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FORMER STUDENT GOVERNMENT OFFICERS NAVIGATING MULTIPLE/MINORITIZED IDENTITIES IN COLLEGIATE AND POST-COLLEGE PUBLIC OFFICE

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Many notable leaders in the United States previously served in their college's student government, including Stacey Abrams, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and Elijah Cummings. Findings in this article derive from a larger study on the experiences of former college student government officers who ran for or served in post-college public office between 2018-2021. Themes in this article reflect the experiences of participants who identify as Persons of Color, women, or gay/bisexual, and the nuances of gender, gender and race, race, and sexuality in the context of collegiate and post-college public office. Among others, recommendations for practice include a calling to student government advisors and university administrators to create and offer tools for participants with minoritized identities to successfully access and matriculate through collegiate public office.

In 2021, Lamar Richards was elected as the first openly gay, Black student body president at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (Toms, 2021). Karmen Jones was elected the first Black woman student body president at the University of Tennessee (Young, 2021). That same year, Abel Liu became the first Chinese-American student council president at the University of Virginia and is the first known openly transgender student government president in the United States who was out when elected (Wyant, 2021). A common thread between these individuals and their elections is that each represents a kind of intersection between their minoritized identity/ies and their experience in elected student government.

Over time, several scholars have sought to capture the experiences of People of Color, women, and queer individuals in student government (e.g., Goodman, 2021a, Goodman, et al., 2021; Miller & Kraus, 2004; Smith, 2020; Workman et al., 2020). This article illuminates the experiences of 17 individuals and their experience(s) in elected student government and post-college public office (running or serving). In this context, "public office" should be understood as elected, representative leadership (e.g., constituent-based, governmental, public service). Specifically, the themes brought forward in this study illuminate the experiences of People of Color, women, and gay/bisexual men who were formerly involved in student government and who ran for post-college public office between 2018-2021. A lot can be learned from the experiences of those serving in collegiate public office and those whose student government experience(s) informs post-college public office. When considering students and identity/ies, important implications and recommendations from this study relate directly to advising and administration.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

College student governments are a function of student involvement, student voice, and representation (Dungan & Klopf, 1949; Klopf, 1960; May, 2010; Miles, 2011; Miles et al., 2008; Templeton et al., 2018). Further, while it is nonpartisan in theory, student government is political. There are politics associated with how student governments legislate, vote on, and engage with equity and justice issues in higher education (Goodman et al., 2021). For this article, relevant literature on women, People of Color, and LGBTQ+ issues and identities is illuminated

to further contextualize and ground this study.

In an early piece on women in student government leadership positions, Miller and Kraus (2004) found that women were elected as representatives (held nearly half of positions in student government), yet were under-represented in president and vice-president positions. This research disrupted the notion that women were not interested in politics or government. Yet, it revealed that they were interested in campus politics, but were not elected to the top leadership roles (Miller & Kraus, 2004). At the time of the research, just over 70% of student government presidents and vice-presidents were men (Miller & Kraus, 2004). Years later, Workman et al. (2020) studied the experiences of seven women student government presidents, and found that there were challenges in traditions and culture within the student association and that student government was a "boys' club" that led to a "chilly climate" for women (p. 44). The authors found an inherent bias against women, as well as challenges for women in student government within both elections and transitions (Workman et al., 2020). One participant, a Black woman, wanted to evolve the student government culture but felt the white men in the organization did not value women or minoritized voices (Workman et al., 2020). Participants were impacted by the male-dominated nature of student government, which affected how they could lead or change the culture to be more inclusive (Workman et al., 2020). Similarly, in a study on former student body presidents working in higher education, one participant recalled a significant sexist incident in her student government. This prompted a senior university official to invite all the elected women to her home to talk more about issues facing women in campus leadership (Goodman, 2021b).

Next, through photo-elicitation interviews, Smith (2020) studied the experiences of eight Black student government presidents at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). One finding from Smith's (2020) study included participants establishing life-long connections with their peers, and valuing relationships through their shared identities and student government experience(s). For some, this included relationships with leaders from other HBCU student governments (Smith, 2020). One participant shared that there were significant benefits of networking with other HBCUs, and that issues student governments are dealing with are similar across institutions (Smith, 2020). However, while participants in Smith's (2020) study felt support from their peers, they lacked it in relationships with administrators.

