

2013

## The Under-Representation of Minorities in Political Careers

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### Recommended Citation

Barr, Chelsea and Pae, Ina (2013) "The Under-Representation of Minorities in Political Careers," *Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato*: Vol. 13, Article 2.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56816/2378-6949.1001>

Available at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/jur/vol13/iss1/2>

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The Under-Representation of Minorities in Political Careers

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### **Abstract**

Numerous studies have found that people of color, women, and those with physical challenges are significantly under-represented in political careers due to societal barriers. For example, women's participation in politics shows some improvement while women occupy only 12% of the political careers. To explore whether students and professors interested in political careers have experienced under-representation of minorities, a mixed-method approach with both surveys and interviews of Minnesota State University, Mankato, students and professors from the departments of Government and Gender and Women's Studies were utilized. These students were selected because both fields study political institutions, and are likely to seek political careers. According to previous literature and similar to our own research findings, minorities experience obstacles in the process of obtaining political careers. In addition, professors who work in academic careers and feel in touch with various political topics, described a lack of support to maintain their careers. This study has implications for raising awareness about the obstacles that people of color, women, and those with physical challenges face obtaining and maintaining political careers. Building upon a wealth of research, our findings will challenge our society to lay prejudicial barriers to rest and provide greater equality for all those seeking political careers.

*Keywords: political careers, minorities, women, oppression, research, challenges, societal barriers*

## Literature Review

Gender, racial, and ethnic differences are crucial factors for consideration when determining the lack of representation of minorities in professional fields. The biological composition of men and women with different racial and ethnic backgrounds seem, based on these grounds, to exist equally, yet in society inequalities commonly enforce prejudices. Although women represent 50.8% of the population in the United States (Farrell, 2013, p. 2), the representation of women in professional careers is significantly lacking. Katharine Sarikakis and Leslie Regan Shade (2011) state in “World Media,” “In terms of the professions, women are under-represented in law (18 percent), business (12 percent), and politics (12 percent), despite their increasingly strong presence in these occupations worldwide” (p. 67). Professional careers tend to be occupied by the majority, white males, leaving others to be marginalized within a “vicious circle” ... “where it is harder both to launch and maintain a parliamentary career” (Murray, 2010, p. 457). This review explores scholars’ research of the struggles faced by minorities.

Worldwide and throughout history, women in every racial category have been under-represented and under-compensated in government sectors, “At every level of government across America, women are underrepresented” (Farrell, 2013, p. 3). In rare situations, when women are elected into political positions they endure obstacles different from their cohorts who are of superior societal stature. “Numerous studies suggest women have difficulty climbing the career ladder because of glass ceilings, ‘those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization’ ” (Dolan, 2001, p. 94).

## **Struggles of Women in Politics**

According to Borisjuk, Rallings and Thrasher (2007), “In some types of council, women candidates are handicapped by being selected to challenge an incumbent” (p. 195-196). These female representatives were ultimately elected as a “sacrificial lamb: they won party support for races the party was likely to lose” (Sanbonmatsu, 2010, p. 37). By serving as a sacrificial lamb, women were more likely to gain party support and are chosen to run for positions that are more difficult to attain. When women attain political careers, their work tends to be valued less. Their careers start later in life and end more quickly (Murray, 2010). Upon the attainment of positions equal to those of men, compensation for women’s work, in general, is often less. Women’s work often deals with building relationships, thus it is hard to calculate a price for their work. Due to this nature of women’s work, they typically earn less money than men (Aguado and Frederickson 2012). These factors are commonly due to women’s constraints of family and domestic responsibilities and their inability to relocate. In situations where females have career successes prioritized as the most important, “They are more likely to remain single and childless, rather than their male counterparts” (Dolan, 2001, p.94).

