Hirshfield and Joseph 2012). Universities are also decentralized, with disjuncture between university, college, and department levels, and between formally stated and informally reinforced expectations. This “incongruous” bureaucratic structure of universities allows stubborn racial and gender inequalities
to persist, with faculty members of color and white women faculty more likely to experience ambiguities as they navigate organizations (Bird 2011; Lisnic, Anna, and Morimoto 2019; Matthew 2016; Moore et al. 2010; Wooten and Couloute 2017). In this section, we briefly outline the literature on the intersectional inequalities in three types of faculty decision-making: service, promotion, and voting.

2.2.1 Service

Despite formal expectations of shared workloads among faculty, it is well-established that women faculty members perform disproportionate shares of service, including mentoring students and colleagues (Bird 2011; O’Meara et al. 2017). This “institutional housekeeping” is necessary for organizations to function but creates an “ivory ceiling” on women’s careers as they spend less time on research – labor highly valued in promotion procedures, especially at research-intensive universities (Misra et al. 2011). Women faculty of color face extra service demands relative to white and men coworkers (Griffin and Reddick 2011; Moore 2017; Turner 2002). While women of color value this work as rewarding for aligning with their personal and professional goals to center historically marginalized groups, they also recognize that their departments are less likely to formally credit this important work in evaluation systems that instead reward white men (Misra et al. 2021). The simultaneous pressures to carry on service work and devaluation of faculty activities outside of “core” responsibilities reflect gendered and racialized biases. Workload differences among faculty are linked to greater career dissatisfaction, lower retention, and longer time to promotion (Bird 2011; Misra et al. 2011).

2.2.2 Promotion

Universities conform to the rationalized myth of meritocratic evaluations of faculty, where tenure and promotion come to the “best and brightest” (Nielsen 2016). Formalized evaluation processes using “objective” measures of excellence (i.e. quantifiable counts of high-status publications and external awards) emerged in the 1990s as higher education institutions responded to calls to reform systems that relied on vague tenure requirements that frequently created room for biases privileging white and men faculty (Mickey, Misra, and Clark 2023). The current evaluation system, designed to improve transparency and equity, still reflects gendered and racialized biases, with several unanticipated consequences emerging (Rosser 2007; Stewart and Valian 2018). Prioritizing quantifiable outputs, for example, disadvantages faculty doing community engaged or social justice research, often faculty of color (Settles et al. 2021). Collaboration fosters research output, but white women and faculty of color are often excluded from highly productive,
high-status academic networks (Gaughan, Melkers, and Welch 2018). Barriers to informal networks, mentors, and collaborations may further limit women’s access to institutional knowledge necessary for career success, including the “hidden truths” of tenure and promotion (Brown-Glaude 2010; Fox 2015; Matthew 2016). Women faculty of color are often dissatisfied with evaluations of their work and do not believe tenure decisions are consistent (Lisnic, Anna, and Morimoto 2019).

2.2.3 Voting

Inequalities in faculty shared governance and departmental voting procedures have been much less empirically explored than inequalities in either faculty service or promotion processes. White men are overrepresented among university decision-makers who implement departmental and campus-wide policies, while people of color are more likely to be in middle levels (faculty) and bottom tiers (support staff, custodial services) (Sturm 2006). The small numbers of women of color in academic positions may obscure their view of decision-making processes because of exclusion from informal circles (Lisnic, Anna, and Morimoto 2019; Matthew 2016). Bias can emerge in contexts when decision-makers have ambiguous information, and decentralized decision-making structures create disconnections between formally stated rules and informally reinforced expectations (Bird 2011; Sturm 2006). Women faculty members and faculty of color voice dismay over their lack of influence, lack of transparency around pay decisions, and unequal access to decision makers and governance opportunities (Brown 2017).

What we know from the extensive literature on gendered and racialized service work and hiring and promotion inequalities in higher education is knowledge with which our savvy organizational actors have some familiarity. Our paper fills a missing gap in the literature by focusing on faculty narratives incorporating this knowledge, with a focus on understudied faculty governance. We see how narratives about decoupling and unanticipated consequences as gendered and racialized become routine and may themselves be mechanisms contributing to the durability of intersectional inequalities.