Additional scholarship has illuminated the experience of Students of Color more broadly, and in the context of student involvement in higher education. Manzano et al. (2017) posited that Asian American student leaders engage in "conventional student-leader roles," such as student government, as a way to enact incremental change on their campus (p. 70). For example, despite unchanging structures of power and privilege, if a student is the first Asian American student government president, they may view that achievement as representative of valuable change (Manzano et al., 2017). Next, one participant in Jones and Reddick's (2017) study discussed the benefit of Black student representation in exclusionary spaces, and named student government in particular. The participant (Terrance) shared, "Without the Black student voice at the table, no one's going to get into that organization...once you get plugged in to student government, you pave the way" (Jones & Reddick, 2017, p. 210).

Similarly, participants in Harper and Quaye's (2007) study saw value in minority student representation on committees that set campus policies. One participant (Christopher) used the role of student government vice president to advocate for Black student organizations and funding made available through student government (Harper & Quaye, 2007). It is not uncommon in the literature to find examples of students with racially minoritized identities facing individual and systemic challenges in student government. This frequently appears in student affairs literature, and in particular, scholarship on student leadership, involvement, and activism. In a study about racial salience in predominantly white student organization spaces, Jones (2020) wrote about Ron, the only Black student government representative among around sixty students. Ron experienced discrimination in student government, and was hesitant to engage further due to patterns of dismissiveness (Jones, 2020).

Finally, while sexuality has been somewhat underpublished for LGBTQ+ students and college student government specifically, there is a shortage of literature regarding LGBTQ+ students and leadership more broadly (e.g., Dilley, 2002; Jourian & Simmons, 2017; Kulick et al., 2016; Lange et al., 2019; Renn, 2007; Rhoads, 1995; Tilla-

paugh, 2013; and more). One student government president in Smith's (2020) study shared navigating campus politics with legislation that would have had a negative impact on the transgender community (Smith, 2020). Next, Goodman (2021a) studied the experiences of openly gay undergraduate men in elected student government and found an 'it is what it is' sentiment as the men reflected on their experiences with being out in this leadership capacity. The visibility of being gay and the work of/in student government captured their experiences and was coupled with a "just so happen to be gay" attitude (Goodman, 2021a, p. 5). Many of the participants in Goodman's (2021a) study saw openly gay student government officials before them who modeled that they, too, could achieve such roles. Still, there was a layer of internalized homophobia experienced by participants, in that they were conscious of how they appeared in public spaces (e.g., one participant thought his voice and gestures were, in one example, "unprofessional") (Goodman, 2021a, p. 6). The intersection of sexuality and race was particularly noteworthy for Participants of Color in Goodman's (2021a) study. Each shared that they felt they had to work harder because of their race, leadership, and sexuality. There were multiple ways that 'being gay' was racialized for these men, who saw and experienced student government as a predominately white space (Goodman, 2021a).

STUDY CONTEXT

This study was approved through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process at the University of Maryland, College Park. This article derives from a more extensive, more broad study on the experiences of former student government officers who ran for or served in public office between 2018-2021. By and large, participants who identified as People of Color, women, and/or gay or bisexual shared multiple examples and perspectives related to experiences with their identity/ies and in- and post-college public office. Enlisting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to this research (Gadamer, 1975; van Manen, 1997), I am guided by philosophical underpinnings (van Manen, 2014) that seek to understand the essence of a phenomenon (Hultgren, 1995), and participants' lived experience(s) specifically.

METHODS

Recruitment involved a national call for participants and was advertised through student government and student affairs listservs, as well as various social media platforms. Participants must have been 18 years of age or older and served in elected student government while in college. Additionally, participants must have run for or served in post-college public office between 2018-2021. Nineteen individuals met the criteria and participated in the broader study. Data from 17 participants were pulled forward for this article. I enlisted two semi-structured interviews (Bevan, 2014) to be in-conversation with participants, which were conducted as hermeneutic conversations (Hultgren, 1993). After transcription, I engaged in a selective highlighting approach (van Manen, 1997) as a method of thematizing. In particular, I pulled forward a theme of participants' experiences with marginalization and minoritized identities. To gain perspective, I participated in peer-debriefing with two colleagues to clarify my interpretation(s) of the data and probe potential biases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Positionality