Jessica Ritchie, author of “Creating a Monster” (2013), brings attention to the struggles of Hillary Rodham Clinton during the 2007 Democratic Party Campaign. Clinton was criticized by the media as “antitheses of appropriate femininity—cold, calculating, emasculating, and brutal—characteristic that reached its logical conclusion in her construction as the ultimate mechanized cyborg” (p. 104). Social media has become an influential factor in political campaigns as politicians more recently utilize these resources for their campaigning (p. 106). Although the Internet can be a beneficial tool, in some cases it can cause a negative impact by creating false and destructive ideas about marginalized politicians, resulting in undue

consequences. A group on Facebook publically criticized Clinton's campaign, their name was "Hillary Clinton Stop Running for President and Make Me a Sandwich" (p. 106). This group was supported by over 30,000 people and was accessible to wide populations through Internet use. As it is common for political candidates to suffer from biases and prejudices, minority politicians suffer these based on their minority statuses.

### **Representations in the United States Congress**

Current statistics provided by the Center for American Women and Politics inform us that women hold only 18.1% (97/535) seats of the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress. Currently, only 29 out the 97 women in Congress are of color including African American, Hispanic, and other ethnicities. The Congress includes the Senate and the House of Representatives. The women in the Senate obtain 20% (20/100) of the seats and the women in the House of Representatives obtain 17.7% (77/435) of the seats. Throughout history, only 1 woman of color has been in the Senate and only 42 women of color have been in the House of Representatives. The Center for American Women and Politics also provided us that women of color make up only 4.5% of the total 535 seats in the 113<sup>th</sup> Congress, women of color make up only 4.5%.

### **Marginalization of Ethnic Minorities**

As we look at the contributing factors for the under-representation of minorities with political careers, it is crucial to explore the educational opportunities and support systems available to these individuals. Ethnic minorities commonly lack efficient support and counseling within educational systems. The initial considerations for career development begin in college, yet the experiences for minority ethnic students are inadequate.

According to Durodoye and Bodley (1997), "Ethnic minority college students encounter career development issues that are different from those experienced by majority students" (p. 1).

It is often found that minority ethnic groups tend to favor communal advancements before achieving personal advancements. This differs from American, societal, Eurocentric ideals. “Conversely, Eurocentric values may foster autonomy and independence, as the individual is emphasized over the group” (Durodoye and Bodley, 1997, p. 2). Eurocentric values are commonly brought to attention regarding white males in which gendered expectations require them to be “Worldly, aggressive, and self-interested.” This is contrary to the expectations of a woman, which are to be “Moral, self-sacrificing, dutiful, and domestic” (Aguado and Frederickson, 2012, p. 27).

### **Introduction**

Previous research has raised our awareness of the many problems within society regarding the under-representation of minorities with political careers. This has led us to research the reasons for under-representation of minorities and to eliminate discriminations related to these reasons. What was discovered are that minorities experience obstacles in the process of obtaining political careers and university students at Minnesota State University, Mankato, believe that efforts should be made to eliminate these. Minorities within careers are often attacked by discrimination, conflicting with their personal and career aspirations. These conflicts affect one’s ability to succeed within a career. Prejudice, discrimination, sexism, racism, and classism affect personal aspirations and on a macro-level, cause dysfunction within larger systems. Scholars have addressed some concerns regarding the difficulties faced by marginalized people in political spheres and we have utilized their suggestions to motivate our research. This study uncovers the opinions of university students and professors regarding minorities with



political careers. Included are their perceptions of minorities and their involvement in political institutions.

### **Methodology**

Our research was conducted using a feminist, mixed-method approach. The purpose for our combination of methods was to obtain qualitative and quantitative data to answer our research questions and ultimately prove or disprove our hypothesis. The ways in which our research methods are feminist include, most importantly, the inclusion of minorities' opinions to improve the conditions of these people within society. The methods chosen were in-depth interviews and surveys, both of equal priority, but of unique value because both result in different kinds of data that compliment each other. This would either strengthen the results or create more grounds for inquiry.