3 Research Design

3.1 The Setting: Faculty Shared Decision-Making

We conducted this research at a research-intensive, public university in the northeastern United States with a total student enrollment of approximately 30,000, and approximately 1500 faculty, about 75% of whom are in the tenure system. At the time
of study, the university consisted of 60 departments across nine schools/colleges. The university serves a majority white student population, and the faculty has been slow to diversify, with approximately 50% of the faculty identifying as women and 26% as African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American (ALANA), with Asian faculty the largest underrepresented minority group. Across the landscape of US higher education, the formal organization of faculty governance is a Weberian archetype of written rules and documentation. In our focal university, each department is required to have their unique set of written bylaws publicly on file with the provost’s office after review by the administration and faculty union (to ensure bylaws do not contradict university level rules or contracts). Informal practice varies widely, with 48 of 60 departments making their bylaws publicly available. Among our sample of 45 faculty members, 8% of individuals had never heard of bylaws; 40% know bylaws exist but do not use them; 45% both had heard of and use bylaws; and the remaining 7% did not comment on their familiarity. Regardless of their familiarity with departmental bylaws, all respondents engaged in shared decision-making and departmental governance.

3.2 Data and Methods

We conducted 10 focus group interviews with a total of 45 faculty members from January 2021 to January 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic necessarily drove a shift to online focus groups, but we discovered value in this method. Online focus group interviews proved convenient as well as a comfortable space to share experiences (Morgan and Spanish 1985; Smithson 2007). Faculty participants voiced freely their experiences with decision-making in their department and perceptions on how inclusive the practices are for white women and faculty of color.

Groups ranged from four to six participants. Faculty members were invited to participate via email, with an eye toward including participants of diverse rank, discipline, gender, and race. Sampling was purposive, and initial recruitment focused on individuals involved in university service focused on faculty equity, to include faculty members with some level of critical consciousness. Once they agreed to participate, respondents were sent an email explaining the research project and to schedule an interview date. Participants were assured that all names and identifying information would be altered to protect confidentiality, and faculty members from the same department were never placed in the same group. The sample represents 37 different departments from all schools/colleges at the university.

Sampling aimed to maximize faculty engagement over shared identities and experiences; out of the 10 groups, seven included participants with similar backgrounds by gender, race, or rank. We oversampled for women faculty, faculty of
color, and non-tenure-track faculty. Designing focus groups by shared identities is a common sampling approach (Kitzinger 1994). Voices of minoritized participants can be muted in groups including white men. We matched the focus group facilitator to participants by gender, race, or rank (to the extent possible). Groups designed around differences can also provide insights into diverging experiences (Myers 1998), and the remaining three group interviews included participants who varied by gender, race, and rank. Women comprised 25 of the 45 respondents. The racial composition of respondents was 25 white, seven Black, eight Asian, two Latinx, and three identifying as multiracial. Eight faculty in the sample were non-tenure track lecturers, eight were chairs/heads or associate deans, with the remaining faculty at various ranks along the tenure track (see Table 1).

Questions covered topics of departmental bylaws and governance, transparency, and barriers to decision-making. Interviews each lasted approximately 1 h, held on Zoom, and recorded with permission (including automatic transcriptions). In the one interview not recorded, the research team conducted extensive field notes.

We analyzed focus group interview data using inductive, semi-open coding techniques with NVivo software. We coded discussions of various departmental decisions, and experiences with governance and voting, including challenges, discovering mismatches between faculty experiences and formal processes outlined in bylaws. Focused coding further identified unanticipated consequences. All authors collaborated on coding, and calibration revealed an inter-coder reliability score of over 90%. Throughout our analysis, we also attend to how group composition may have influenced the narratives.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of faculty focus group participants (N = 45).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Non-tenure track faculty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assistant professor</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate professor</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full professor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair/Head/Assoc Dean</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To supplement focus group data, we analyzed the formal written department bylaws of 56 departments at the university, as well as 14 additional documents departments wrote about their fields’ “cultural standards” for promotion, service expectations, and hiring. We accessed documents from the provost office website or requests to department leaders. Bylaws ranged from two to 26 pages, with most on average 10 pages. The provost’s office recommends bylaw contents, lending to a general uniformity of document structure and content, including standing committees and leadership, and procedures for faculty meetings, hiring, reappointment, tenure and promotion, and bylaw amendments. There is a great deal of administrative oversight, with departments instructed to avoid subjects primarily within the purview of chairs/heads (e.g. budget, teaching schedules, and space allocation), existing university policies, or the collective bargaining agreement with the faculty union.