As a scholar, I am most informed by my own history with college student government and representative leadership. While I have never run for post-college public office, I understand the nuances of identity, and in particular, my gay identity as it relates to college student government. As a former student body president, I always felt my role was "public." This publicness stopped me from feeling like I could truly be myself and be open and "out" as gay in many ways. I stayed in "the closet" because I felt I owed my constituents something (something I would later realize was my own conjuring, but a combination of being from Oklahoma and seeing very few out people at my institution). As an older adult, I stay attuned to local, state, and (inter/)national politics, and the very ways identity emerges in public leadership. We are still heavily experiencing "the firsts" in college student government (e.g., Liu at the University of Virginia, Jones at the University of Tennessee), and in post-college public office (e.g., Pete Buttigieg and his candidacy for U.S. President, Mauree Turner from Oklahoma as the first nonbinary state legislator). As such, I believe there is value in a study such as this, and the lessons learned can be life-changing for students who are and will run for college student government - and someday, even post-college public office.

FINDINGS

While these themes are illuminated as gender, race, and sexuality, they can also be framed in the context of sexism, racism, and homophobia in both student government and post-college public office.

Gender; Gender and Race

For the women in this study, (their) gender was salient to their experiences and existence(s) in both student government and post-college public office. Participants shared stories and anecdotes as part of our conversations, including many that were left out of these findings as a result of the publicness of their role and identity. But gender does not exist in a vacuum, especially for the Women of Color in this study, who shared about the intersection of their gender and race. This includes both independent incidents of sexism and racism, and often, sexism and racism happening simultaneously.

Yvonne, a white woman, served as student government vice-president, but lost the presidency to a male classmate who she felt had not done the same level of work or commitment as she had during her four years of college. She shares, "I had been doing the work, you know, for the three years and that, you know, it should have been mine if it was based on work ethic." While Karina, a multiracial woman, won her election of student body president, at that point the first Woman of Color in 20-30 years to win, she feared her work would be all for naught. She recalls thinking, "I'm going to really, like, [bust] my ass for these three years, I'm going to put myself on the line, and somebody is going to pick the frat boy over me, aren't they?" Coming from a "very old" university, Amy, a white woman, recalls being only the fifth woman elected as president, and ten years after the woman before her election. Comparison to male counterparts/peers was not uncommon, and Cyndi, an Asian woman, experienced this at multiple points before, during, and after collegiate roles. Cyndi recalls that the high school student body president was a tall, white man when she was a sophomore. The student body president when she was a first-year student in college was "a white guy from [a small town]...a rural community...he's savvy, he's smart, he's attractive, just like things that everybody assumes a politician will look like." She shares how this impacted her and continues to today:

> I still struggle with those things, and those fears, and those limitations bubble up as I use my voice...I'm like, I want to be that guy, except not a white guy. You know? And yeah, I just, I've always been interested in it…but always have had a fear of putting myself out there because I didn't look like the people who came before me, and there are a lot of things that now at [my age that] I think back on in college that I'm like, Wow, I didn't realize maybe because I was a female student or because I'm Asian, or because I didn't have the same journey here, that I may not be enough to do this. (Cyndi)

While campaigning for post-college public office, Amy felt people dismissed her because of her gender. In particular, she experienced older men dismissing her, many who had their wives call, email, and Facebook message her when they had questions. While her constituents who are men have come around, she also experienced similar microaggressions once she was elected. In one experience, Amy recalls an older white male colleague she served alongside using the term "Mama" when responding to her. She notes:

> I said, "You know what, I'm gonna stop you right there." I said, "How about you be [you], and I'll be [Amy]." And I said, "Don't ever do that again." And it has never happened again…You can't let those moments, you really can't let them pass as a woman. You have to be willing to say, "That is unacceptable, and I am not going to allow that behavior." (Amy)

Shirley, a white woman, experienced similar interactions with men. She recalls speaking at an event and a man telling her she "shouldn't talk about all that women stuff." She felt strongly about telling the man he was wrong and that for her, it was about speaking to women who had not previously been seen or heard. Even after winning her election with a historic (wide) margin, people said, "You only won because you're a woman."