Our initial step in the research process was to generate research questions that our results would intend to answer. Also, we created a hypothesis about our results, that marginalized populations are underrepresented in political careers.

For both methodologies, we were required to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to include human subjects in the study. The IRB approval process included the composition of consent forms, interview scripts, survey templates, and completion of the IRB approval application.

### **Survey**

After much reflection, we chose the primary mode of research to be a standard, paper-based questionnaire. This methodology is commonly successful at providing accessible and easily remembered knowledge about societal issues. While there are drawbacks to using this

method, such as excluding participants' personal experiences regarding their opinions, the provision of statistical data is valuable.

### **Design**

Our survey was designed with seventeen questions, including multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank styles. It requested demographic information through fill-in-the-blank questions, with the purpose of allowing participants to not be confined to particular identity options. This data was later transformed into categories that could be quantified. All of the survey participants remained anonymous.

### **Sample**

Our survey sample included 212 students in Government and Gender and Women's Studies courses at the Minnesota State University in Mankato. The majority of participants were Caucasian (78%, 165 of 212), then People of Color (including African, African American, Asian, Asian American, and Hispanic people), (20%, 42 of 212), Native Americans (1%, 3 of 212), and 1% (2 of 212) chose not to answer. The genders of our participants were female (68%), male (31%), and others (1%). Our participants provided their sexual orientations: 80% heterosexual, 7% LGBQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer) and 12% chose not to answer.

We were given permission from teachers on campus to come into their classes to distribute surveys. This process of sampling is considered to be "convenience sampling" because the population was easily accessible to us. Our sample size was satisfactory and was more inclusive because of its quantity.

### **Data Analysis**

After survey completions, we entered the data onto an Excel spreadsheet. This allowed us to analyze the data efficiently. During data entry, we created codes for the open-ended questions

to include them in the statistical analysis. Through these processes, we were able to create meaning from the raw data provided by many individuals. The interview results were similar to and explained some of our survey results. At the completion of data analysis and result interpretations, we determined whether our hypothesis was proven or disproven.

### **In-Depth Interviews**

After the completion of surveys, we conducted interviews, with three individuals, to add subjective data to aid our objective, statistical results. The timing of our data collection, or sequencing, was important because we were hopeful to keep both sets of data separate until interpretations were complete. The interviews served multiple purposes. Most importantly, we wanted to learn the personal experiences of our interviewees, specifically within under-represented populations. This is a unique aspect of our feminist research. Next, we were interested to discover if the interview data correlated to the survey data. If so, we were interested to learn explanations of the quantitative data through the qualitative method. If the qualitative data were synonymous to the quantitative results, they would be considered credible.

### **Design**

Our interviews were planned to be semi-structured, by applying a specific guide to maintain a degree of control, but also allowing some flexibility. The guide was planned early in the process and approved by the IRB. After describing our research study, we provided our participants with two consent forms, one to keep and one to sign and return to us. We allowed our participants to choose pseudonyms, and reiterated the voluntary nature of their participation. All of the questions were open-ended and we used probing to encourage the responses of our interviewees. Probing consisted of body language and questions that would encourage the interviewees to elaborate more on a topic of particular interest.

It was important for us to use reflexivity, to be aware of our personal beliefs and values and to not portray them during interviews in order to obtain the most unbiased data. We left our preconceived notions out of our interviews. We also felt at certain points that participating in conversation was beneficial and provided a cooperative creation of data. During interesting dialogues some information may have been discovered that otherwise would not have been.