Bylaws were analyzed using semi-open coding techniques in Nvivo software, focusing on personnel decisions and voting processes. Most departmental variation appears in terms of voting and committee eligibility. Given our focus on faculty equity, we coded for discussions of diversity, mentorship, transparency, or workloads. Thirty-nine of the 56 bylaws explicitly mention diversity. Intercoder reliability scores indicated over 90% consistency among researchers. Data analysis of bylaws shaped the focus group design, including the interview guide, and we presented summary findings to participants for discussion. In addition to bylaws, we reviewed many institutional documents including data on faculty representation by race and gender in different colleges, and gender and race patterns in receipt of internal grants, administrative memos, etc.

4 Results and Discussion

We first briefly discuss our findings on faculty narratives related to decision-making processes as decoupled from the written bylaws, then turn to discussion of unanticipated consequences narratives, which were more nuanced and connected to gendered and racialized outcomes in specific decision contexts of service, promotion, and voting.

4.1 Decoupling Decisions from Bylaws

Faculty across departments had a standard narrative about bylaws often being ignored in actual decision-making processes. When we asked about the use of bylaws in the focus groups, there was widespread agreement about the gaps between bylaws
and actual governance. Most of the time, faculty saw these gaps as problematic in ways that were gendered and racialized. The language that faculty used to describe these gaps between the formal documents and the process of shared decision-making ranged from “informal networks” to “monkey ass bullshit.” Table 2 displays these decoupling descriptions that were collected across all 10 focus groups.

We were reminded of Goffman’s (1961) concept of the backstage in listening to the standard faculty narrative of decoupling shared decision-making from the formal departmental rules, particularly when we heard one faculty member refer to it as “a theater of the absurd, pretending to be very transparent.”

We also heard frequently how the backstage was gendered and racialized. One type of decoupling narrative comes from a discussion of how the written tenure and promotion guidelines are interpreted in gendered and racialized ways. Most department bylaws referred to the university rules in setting out guidelines for evaluating the merit of faculty work. Implicit was the expectation of objective shared decision-making based on standard criteria. One department’s bylaws, for example, noted that the faculty review committee’s first duty is: “Be responsible for reviewing and evaluating faculty performance of instruction, research, and service. Committee decisions will be based primarily upon Standards and Criteria for Personnel Reviews, Recommendations, and Decisions.”

Yet we commonly heard in focus groups stories of gender and race biases shaping the interpretation of criteria in tenure and promotion reviews, and standards being applied differently for men and women, or for white faculty and faculty of color. These disparities in interpreting rules appear to be a kind of decoupling.

**Table 2:** Faculty descriptions of how decoupling bylaws from decision-making happens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Informal networks”</td>
<td>It’s a theater of the absurd, of pretending to be very transparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Back channeling”</td>
<td>Transparency as a “loaded word” that is “weaponized”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Dominant voting blocs”</td>
<td>Transparency is not the name of the game in a lot of ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“It’s a theater of the absurd, of pretending to be very transparent”</td>
<td>The loudest voices, carry the day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Transparency as a “loaded word” that is “weaponized””</td>
<td>Back of the envelope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Dominant voting blocs”</td>
<td>Monkey ass bullshit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Transparency is not the name of the game in a lot of ways”</td>
<td>Doublespeak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The loudest voices, carry the day”</td>
<td>Shadowy cabal of power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Back of the envelope”</td>
<td>Hidden in a cloak of uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Monkey ass bullshit”</td>
<td>Under the blanket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Doublespeak”</td>
<td>Kept in the dark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Selena, a white woman full Professor, gave a particular example of the messages that women and Black faculty receive in being told to “wait” to go up for promotion to full professor. She discusses personally being held back from promotion, and how she worried for colleagues struggling with the implicit racism and sexism in both hiring and promotion. In a different focus group, another white woman full Professor, Doris, identified the gendered and racialized processes embedded in decisions that some types of scholarship are more valuable than others. Her department was one of those that had additional, written guidelines for standards for tenure and promotion.

I think there’s so many unintentional ways that things get inequitable, and they’re not planful or thoughtful. They just happen in part [because] in our department more senior people are white and more senior people are male, and they do a certain kind of science. Our new people coming in are doing very different kinds of science or [particular kind of method]. And the discussion, the last time I was on the [review committee] of the science—which also gets connected to the person and the gender—was, I don’t know what the right word is, (pauses) frustrating. And so, we end up having these disciplinary arguments and then a whole group of people are seen as not doing as good of science. But that group of people happens to be our younger women of color group. And it turned into a challenging discussion.