It was one thing to be a woman in a male-dominated space like student government and post-college public office, and it was another to have the pressure of both gender and race at play. Karina felt this pressure deeply

and as far back as high school student council. Karina recalls feeling like "the perfect Black girl student" as student government president. She felt "propped up" by administrators, and that there was increased pressure on her due to the nature of her institution as a "majority white space." When she got to college, Karina watched another Black woman run for student government president and lose. This impacted her perception of her own election and made her wonder if she could achieve such a goal at a predominantly white institution like the one she attended. In her post-college role, Cyndi experienced a similar fear as a calling to work harder and be more creative. She reflects on the language and inferences made around her:

> You have to show up more. You can talk about all the things you've done, all the results. And even today [someone said to me], "Are you tough enough? Are you strong enough? Can you punch a bully in the mouth?" These are things I hear. And I'm like, in what world? Every leadership book I've read and classes I've taken, I have a [degree] in leadership, not one time do we talk about toughness. (Cyndi)

Such a "toughness" emerged in responding to microaggressions and macroaggressions, which occurred when Cyndi was speaker of her collegiate representative body that she recalled during our conversations. She shares:

> I had to go downstairs to get something, and I came back up. And my gavel…it was wrapped in a condom. And I remember thinking, like, what in the, who would do something like that? And in that moment, I really wasn't thinking about gender. I wasn't thinking about the disrespect as a woman being in that kind of position. I was just embarrassed. And I was appalled. And I was upset that someone would use something of mine and do that. And then the next week, I addressed the issue. But, you know, I bet I could ask some of my, my former, you know, peers in college, like, did that ever happen to you? And I'm positive the answer would be no. And that sticks with me because…we're using our voices to make a difference for each other, for our community, which is the university community. And that kind of disrespect, you felt this person felt like he could, he could do that to me. And I think it's because I'm a woman. And that sticks with me. (Cyndi)

Since college, and because of incidents such as these, Cyndi has committed to confronting remarks and aggressive behavior as it relates to her gender (and race).

Race

Race reverberated for all Participants of Color. And like Cyndi shared related to dynamics of race and gender in her pre-college student government experiences, Michael, an Asian man, recalls several examples when his race and ethnicity became a focal point in elections, and as early as his high school election(s), as well as in his election(s) after college. In high school, Michael found himself "leaning into the Brownness" of his identity in slogans, only to be met by an opponent who used xenophobic and racist language as a response. After college, Michael felt his initial elections were "about making white people comfortable" and constantly felt "worried about not being foreign or an other" to his constituents. These moments led Michael to extensive self-reflection, especially as he believes he was the first Asian student body president at his university. He now lives and leads in a community with a significantly small Asian population. He shares:

> I don't know if Asian ethnicity is just not prioritized or seen as diverse in the same way that other immutable traits are. Every position I've ever been in, from a political perspective, I've been the first. And yet it's never been part of my narrative. I don't feel bitter about that or anything; it's just an interesting observation. The first is important for a lot of communities, but it never seems that important for Asian communities. (Michael)

This idea of "the first" resonated with Participants of Color, particularly the nuances of race and institution type (e.g., all but one went to an, at the time, predominately white institution). Theo, a multiracial man, experienced inquiry from student groups, particularly other student leaders who noted the importance of being the first Person of Color in many years to hold the student government presidency (and potentially even the first Black student to be in the role). He recalls that this led to an actual argument at a student government event about if he was Black or not, where he shares he "watched them debate my identity."

Cici was the first African American woman to be president of her university's student government. Identifying as half-Black, Cici battled people's questions of whether or not she was "Black enough" to represent Students of Color on campus. Theo experienced this same disconnect, in that at times, he did not feel "Black enough for the Black community" as a mixed-race person. In the end, both felt a calling to be more representative from Students of Color. For example, Cici recalls, "It was kind of like, 'Come on, you're the Person of Color, you need to be into this, you need to understand, you need to represent for us.'" And yet, she found some Students of Color resisting her leadership and identity. She recalls thinking:

> Do you think that the white guy that's in the fraternity - in the ag fraternity on top of it, who doesn't speak any Spanish - is any better, but you're gonna just knock me off because [I don't speak Spanish]?" (Cici)

Identifying as Latina, Karina spoke Spanish in the last part of a speech and afterward had a peer accuse her of "pandering to get votes from Latinos." She reflects on that experience:

> And I was like, "But I am Latino. What do you mean? How am I pandering to get votes for people that I represent?" So I, I'm telling you all of this, to give you some context for like, just the, what I had to deal with, as I was trying to figure out, like, what student government meant, and whether I was, you know, could be respected in that kind of space, because it has, like all this...prestige. (Karina)