### **Sample**

The population of our interview sample was small, consisting of three university professors. All three professors were Caucasian females. These professors taught within the Government and Gender and Women's Studies departments at Minnesota State University in Mankato. The small sample was satisfactory because we focused more on the process of our interviews and the meanings of what each individual was sharing. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, in locations of the professors' choice. This was important to us because we felt it was necessary to earn the trust of our interviewees. This allowed us to be more attuned to physical, non-verbal cues.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were audio-recorded, and then downloaded onto our password-protected computers. Throughout the entire process, we used memoing, handwritten notes, as a way to record our progress and make adjustments throughout interviews when necessary. Our memos assisted us as we created coding categories, which then assisted us in recognizing similar themes across all interviews. After these themes were interpreted, we applied our results to our research questions and survey results to determine that our hypothesis was proven. By utilizing both methods, we found our results to be plentiful because they come from multiple methodologies, including more possibilities for diverse outcomes.

## Survey Results

The quantitative data we collected provided us with a statistical analysis of our participants' opinions of minorities' representations in political careers. It is agreed by 95% (202 of 212) of student participants that the majority of politicians are Caucasian males. This informs us that students believe political populations have much room for improved diversity. Participants (72%, 154 of 212) reported that minorities are underrepresented within political positions. The majority of participants (96%, 204 of 212) signified that it is important to include minorities in political careers. Students recognized the lack of diversity and express their concern for improving this representation.

Among the minority groups, participants felt that African Americans are the most represented in political careers. Students also answered that women are moderately represented. Participants felt that transgender individuals are the least-represented minorities in political careers.

Participants reported that it is either somewhat likely or very likely (88%, 186 of 212) for minorities to want to obtain political careers, but they (55%, 117 of 212) felt that minorities do not have equal opportunities. Participants (64%, 136 of 212) agreed that minorities are oppressed (limited based on minority status) in the process of obtaining such careers. In addition to oppression, participants (85%, 181 of 212) reported that minorities are limited by the glass ceiling. The term "glass ceiling" refers to an unofficially acknowledged barrier to the advancement in a profession. These numbers are interesting in that they provide information about the opinions of students about discrimination of minorities. This discrimination limits their opportunities and possibilities for successful careers.

Participants (85%, 181 of 212) could only list up to ten individuals, who are considered minorities, with political careers. The following is the list of politicians from most frequent to least: Barack Obama, Condoleezza Rice, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Sonia Sotomayor and Colin Powell, Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann, and Marco Rubio and Amy Klobuchar. These results are consistent with the fact that students reported that African Americans are the most represented minorities in political careers and women are the next most represented. All of the names provided are of African Americans and women, except for Marco Rubio (Cuban American).

### **Gender Factors**

The majority of our male (68%, 44 of 65) and female (92%, 134 of 145) participants signified that transgender minorities are least represented in political careers. Surprisingly, 18% (12 of 65) of male participants signified their beliefs that transgender minorities are moderately represented. Five male participants stated their beliefs that transgender minorities are represented and 12 stated that they are moderately represented in political careers. This is a relatively large number compared to only 5% (8 of 145) of the female participants who signified that transgender minorities are moderately represented. This informed us that 26% (17 of 65) of male participants assumed that transgender minorities are in politics. One-third of male participants felt that lesbian, gay, and bisexual minorities are moderately represented in political careers. In the process of obtaining political careers, the majority of females (72%, 105 of 145) chose strongly agree or agree for the statement of minorities being oppressed on the survey, while men (55%, 36 of 65) on the other hand disagreed.

As the majority of the population, males may want to stay in the status quo, which is the male-dominant society. They want to keep their dominant visibility and influence in the politics.

Males indicated that this situation of lacking diversity is not an immediate priority. Females (93%, 135 of 145) signified that minorities are limited by the glass ceiling, and males (70%, 19 of 27) disagreed. This could be due to female participants' personal experiences or the experiences of people whom they know. It is interesting at this point that the some male participants chose not to answer for next questions.

### **Racial Factors**

The following results were analyzed based on the racial backgrounds of participants. Among participants of color (69%, 29 of 42), it was reported that African Americans are either represented or moderately represented. Caucasian participants (87%, 144 of 165) signified that African Americans are either represented or moderately represented. It is interesting that Caucasian participants continued to minimize the commonality of the under-representation of ethnic minorities in political careers, at greater frequency than participants of color. Women of color obtain only 4.5% of the 535 positions in the 113th U.S. Congress (Center for American Women and Politics, 2013).

