



Open Forum on Broadening Participation in STEM (OFBP)

Reflecting On Our Roots – The Double Bind: The Price of Being a Minority Woman in Science - by Shirley Malcom

Reflecting On Our Roots is a series of essays outlining some of the historical context of the field of broadening participation. The essays were originally published in the NSF INCLUDES Open Forum group on Trellis, and are now located in the new Open Forum on Broadening Participation microsite. Shirley Malcom is the Senior Advisor and Director of SEA Change at the American Association for the Advancement of Science and co-PI on NSF grant 1748345 which supports the NSF Open Forum on Broadening Participation in STEM.

The conference on “minority women” in science was held in December 1975 and the report, *The Double Bind: The Price of Being a Minority Woman in Science*, was published in 1976. Since the time of that publication, the impact of living in this space where women of color encountered barriers related to race/ethnicity and gender has been the subject of much discussion. The fact that women of color in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and biomedicine (STEM) experienced education, workplaces and careers in ways that were unique to their “intersectionality” has been highlighted and elaborated by many others over the decades. But little has changed.

One of the most recent reports comes from the National Academies, *Transforming Trajectories for Women of Color in Tech* | The National Academies Press (nap.edu). This consensus study notes the vast opportunities within the expanding tech sector and, once again, the underrepresentation of women of color. In some cases, there are declining levels of participation. But the report goes on to make the point that representation is only part of the story:

“Even in cases where some groups of women of color may have higher levels of representation, data show that they still face significant systemic challenges in advancing to positions of leadership. Research evidence suggests that structural and social barriers in tech education, the tech workforce, and in venture capital investment disproportionately and negatively affect women of color.”



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The women who participated in the Double Bind conference in 1975 crafted recommendations largely requiring responses by their own communities. A commentary, “The Double Bind: The Next Generation,” was published as part of a symposium in the Harvard Educational Review in recognition of the 35th anniversary of the publication of the report, https://www.hepg.org/her-home/issues/harvard-educational-review-volume-81-number-2/herarticle/women-of-color-in-stem_814. Noting that women of color had challenged and addressed many of the concerns identified in 1976, it was clear from the perspective of “Double Bind daughters” that further progress depended on changes by institutions and organizations. <https://www.aaas.org/news/thirty-five-years-after-double-bind-obstacles-remain-minority-women-stem>

The new NASEM report calls that out clearly. How will that challenge be met??