Mark, a Black man, saw similar learning in college as beneficial to his later experiences in public office, particularly his proximity to and relationship with the Black community. In college, he felt his Black peers remark, "What have you done for us," and, "I don't think you've done enough for us." However, in one of his elections, Mark experienced a white peer believe he (Mark) was racist because Black students were voting for "the Black guy." He felt this reflected the privilege white students felt at his institution, a predominately white institution, and "what people will do when they feel like something they deserve is taken from them." Despite this feeling and experience, his thinking has evolved in that, he recalls:

> I could be the student body president for all people, but also I have to be a leader of Black people in my community as well. And I've been faced with the same, you know, I guess you can say, situation dilemma, as a leader, you know, now as well, and that, that prepared me for today. (Mark)

Similarly, in her post-college election, Cici felt a dismissing of her identity as multiracial, in that years into a role, an opponent garnered attention that prompted people to comment, "Well, it'd be nice to have an African American [elected]." Remarks like this left her feeling frustrated.

In addition to feeling called to representation, participants noticed a lack of or notability of representation reverberated. When Theo got to college, he noticed the elected student government representatives were "privileged white kids." He did not see other students who looked like him in student government. Even in early leadership roles after his first year, he served alongside a majority of white students, including many who "had a different way of thinking, both in political ideology, but also in general on social cues and norms." Some participants felt called by other notable Leaders of Color impacting the larger United States political arena. Both Karina and Michael recall the salience of seeing President Barack Obama ascend to the highest office in the United States. Karina recalls Obama's election as her "political awakening," in that she saw herself "reflected" in him. For Christian, a Latino man and the youngest participant, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez inspired him to lead and make a difference. He identifies with "that AOC kind of movement," which influences how he leads and sees the world (through shared identities). Noticing Black and Brown people be ignored in his geographic region, Christian watched his district flip, and a new political dialogue emerged. This spurred him to run for student government, and immediately after his term as student body president, run for post-college public office.

Sexuality

Finally, sexuality was of note for gay and bisexual participants in particular. Charles and Henry, both gay men, were the first openly LGBT people elected to their institution's student governments. Henry felt his experience as openly gay and elected to student government allowed his student government to address queer issues and bring

LGBTQ+ topics into the campus discussion on diversity and inclusion. Another gay participant who had many gay and lesbian people involved in his student government felt he poured more of himself into work than into his personal life or his identity as a gay person in the top leadership role in student government. The participant reflects, "My experience was, you know, I don't have to address it. I'm just the student government president, I'm too busy to do, to do *that* (participant emphasized *that*), my personal self," talking about his gay identity. Rufus, a gay man, illuminates similar sentiments around not addressing sexuality, which was a seminal part of his coming out, and in some ways, why he did not come out until after college. He shares:

> I always thought is that I've got to be, you know, nose to the grindstone kind of upstanding, straight guy to get ahead, and eventually find myself a wife, and yada, yada, yada. … and eventually decided to run for office, you know, I, I was very determined, you know, sort of, this is who I am. And if the…if the public doesn't like it, you know…I'll go do something else. That's okay. (Rufus)

Henry feels he "blazed that trail" for gay students, and the year after he served in his role, his institution had an openly gay student government president. Henry feels his identity and presence made it easier for people after him to run. This translated to post-college public office and running as an openly gay man in his geographic region. Over time, Henry has received affirmation about the importance of his running as openly gay. One anonymous letter thanked him for being out, "and he wasn't ready to come out himself, but just thank[ed] me for being out and visible and saying that made life easier for him. That's still very important."

While Rufus was not out as gay while in college, in post-college public office, he thinks a lot about sexuality and its relationship to leadership (for both college student government and post-college public office). His community is a "bedroom community," he shares, and, "If you don't want the single, young gay man, [there are] plenty of people who aren't like me you can vote for." Over time, he's experienced "undertones" of homophobia and some explicit notions about his sexuality. In some ways, this is akin to Cyndi, who rejects the "white picket fence" narrative when running for office after college. Candidates do not have to be—and are not—solely white, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian, *and married*. Rufus feels many gay candidates deal with this in college and beyond. Aside from his sexuality, though coded in homophobia, Rufus has heard people say he would not make a "good" candidate for higher public office because he is not married. He shares:

> I know what that means…You're talking about a specific kind of marriage, not that I'm not married. If I were married to a man, which I hope to be one day, that's not what you're talking about. What you mean is I don't have a wife and children. That's what you're saying. And that's homophobic. (Rufus)

Rufus has even faced backlash on social media and received hateful and violent messages due to some of his posts. He even once had a colleague make pejorative comments about him being gay and telling people in a way that held a negative connotation.