The majority of participants signified that women are moderately represented, rather than extremely underrepresented, signifying their opinions that the acceptance and representation of females may be improving in political careers. Also, participants agreed that sexual minorities are extremely underrepresented. When asked whether minorities experience equal opportunities for obtaining political careers, the responses were almost split down the middle. The majority (52%, 22 of 42) of people of color agreed. All participants based on their racial backgrounds, agreed that minorities are limited by the glass ceiling (Caucasian 83%, 137 of 165, People of Color 88%, 37 of 42). Still, Caucasians who are less likely to experience this discrimination

agreed, but at a lesser value than those minorities who have a greater potential of experiencing this.

### **Interview Results**

Many of our interview results support the data gathered throughout the survey. Each of our interviewees identified as members of marginalized populations. These populations are not minimally quantified, but they experience limiting prejudices based on their identities. These identities have been crucial factors affecting their personal, academic, and professional lives. They each expressed, to some extent, experiences of overcoming obstacles caused by limitations of minorities in society.

#### **Discrimination Based on Biology**

A theme repeated throughout interviews was about difference. We refer to difference as an issue because in our society differences tend to be a source for discrimination. In one interview, we learned the importance of treating people equally regarding differences, and even encouraging individual differences. Differences are not usually thought of as something to embrace and enhance, rather something to try to eliminate. The outcomes of enhancing personal differences may just very well be the reason humans are all born differently, to compliment each other. Another interviewee shared her experiences throughout the civil rights era as a visually impaired individual. She discussed the hatred she experienced that was directed toward people based on their skin color, but she did not fully understand it because she could not see color. Rather, she instinctively knew that something about all of the hatred was not right.

Reasons given for the under-representation of minorities in political careers involved the implementation of gendered stereotypes. These are enforced at birth despite males' and females'



biological similarities. Men and women are raised and taught based on their biological sex to excel in certain skills. During an interview, it was mentioned that the skills that are not encouraged are ultimately discouraged through intimidation. Women and girls are more likely to go into certain fields like humanities rather than pursuing fields such as science and math, which are usually occupied by men. Also, minorities feel incapable of succeeding in these areas. Hypothetically, if gender minorities, women, were to pursue such fields, their male counterparts would discourage them by doubting their competence. This was shared as the personal experience of one interviewee.

### **Influences of the Majority**

Interviewees (2 out of 3) discussed the United States government and education systems as dominated by Caucasian males. This relates similarly to the result of 96% of survey takers agreeing that the majority of politicians are Caucasian males. Minorities are under-represented in political careers. It was mentioned in an interview that even in the rare case of a member of a minority group obtaining a political position, they are influenced to conform to the views of the majority in order to obtain the support of the majority. They would tailor their campaign strategies to align with their allies' and supporters' views. Otherwise, they would be subjected to discrimination and criticisms on this basis.

### **Flaws within the Education System**

Struggles faced by minorities were mentioned in interviews as differing from those of the majority. Many of these include educational disadvantages. An example of this is when students need additional supplies to aid their learning. An interviewee had a need for Braille textbooks in elementary and high school, but due to school administration's red tape, she was not provided with the materials. These textbooks had to be ordered early, thus she would obtain the books'

information before her classmates. The school did not give her an access to proper materials because they considered it to be a disadvantage for her classmates. The school prioritized this visually impaired student less compared to her classmates, and she was disadvantaged. As this is one example, it is not doubted that many others struggle from a similar lack of equal treatment and opportunity. This same individual continuously struggles to prove her competence as she works in a university setting. She has to be more prepared and obtain special technologies to succeed because her supplies and materials are insufficient because of her different needs.