While Doris was speaking, Holly, a tenured Black woman Professor, nodded her head in agreement. The senior white women faculty like Selena and Doris may be speaking from a place of relative privilege to articulate these inequalities in ways that untenured or faculty of color may not have. It is also important to note that Doris was not blaming the written standards themselves, but rather the interpretation, the ways that written standards were used differently for different groups of people. We see this as a narrative about choices made as part of a gendered and racialized process of decoupling the formal and informal organization.

4.2 Unanticipated Consequences Narratives About Gendered and Racialized Outcomes

We organize our discussion of common narratives about unanticipated consequences around three major departmental functions addressed in all bylaws documents: (1) committee service decisions; (2) hiring and promotion decisions; and (3) voting practices. We summarize the findings on unanticipated consequences narratives in Table 3, and we elaborate and provide data analysis in the following sections.
Increasingly, faculty and administrators acknowledge that service work—especially committees and task force assignments—unfairly burdens white women faculty and faculty of color (Misra et al. 2021). We examined this narrative in the context of how it arises around unanticipated consequences of faculty shared decision-making. Even when department bylaws spell out the rules there is still ambiguity about counting service. For example, one department requires: “that all tenure system faculty engage in service. NTT faculty are required to engage in service only if it is part of their assigned duties.” Still, there appears to be a lot of slippage around vague rules about engaging in service, which results in narratives about unanticipated consequences of service falling more heavily on women and faculty of color, whatever their rank.

We heard repeatedly in focus groups how the unanticipated consequences of service burdens fall on faculty unequally. While all faculty members acknowledge these unequal burdens, their narratives vary. Black women and other women of color faculty recognized that not only are they asked to do more, but also that they are asked to do more service ‘for show’ rather than serve on committees with real decision power and resources. Avery, a Black woman Assistant Professor, noted how this burden of busywork takes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faculty away from shared decision-making when it counts: “Because females and BIPOC have so much service work, they can’t be involved in decision-making in other decisions because we’re doing other things. We can’t have everyone at the table because we are so busy doing other things.”

White and Asian women faculty discussed their fear of saying no to administrators. In the same focus group Mei, an Asian woman Assistant Professor said,
“I am reluctant to say no to some service, and when the chair especially asks you to do so. And sometimes the chair could naturally think some things like collecting Christmas gifts or throwing departmental parties and those things should be done by women.” At this point, Avery raised her eyebrows at what was being said. Mei continued, “And so it would be better if we could explicitly assign some things to men, invite them to do things. Instead, we are always assigned those things that are never going to matter to our promotion in the future.”

Men faculty often noted the lack of credit for service work, especially service for increasing campus diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), and were more likely than women to call for compensation for this extra service work. Ansh, an Assistant Professor and Asian man, put it plainly:

From the university and college level there is emphasis on DEI, …and then the execution comes down to the faculty level in individual departments and invariably BIPOC faculty and others end up doing the bulk of the work. And when it comes to [faculty evaluations] invariably service is given lower weightage [sic] than research or teaching. So, if it is recognized it’s a problem, how was the university or the college or the department even dedicating additional resources to compensate for the service that these faculty are doing? Are they given extra research dollars, are they given a graduate student assistant…? No. Service is an ask without a give.

The fatalism aspect of this narrative appears as Ansh notes that “it is recognized it’s a problem.” Faculty commonly express that service imbalances have a certain imperviousness to change. In the narrative, this durable inequality persists.

In analyzing the narratives about unanticipated consequences of service allocation processes that disproportionately burden white women and faculty of color, we heard about changing awareness over time in how faculty now realize these effects are gendered and racialized. If faculty once turned a blind eye, this inequality is now more visible. At the time of this writing, the union had negotiated a new policy, with the administration’s support, requiring departments to formally review faculty service allocations by race and gender. Yet we did not hear much hope expressed that things would change.

### 4.2.2 Hiring and Promotion

While larger political economy forces are threatening faculty autonomy in many areas of university life (Brint 2022; Moore et al. 2010), in areas like hiring and promotion, US faculty still have substantial decision-making power (AAUP 2021). In our analyses of bylaws, 92 % of departments indicate that faculty representatives determine hiring decisions rather than department heads. Officially, deans of colleges make final hiring decisions, but many follow the recommendations of either the department heads or the hiring/promotion committees. Faculty narratives were
less about the decoupling from rules on this point than about the unanticipated consequences of administrative override of faculty recommendations. Not surprisingly, the administrators saw things differently.