While this thematic section on sexuality is not as "full" as those that illuminate elements of race and gender, it is still important to uplift sexuality as a notable minoritized identity that came through as a sub-theme in this study. For relevant participants, their gay or bisexual identity showed up in different ways and yet was a part of each person as a salient—at times hidden—identity. It is essential that a study such as this names sexuality as a significant and relevant minoritized identity in public office spaces, and especially as one that appeared in conversations with participants, even if as an "imbalanced" theme overall in comparison to themes relating to gender and race.

INSIGHTS AND DISCUSSION

There is, perhaps, something significant about understanding these experiences in student government and post-college public office. For these participants with multiple/minoritized identities, the work demanded more from them in different ways - new and different hurdles to clear, politics to understand, and (hidden) curricula to locate and interpret. But what is this "hidden curriculum" that requires students to believe they must be this or that, or XYZ, to be in student government and be received as a worthy public leader? Predominately white student organizations such as student government, specifically, maintain "hidden and exclusionary support networks"

used by the dominant group to secure leadership positions (Jones & Reddick, 2017, p. 215). Cyndi mentions this hiddenness related to opportunities on campus that she later learned others were receiving, including opportunities she never heard of until she ascended to post-college public office. For example, she shares that years after college, when she was invited to speak as a public official at a major student leadership program in her state, she wondered who went from her time as a student. Cyndi shares, "There were hidden things going on that I didn't even realize; I wouldn't even know to ask." Despite being a known and successful student leader in college, she felt that some major opportunities beyond the institution were reserved for young men. This idea of getting passed up for opportunities relates to Cyndi's gender and race. It should be further interrogated how opportunities are seen, reserved, and taken up in college and beyond. Who gets which spaces? Who even knows about the spaces?

The/se dismissals, the patronizing and hidden curricula, and the extra hurdles to clear should be a sounding alarm for student government advisors and university administrators. Like Amy and Shirley feeling dismissed by older men, the makeup of university administrators as older (and white) men may pose a similar risk for women leaders specifically. For example, in 2017, the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources reported 88% of provosts or senior academic officers were white. The challenges that many participants faced, whether it be peers who questioned their elections or sexuality, race, or gender, are also of particular note, in that the very individuals doing the challenging may go on to later hold office, and maintain heteronormative, racist, and sexist tropes that are a barrier to minoritized people serving in public office. Just as a participant in Workman et al. (2020) posited, "Me being in this space is already causing a conversation" (p. 45), advisors and administrators should engage in those types of conversations as fierce advocates and allies to students. There is a need for advisors and administrators to address issues of inequality and inequity in interpersonal interactions as well as through spaces like public social media and campus press.

Many of the student body presidents in this study recalled being "the first" related to various social identities, or at least were conscious of when "the last" occurred of a particular identity. As participants talked about the noteworthiness of political leaders like Tammy Baldwin, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Alexandria Ocacio-Cortez as notable figures who caught their attention in student government and post-college public office, advisors and administrators can program and advise with these important milestones in mind. Influences like those had on these participants are of particular note, and may mean advisors and administrators should pay close(r) attention to elected leaders making ground in different ways. Involvement in student government leadership positions is not a race-neutral endeavor, and there are power discrepancies that create barriers for Black students in particular (Jones, 2020). In Goodman (2021a), one participant saw a previous gay student government president, which helped him also to believe he could serve in that role. Letting the leaders be themselves is not entirely a radical act - it has only become one due to the nature of and politicization of identity in U.S. politics. Still, it is important and should be valued. I come back to Rufus' perspective on his election, and he shares, "It was no secret that I was gay, but I was running for a job...I wanted to make it work well for people...to reform it, and that's why I was running. It wasn't to do anything else."