### **Mentorship**

Throughout interviews, a constant theme continued to appear. All three interviewees expressed the importance of mentorship and strong support systems in order to succeed. They explained that sometimes family members and friends are not adequate supporters and it is crucial to obtain other mentors. Mentors help individuals eliminate their fears based on self-doubt and encourage their success. It is beneficial for people to surround themselves with professional mentors with similar goals for personal motivation. Institutionalized barriers may discourage minorities aspiring to political positions. It is beneficial for minorities' success to work as a community to advance each other's positions through solidarity.

### **Inclusion of Minorities**

For improvement on the basis of minority representations, interviewees mentioned the possibility of gradual improvements if minorities are given the opportunities. Persevering through obstacles is possible, but it may sometimes seem impossible. Interviewees provided the suggestion that with an increase in minority representation within political careers, policies would be created to support the needs of these populations. With more inclusive representation in political positions, young people are more likely to aspire to achieve their political goals.

Although Hillary Rodham Clinton has not been the President of the United States, two interviewees mentioned their desire to see her elected. Similarly, survey participants expressed their familiarity with Ms. Clinton as the third most frequently acknowledged politician, who is marginalized based on her gender.

### **Advice for Success**

Each of the interviewees provided us with a piece of advice for minority individuals on how to obtain political careers and not be discouraged. Some advice included remembering the original goals and motivations. One must be prepared for discouragement and criticism, but keeping in mind the original motivations will help achieve these goals.

Also, by networking and forming relationships with mentors, students and young professionals can be guided and receive help in reaching goals. Another piece of advice was to obtain a good education, not only to get a well-paying job, but also to become better rounded. A useful field of education is one that provides a broad-based knowledge such as liberal arts programs. Through education, students also gain critical thinking skills that are necessary to make the most informed decisions.

### **Implications**

Our research challenges our society to lay prejudicial barriers to rest. By respecting the growth among individuals' differences, we can create a true cooperative democracy. This is one important goal of feminism. The results from our research inform us that there is an interest among university students, to improve inclusion of minority people in politics, especially sexual minorities. Participants across the board agree that minorities face different obstacles than those of the majority. These obstacles are based mainly on oppressions and discrimination. It is

interesting that one-third of male participants chose 'Moderately represented' for the visibility of lesbian, gay, and bisexual minorities in political careers. Although this is significantly low, it is important not to disregard the recognition of some representation especially because names of these minorities were not listed on the surveys. These answers may have been based on an assumption rather than actual knowledge.

Our research can be used in various ways to eliminate the exclusion of minorities and encourage equality within political fields. As an initial effort, fundamental values such as equality among all people should be taught throughout educational institutions. Educational leaders should be more conscious about opportunities to teach inclusion. By encouraging students to be successful, educational leaders should be mindful of the feminist pedagogy teaching style, a pedagogy used for the learning of every person involved. Students and educators are encouraged to share their beliefs and ideas, resulting in a cooperative and comfortable learning environment. By utilizing this teaching style, minority students are encouraged to achieve their personal aspirations. The success of these efforts will minimize minority-students' fears of failure based on discrimination, sexism, racism and classism.

Some benefits to improving our educational system are delayed, but improving step by step. Students who are taught to live virtuous lifestyles will eventually grow and learn to represent our nation. A more immediate contribution that citizens can make is practicing their right to vote. This right is one way for citizens to have a voice within society. Within our democratic society, citizens have the opportunity to elect the leaders. This is a heavy responsibility because those who vote create policies that are applied to all people of the nation. Citizens should be sensitive to the needs of their fellow citizens. They must reach out and support those who are marginalized to create equality.

Due to the lack of minority representations within political leadership, current leaders must be mindful and considerate of the needs of these minority people. Lacking representation within leadership positions should not cause discrimination among populations and politicians can use these results as motivation to advocate for marginalized citizens. Minority people's needs must be considered and leaders must support their people equally. Minorities who have successful political careers should consciously encourage members of minorities groups to strive for similar successes. As Hillary Rodham Clinton has achieved many political goals, women and girls can look up to her as a role model.