The bureaucratic and increasingly corporatized university in the US and Europe means that administrators get ahead by taking the reins (Sorenson and Traweek 2022). One administrator opined that it may take “benevolent dictatorship” to override chairs and deans who do not uphold values of diversity and inclusion, making the case that taking the reins can be positive. In our focus groups with faculty, this ideal of administrators stepping in to uphold equity in hiring and promotion was not a general experience; in fact, we heard more about cases where administrators failed to step in for equity or acted in particularistic ways that favored the status quo, which skews white and male. For example, faculty expressed puzzlement at the appearance of named chairs and professorships in their departments without understanding the selection process. Honorific positions decided by administrators behind closed doors most often seemed to benefit white and men faculty. The most sought-after honorific fellowship on campus has disproportionately gone to men faculty over the past forty years and (until recently) did not have a transparent selection process.

In focus group discussions about administrative overrides of hiring or promotion decisions, white women and faculty of color were more often disenfranchised. Women faculty expressed more surprise than men when backstage behavior contradicts frontstage, and often talked about their concern at the lack of transparency and its effects on equity. Narratives about administrators overriding faculty decisions (or not stepping in to stop men’s bullying) more often arose in fields with greater representation of women faculty—as discussed by both men and women. In one conversation, Eva, a white woman Assistant Professor from a predominately female field, discussed her surprise at an administrator overriding their hiring decisions: “We actually didn’t have control over this within the department. ...We weren’t allowed to rank candidates [by the dean]. And [the dean] nixed some of our top candidates even after campus interviews.” At hearing this, Naomi, a tenured white woman from a male-dominated field, shook her head and looked upset as she frowned and tightly pursed her lips. Eva continued:

So those hiring decisions weren’t even at the departmental level at all. So, I thought that was interesting and I’ve never been on search committees before; I didn’t know. I mean, people were not that happy about it but...I’d be interested to know how much departments actually follow the bylaws on that front.

While further research would be useful to gauge the generalizability of this suggestive finding, the problem with studying informal organization processes is that there are few records of when decisions are administrative overrides of faculty
votes. It tracks with research in corporations that finds gender biases in policies that lack transparency (Castilla and Benard 2010).

In our analysis of the narratives about unanticipated consequences of administrators overriding faculty hiring and promotion decisions which favor white and men candidates, we see variation by organizational position. Most of our data come from the faculty member point of view, rather than from upper-level administrators. Positionality matters to how unanticipated consequences are experienced and explained.

4.2.3 Voting Practices

The fact that each faculty member gets one vote in decision-making is so taken for granted that it is not spelled out in the bylaws. What were spelled out in many departmental bylaws are rules about which faculty ranks can vote, on which decisions. Many departments only allow faculty at rank or above to vote on promotion decisions; for example, only tenured professors can vote on tenure and promotion decisions. Formal voting privileges, and often voting processes as well (ranked-choice, secret ballot, etc.), were clear in department bylaws.

The informal organization of voting has aspects of a “well known secret” like the mock no-smoking rule in Gouldner’s (1954) study. All of our faculty focus groups had robust conversations that acknowledged white men faculty are often privileged by their informal influence on votes. Participants’ reactions to this reality varied from acceptance to cynicism to outrage to despair. One white man faculty member, Finn, was in a department that he said had no bylaws and yet he thought voting was “pretty transparent.” It did not seem to be a problem until he thought about the outcome, “But the lack of bylaws does mean that the majority which, in my department is a bunch of old white guys, they’re the dominant voting bloc. So, there is that.”

Finn agreed with Atithi, an Asian woman faculty member who had spoken about her department:

Like [Atithi’s department], my department are overwhelmingly a bunch of old white guys and so anytime something is done by vote, our old white [specific ethnic group], right? They win. And they have no problem saying, like I’ve heard this in a faculty meeting on a hire of like, ‘Oh…this is a woman, and she might be wanting to have kids.’ And we’re like, ‘You can’t say that, you can’t take that into account!!’ These things are said in my department meetings and so it’s transparent (laughs). At least, in that sense it’s very transparent, but it’s the problem of when you’ve got a homogeneous group they vote for the homogeneous group. So, this is a big part of the problem.