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations and implications for student affairs practice can be drawn from this study. First, student government advisors and university administrators should pay close attention to the very students running for elected office on campus. What identities are and are not represented? Do students feel comfortable and safe running in that particular institutional context? Further, what tools are provided to student government leaders (across all leadership roles - from executive cabinet to committee work)? Cici talked about the value of giving students *tools* so that Students of Color feel more comfortable to run for office in college and after. In their study, Jones and Reddick (2017) wrote about a participant (Annette) who designed a guide for students of color running for student government positions. Support in this way starts with access. However, it should not be the sole/responsibility of students to do this labor for the institution and its constituents. Advisors and administrators should innovate ways to bring Students of Color, women, and queer students into student government and work to make that space supportive and safe for those students to lead. This involves recruiting women to take on higher leadership roles and getting them involved early (Workman et al., 2020). Advisors and

administrators must directly address the whiteness (and racism), maleness (and sexism), and heteronormativity (and homophobia and transphobia) that often permeates student government(s). Advisors and administrators must "be real" with themselves, as well, and in particular, how they may be fostering an environment where such -ism remains unchecked. Further, when/as institutional crises occur, advisors and administrators can be mindful of the labor placed on students whose identities are related to the very issues involved. For example, in contexts like voting on Chik-fil-A as a dining option (i.e., the impact on queer students) or passing a resolution to affirm the campus' support of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program (i.e., the impact on undocumented student leaders) (Goodman et al., 2021), advisors should be attentive to students who share identities with the very issues being discussed or legislated.

Administrators and advisors should be prepared to work with students that allows them to examine their identities and make sense of how they show up in society and in leadership (e.g., identity exploration and development). Cyndi shares that her realizations today are a result of processing over time. She probably would not have been able to articulate this learning at that time, in college, when she was still grappling with her identity as an Asian American woman. Cyndi experienced periods of her life where she googled how to Westernize her eyes, and paid attention to specific attire, makeup, and patterns that helped her seem less Asian and fit in. Like Michael, who made jokes about his Asian identity while running, a post-college reflection led participants to realize the harm that had been done. Advisors and administrators can consider the ways students are experiencing identity development at the same time as their leadership.

Further, advisors and administrators can work with local elected leaders to display the varying identities involved in public office. Henry talked about the importance of seeing one of his state representatives on campus as he and other student government leaders worked to create space(s) for LGBT students. Like the salience of Obama or Ocacio-Cortez, student leaders need to see people who look like and are like them to further realize their potential and possibility for post-college public office (or service, in general). In Michael's reflection of Obama's impact, he shares:

> He's a Brown dude. I just identified with him so much, and I loved him so much. He made me believe that even I could run and get elected. And he made me believe that I could lift up communities around me.

To believe one can accomplish something is an ideal path to making student government more accessible. Perhaps, bringing in individuals to model this for student leaders may increase the way students come to student government or run for office in and after their time in college. Michael shares, "So yeah, I mean, so I am his legacy." Legacies such as Michael's, and many others, should be captured and held dear by institutions and practitioners. As such, institutions can do a better job of documenting histories such as these student government elections, and in particular, house them within archives, displays, or through the very student governments themselves. For example, in 2020, Danielle Geathers was elected the first Black woman student body president in the 159-year history of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Johnson Hess, 2020). Housing and spotlighting this information are ways to anchor opportunities for generations of leaders to come. Institutions can maintain this history and better understand how individuals with minoritized identities show up in politics, on and off campus.

CONCLUSION

It feels, perhaps, most relevant to close with a quote from Cyndi, whose student government and post-college public office experiences both significantly impact(ed) her political worldview. Cyndi shares:

> And I think about women in politics, Hillary Clinton in particular. She was too tough. Too many plans. So she wasn't enough. I look at Stacey Abrams, I mean, just a true shero of mine, and a true example of, you know, for her, it's like, "Am I an angry Black woman if I speak too loud? But then am I speaking loud enough, so my colleagues know I'm fighting for them?" You know? And I think that, you know, that's, that's the barrier, and those are the challenges we have to overcome as women and Women of Color that people really don't understand. And you can literally work your tail off, and it's not enough...And you know, but it's like, I'm showing them my results...I think they're looking at me as, like, little Asian lady...

And they're like, "But, are you tough enough?" But hopefully, it will be enough. Let's put that, put that in the universe.

Perhaps, it will be enough. Perhaps, it always was - to bring one's identity into the student government and post-college public office role(s). And, still, there is much work to be done to ensure students are (1) granted access into those spaces and (2) able to thrive with all minoritized identities in tow.

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