Like educational institutions, grassroots organizations apply their fundamental values to contribute in our society. These organizations campaign for important issues that affect local and national populations. These organizations can use our results to advocate for minority inclusion within political careers.

### **Limitations**

Our research was conducted at a university with students who are predominantly Caucasian. As our results have informed us, the majority of our participants were Caucasian. In different geographic locations, such as urban communities, diverse populations can be better accessed. The research was limited by the lack of diversity on the Minnesota State University, Mankato campus. We contacted academic professionals at several educational institutions in Minnesota and government offices, though were unable to complete interviews with them. Through obtaining larger samples, our research would have more diverse and informed data.

It is difficult to draw conclusions from an interviewee population consisting of only three participants. Our research would have benefitted greatly by including more interviews. Also, all three of our interviewees were Caucasian females and diversity may have altered these results.

Our research was conducted with sample populations within Government and Gender and Women's Studies departments. Our survey takers were confined to major classes from the two departments including lower and upper division classes. Other students with different academic backgrounds may have different opinions regarding minorities in political careers. This study was limited by the lack of academic diversity. It would be instructive for our research if we could collect diverse opinion from other academic programs and the general education classes.

### **Future Research**

Future research should utilize snowball sampling to accumulate a more diverse network. This method is useful in that researchers inquire a population that continues to grow. The population is initially based on people that the researchers know. These people then ask other people they know and this continues. As our data suggests, participants have different opinions based on their personal backgrounds and it is important to include the diverse opinions of people. Even though people might be categorized based on gender or race, each person has built up a unique background.

A beneficial continuation to our research should consist of sets of qualitative and quantitative data, similar to what we have already done. The difference would be the sequencing of obtaining each of these sets of data. Interviews should be conducted first, for the purpose of developing ideas for creating survey questions. The interviewees should be asked to recommend a survey sample population and specific questions they would like asked. Next, the surveys

would be distributed to the suggested sample populations containing the suggested questions. In addition to these questions, the surveys should include an open-ended interviewee referral section. This process should be used to explore what students and professors desire to learn about minorities in political careers.

Another suggestion for future research includes the exploration of professional opinions from establishments other than educational institutions. Such establishments would include local and federal government agencies. These could include the opinions of minorities, although it would be interesting to learn the opinions of the majority, Caucasian males. The opinions of the majority may differ from those of minorities, as was indicated by our results. The majority may be unaware or unconcerned of the under-representation of minorities in political careers due to their privilege. Majority leaders in local and federal government agencies should be interviewed about their experiences obtaining their positions. They should also be interviewed about their opinions of minorities' opportunities for obtaining political careers. A survey should also be implemented in order understand majority leaders' opinions based on inclusion of minorities in politics.

Also, grassroots organizations and non-profit organizations that advocate for political inclusion should be studied. These organizations participate in campaigning for the inclusion of minorities and marginalized populations in our society, but their effectiveness is unknown. It would be interesting to learn the effects of their efforts to improve the conditions of these marginalized populations. A study of these organizations would inform us of their goals and desired outcomes. Then their targeting audience should be surveyed to distinguish the organizations' effectiveness. This would provide the organizations with recommendations for improving their goals, efforts, and procedures.

## **Conclusion**

Our research was motivated by previous research about the marginalization of minorities in the process of obtaining political careers. The study has proven our hypothesis to be true, signifying that some university students believe minorities and marginalized populations experience obstacles different from those of the majority. Through surveys and interviews, we have collected data that uncovers the opinions of university students and professors regarding minorities with political careers. We have explored the reasons for the under-representation of minorities and many ways of eliminating the discriminations faced by these people.