As he was speaking, Anna, a white woman faculty participant raised both hands in front of her open mouth, and had her eyes wide open in shock at this recounting of blatant sexism, which was so clearly against formal rules.
Troublingly, we heard narratives of this kind of male privilege in important votes paired with treating women colleagues with disrespect, leading women faculty considering leaving the university. A white woman Professor, Samantha, told us plainly: “It’s gotten to the point where two of the women are looking for other jobs… we’re a small department who can’t afford that.” Avery, a Black woman faculty member, noted that leaders in her department (typically white men full professors) must be proactive in welcoming diverse faculty voices.

Assistant professors and faculty of color and women don’t feel comfortable speaking up during a meeting and inserting their opinions. And so, having a variety of different methods for people to give opinions besides verbally is a really important thing to do – so a Google form… rather than you have to say it now, out loud, during this one faculty meeting we have a month. It’s important for those in power in high rank to be proactively seeking opinions from women of color or people of color, because that gesture – that makes me feel like you value me and my perspective.

An unanticipated consequence of entrenched gendered and racialized informal decision-making power may be the inability to retain women faculty, especially women faculty of color.

Our analysis reveals how the traumatic realization of gendered and racialized privilege of this backstage voting behavior may often first be experienced by new junior faculty members as an individualized awareness that they process alone. This alienating experience becomes a routine part of the faculty socialization process. Normalization of deviance (Vaughan 1996) is a process by which problems in organizations become so taken for granted that the risks are no longer perceived as such. It is not clear from our data to what extent this masculine-favoring voting bloc behavior contributes to lack of retention of women faculty of color, but the fact that exit rates of Black women faculty post tenure are higher than other tenured faculty groups on this campus is a troubling sign.

While the influential ‘old white guys’ unanticipated consequences narrative about faculty voting was a familiar standard, we were surprised about the ways that narratives about inequalities for non-tenure track faculty played out. Unanticipated consequences narratives that focused on unequal conditions for faculty by rank often failed to take an intersectional lens that included gender and race. In discussions about departments where Non-tenure track (NTT) lecturers were included in governance, these outcomes often seemed to privilege white men faculty. The higher education literature often paints all contingent NTT faculty with the same brush—as victims of neoliberalization of the university and lacking formal employment protections, let alone informal power (Kezar and Bernstein-Sierra 2016). But in the unionized context we studied, permanent lecturers had many of the same benefits and opportunities as tenure stream faculty, including paid professional leave akin to sabbatical. Perhaps because it is a relatively good job, NTT positions on this campus
consist of a much higher percentage of white men than at other universities. Half of the departments’ bylaws formally included the provision that NTT faculty could serve on the faculty review committee, with some explicitly citing the inclusion of NTT faculty as aligning with equity goals.

But in the informal circles of power in departments, women NTT faculty did not articulate the same experiences as men NTT faculty. Women NTT faculty discussed the devaluation of their work and lack of inclusion in strategic planning or governance decisions. One white woman NTT faculty member, Heather, described how lecturers often do the care work of teaching which is devalued (and gendered):

The department should just be hiring more lecturers, because the tenure track faculty don’t want to teach. Like they keep trying to vote themselves into a lower teaching load. And then at the same time they’re wrestling with all the metrics and audit stuff around ‘butts in seats’ and credit hours and all that. And there’s a very easy fix for that, which is to stop arguing for more tenure lines and just hire a few more lecturers. … There’s a very strong sense that that it’s a ‘waste of a line’ to argue for a lecturer line with the dean and that instead we would obviously prefer a tenure track line. And… that contributes to the sense of second-class citizen, like, ‘Why would we want more people you? Ugh.’ It’s like, ‘Well, we do actually most of the work around here.’

While Heather was speaking, Delilah, another white woman Lecturer was laughing in solidarity. Heather laughed too at the end of this statement, at her own bitter, sarcastic tone.

By contrast, two white men NTT faculty compared notes on how their departments are very supportive of them and value their work, but that the higher levels of administration are where they feel less respected. Walter says,

I kind of thought to second what [other NTT faculty man] said. I had the same experience over the last two years…it was not so much the department, it was the College. I had relatively bad experiences, where I got emails where I was told I am ‘just a lecturer.’

As Walter spoke, he waved his hand up high and to the side to show that the bad experiences and emails were coming from ‘out there’ in the college rather than in his home department. Generally, while there may be limits to their privilege as non-tenure stream faculty, white men lecturers more often described finding themselves included in departmental decision-making than did other NTT faculty.