The discriminations against minority people are often rooted within the norms of society. Our study raises awareness of these and challenges our society to lay prejudicial barriers to rest. Many of the ways to eliminate discrimination similarly encourage career successes and allow individuals to pursue their career aspirations. By encouraging individuals to develop their personal strengths, we all will create a true, cooperative society.

We have addressed some limitations that were encountered throughout our study and have offered some ideas for future research. These will ultimately enhance our findings and contribute to a growing wealth of knowledge.



## Appendix

1. Do you believe that minorities are underrepresented within political positions?

- Yes                                       No                                       Maybe

2. How many minorities can you think of with political careers?

- 1-5                                       6-10                                       11-20                                       more than 20

3. How important do you think it is to include minorities in political positions?

- Very Important                                       important                                       Not Important                                       Extremely Unimportant

4. Which minority groups do you feel are most under-represented in political careers? Please circle the number

	Represented	Moderately represented	Extremely under-represented
a. African American	1	2	3
b. Asian American	1	2	3
c. Latin American	1	2	3
d. Native American	1	2	3
e. Women	1	2	3
f. Transgender	1	2	3
g. Lesbian	1	2	3
h. Gay	1	2	3
i. Bisexual	1	2	3

5. How likely do you think it is for minorities to want to obtain political careers?

- Very likely                                       Somewhat likely                                       Not Likely

6. Minorities have the same opportunities to obtain political careers as non-minorities.

- Strongly Agree                                       Agree                                       Disagree                                       Strongly Disagree

7. Minorities are oppressed in the process of obtaining political careers.

- Strongly Agree                                       Agree                                       Disagree                                       Strongly Disagree

8. The current President is considered a minority.

(Please select disagree so we know you are not just randomly choosing answers)

- Strongly Agree                                       Agree                                       Disagree                                       Strongly Disagree

9. The majority of politicians are white.

- Strongly Agree                                       Agree                                       Disagree                                       Strongly Disagree

10. The majority of politicians are men.

Strongly Agree                       Agree                       Disagree                       Strongly Disagree

11. To obtain political careers, minorities are limited by the glass ceiling

(Glass ceiling: An unofficially acknowledged barrier to advancement in a profession, esp. affecting women and members of minorities)

Strongly Agree                       Agree                       Disagree                       Strongly Disagree

12. Please list names of minorities you can think of with political careers

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13. My major is \_\_\_\_\_

14. My gender is  Male                       Female                       Transgender                        
Other \_\_\_\_\_

15. My age is \_\_\_\_\_

16. My race/ethnicity is \_\_\_\_\_

17. My sexual orientation is \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Authors' Biographies**

Chelsea Barr was born on December 4, 1989 in Niagara Falls, NY. She moved to Minnesota in 2001 due to her mother's career location. After graduating high school, she attended college at Minnesota State University, Mankato in Mankato, MN. She graduated in May 2013 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Gender and Women's Studies and an Art History minor. Chelsea plans to attend graduate school for International Leadership. She plans to use her education working abroad and locally with marginalized populations.

Ina Pae was born on April 1, 1988 in Tübingen, Germany while her father was studying abroad earning his Ph.D in Theology and her mother was working as a nurse. She was educated in South Korea after her family moved back. Since August 2011, Ina has attended Minnesota State University, Mankato in Mankato, MN. She is working on a degree in International Relations with a minor in Gender and Women's Studies. After college, she is hoping to work for international organizations that advocate for women and children.

#### **Faculty Mentor:**

Shannon J. Miller is an Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She received her doctorate in Child and Family Development with a concentration in women's studies from the University of Georgia. Her research interests are in the combined effects of race, gender, and sexuality on southern black queer women's experiences, particularly resilient responses to discrimination. Dr. Miller has presented numerous papers at international, national, and regional meetings and has published manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals. She is the co-founder of All My Children Project, an organization promoting the health and well being of Black LGBTQQ persons, their families, and communities through social justice research. As recognition of her activism in the south, she is the current president of the Southeastern Women's Studies Association (SEWSA).