Our analysis of the unanticipated consequences narratives about non-tenure track faculty in governance reveals some gendered and racialized patterns. These are more hidden inequalities, as lecturers often speak and act in solidarity with fellow NTT faculty. This kind of class solidarity may unintentionally contribute to blindness to other intersecting systems of inequality. White men lecturers seem unaware of their relative privilege, with the possible exception of recognizing that
teaching evaluations by students are often gendered and racialized.\textsuperscript{5} Even with the best of intentions for inclusion, unanticipated consequences narratives of rank inequalities may allow gendered and racialized privilege to creep into policies when implementation does not attend to those relentless social forces.

\section*{5 Conclusions}

This study launches new understanding of durable inequalities by demonstrating how gendering and racialization intersect in the faculty shared decision-making context. It contributes substantive knowledge about higher education decision-making and about organizational inequality-making more generally. In particular, we demonstrate how faculty members perceive the disjunction between policy and practice, and how savvy organizational actors, including those involved in a university equity project, talk about gendered and racialized unanticipated consequences. While organizational scholars have long pointed to the process of \textit{decoupling} between the formal organization and informal practices, we show how faculty narratives about the fissure between the rules and actual decision-making are also narratives about gender and race. For example, our data show how narratives about gendered and racialized decoupling of faculty evaluations from written criteria may reinforce what Erin Cech et al. (2017) and colleagues refer to as “epistemological dominance,” a structured pattern of rejecting subordinated knowledge. Faculty of color working outside disciplinary norms or studying marginalized people experience epistemic exclusion, academic gatekeeping devaluing certain topics or types of knowledge production (Settles et al. 2021). We see fertile ground for future studies of decoupling and epistemological dominance in academia and other knowledge-based organizations.

By bringing together separate literatures on institutionalized organizational routines and intersectionality, we develop a new, perception-based conceptualization of a long-used term in organizational studies: unanticipated consequences. Observing how faculty focus groups came to consensus about gendered and racialized outcomes of decision-making led us to define \textit{unanticipated consequences narratives} as intersubjective agreements that formal organizational goals have been subverted in some meaningful and unexpected way.

Our data illustrate how savvy organizational actors’ narratives about unanticipated consequences arising in faculty shared decision-making notice gendered and racialized disadvantages in the careers of women faculty and faculty of color, yet also

\textsuperscript{5} We focus on faculty decision-making, but a large body of research finds systematic gender and race bias in students’ teaching evaluations (e.g. Peterson et al. 2019).
vary in different decision-making contexts. The narratives about inequalities may themselves contribute to intersectional, durable inequalities, as seen in how faculty talk about routine practices of faculty governance in departments, including committee work, hiring and promotion, and voting.

Research on faculty *service workloads* points to large race and gender gaps disproportionately burdening women and faculty of color because universities fail to attend to inequities (Misra et al. 2021; O’Meara et al. 2018). However, we find an emerging awareness of service inequalities among faculty on the ground; we heard clear narratives about gender and race inequities. Awareness of unfair consequences can lead to equitable policies (e.g. tracking workload allocation, a new policy at the focal university studied). Of course, a policy is no guarantee of implementation if workload reporting becomes another case of institutional window dressing or continues to end up in the dead end of fatalistic narratives that things can never change.

Faculty *hiring and promotion inequalities* tend to be most commonly discussed in the literature in terms of implicit bias (Nelson and Zippel 2021), with the solution to raise awareness of individual biases. While psychological biases toward men and whiteness have been identified in many experiment-based studies, organizational sociology points to how systemic inequalities go beyond individual awareness. Our findings contribute to organizational sociology by looking directly at when savvy organizational actors well aware of biases develop common narratives that remain unassociated with change. We found hierarchical position shapes how people understand the unanticipated consequences of biases in hiring and promotion decisions. Faculty view administrative ‘overreach’ into faculty shared decisions as reflecting biases, while administrators see faculty in departments as the main source of bias. Finger pointing less likely results in disruption of inequalities than would identifying common goals for change.

Finally, *faculty voting practices* have been little studied by sociologists. The literature on informal organization characterizes backstage influence on decisions as rather idiosyncratic to individuals in a particular organization (e.g. Dalton 1959; Gouldner 1954; Goffman 1961). However, our findings point to both gendered (Kanter 1977) and racialized (Wingfield 2019) privilege for both the most powerful white men faculty (full professors) and the least powerful (non-tenure track faculty). Our findings show even when organizations attempt to improve equity with policies, such as supporting NTT lecturers, rules may fail to consider intersectional race and gender inequities and thus end up favoring men and white workers.

Our study thus contributes to organizational sociology literatures helping us understand the durability of inequalities, especially the ways organizations
themselves are gendered and racialized. It may also contribute to the line of work on “inhabited institutionalism,” which considers how institutions are populated with people whose social interactions infuse institutions with both force and meaning (Hallett and Hawbaker 2021; Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Scully and Segal 2002). While many psychological studies call for greater individual awareness of biases, our study of savvy organizational actors aware of gendered and racialized decoupling and unanticipated consequences in university settings observed that narratives themselves may link with reproducing inequalities. When unanticipated consequences narratives contain dimensions of fatalism, finger pointing, and blindness to intersectionality, white men may continue to benefit at the expense of faculty of color and white women.

5.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations. We originally designed a study to observe faculty shared decision-making at regular faculty meetings, but this plan, like many others, was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than observing decision-making in action, we instead heard about decision-making practices after they happened, in focus groups. While faculty narratives about the unanticipated consequences of decision-making reveal how fatalism, finger-pointing, and lack of intersectional reflection operate in discourse, we are missing direct observation of how these narratives prevent faculty from equity work. Future research could investigate whether these narratives arose around faculty meeting decision points about service, promotion, and voting practices. Ethnographic observation of faculty decision-making in meetings is needed.

Another limitation is our focus on one organization; while we saw large variation among departments in faculty governance, data collection occurred all within one US public university. This study also looks at inequalities among relatively privileged, highly educated professionals. We focus our analysis on the intersection of gendered and racialized inequalities, but as intersectionality theory (e.g. Collins 2019) reminds us, many inseparable systems of oppression operate in people’s lives. We inevitably miss other important dimensions of inequality. More research is needed to see where class (perhaps especially for NTT faculty), ableism, sexual identity and gender expression marginalization, nationality exclusion, and other stratification mechanisms operate in universities to oppress even relatively privileged faculty.
5.2 Next Steps

Our findings leave little room for hope. If even awareness of inequity can contribute to durable inequalities, where do we go from here? It makes developing governance interventions more difficult to target with slippery, evolving inequality processes; the findings imply a need for organizationally adept solutions. While the ‘smoking gun’ of evidence linking savvy faculty’s unanticipated consequences narratives to lack of change in their departments lies beyond the scope of this paper, in this section we point to some promising directions for studying and disrupting durable inequalities related to these narratives.

If fatalism characterizes unanticipated consequences narratives about gendered and racialized committee service burdens, one promising direction may come in the form of a “small wins” approach to organizational change (Correll 2017). Quasi-experimental research by Kerry Ann O’Meara and colleagues (2018), indicates in departments where faculty encounter some success in implementing service equity plans, the attitude toward change is more sanguine. Further research over time—including qualitative data collection—could examine how both narratives and service assignments may reflect either long term change (or revert to gendered and racialized status quo and fatalism narratives).

If finger pointing characterizes unanticipated consequences narratives about gendered and racialized outcomes of hiring and promotion decisions, one promising direction may come from collaboration between faculty and administration. In interviews with feminist sociologists seeking institutional change toward intersectional gender equity, Laube (2021) identified (despite Lorde’s [1979] warning) working with the “master’s tools,” compromise, and pragmatism, as effective approaches to working in the space between administration and faculty interests. Further research observing change behavior and narratives of savvy organizational actors is needed to better understand when collaboration works and when it does not.

If failure to see intersectional inequalities characterizes unanticipated consequences narratives about non-tenure track inequalities in voting and faculty governance, one promising direction may come from fostering critical consciousness in white men allies. Mosely and colleagues’ (2021) model of critical consciousness of anti-Black racism, developed from interviews with Black activists, identifies witnessing racism/sexism (rather than general awareness of bias) as a first step toward cognitively processing and acting collectively toward change. Further research on how these social psychological processes might operate for allies, and could connect to change at the organizational level, is needed to understand better how to overcome resistance toward intersectional equity.
Organizational problems need organizational solutions. Awareness of inequality sounds like progress, but we need policies and stronger collective governance to ensure deciding together is truly inclusive, democratic, and strengthens our higher education organizations. Departmental governance is a crucial site of work life for faculty, yet faculty experience it in different – and unequal – ways. When faculty shared decision-making processes support equitable resource distribution (time and funding for scholarship), relationships (access to mentors and information), and recognition (attention to scholarship and service contributions), the power and autonomy of faculty are reinforced. Creating stronger, more equitable faculty governance will promote democratic processes in higher education despite external pressures.

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