

# The Privilege Degrees of Separation Gives Us

'The Priesthood', The 'Black Tax', and  
Formulating Fixes for Fixed Physics Friction



# What we're going to talk about today

- Mainly about a set of tangentially related issues (connected by an idea of “degrees of separation”) which can come up in academia due to simply a lack of existing in a minoritized group
- How can we better inform ourselves?
- How can we potentially fix these issues?

“It’s hard to empathize with the problems of marginalized populations when you think you’re the smartest person in the room and have all the answers”

# Dr. Apriel Hodari

- A sociophysicist at Brown University
  - Studying culture of physics and other STEM disciplines
- A black woman physicist
  - Uses experiential data to develop the concept of “the priesthood”

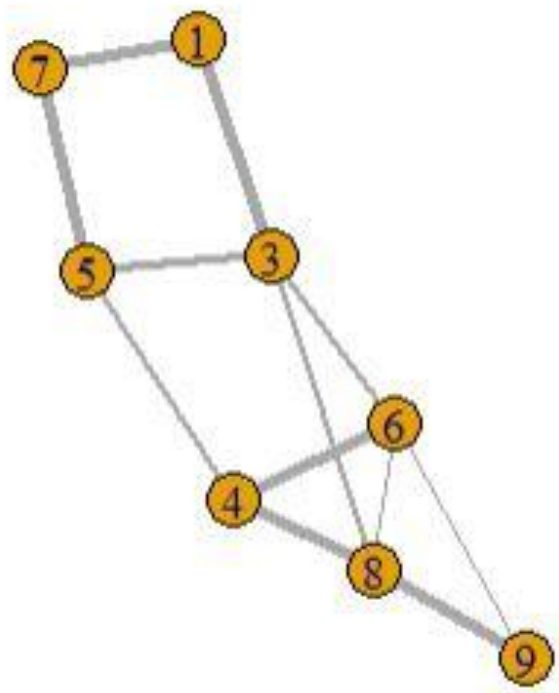
Further reading:

[Common Challenges Faced by Women of Color in Physics, and Actions Faculty Can Take to Minimize Those Challenges: The Physics Teacher: Vol 55, No 6 \(scitation.org\)](#)

[Where Are The Black Physicists? \(sciencefriday.com\)](#)

# So what do I mean by “degrees of separation?”

- In network theory, *degree* indicates how far away one node is from another.
  - The higher the degree, the less easily information can travel
- When you add a factor of something like race, gender, disability, etc, you can see where issues could arise.



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# The “Priesthood”

- Let’s face it, there is an overrepresentation of cis-straight-white-abled-men in physics.
  - This isn’t news.
- They aren’t going away
  
- The “priesthood” is just the idea that this overrepresentation forms a “block” of sorts
- This block is separated, oftentimes by multiple degrees
- This block often forms the dominant culture of departments

# Physicists like to think we exist in a “culture of no culture”

Traweek, S. (1988). *Beamtimes and lifetimes: The world of high energy physicists*. Harvard University Press.

- Physics is driven by hard facts and data.
- Physics is done by people, not hard facts and data.
- The moment you have more than one person connected to another, you have culture.
- Networks are breeding grounds for culture.
- When your church is all priests and no nuns you tend to forget nuns bake all the bread



# The “Black Tax”

- The idea that black faculty and students should work to combat racism, despite it not being their job.
- This is well and good when you're me, but not everyone
- Turning inward, think of examples of the “black tax” you may not have noticed or thought of here in Rutgers P&A.
- Are there other taxes?

# The Problem of the Native Informant

- A “native informant” is “someone from a particular race or place who is seen as an expert on it simply by virtue of belonging to it”
  - Sonia Sotomayor’s NYC is very different from Donald Trump’s NYC is very different from Whoopi Goldberg’s NYC is very different from Lindsay Lohan’s NYC is very different from mine.
- When we expect one person to be in charge of the narrative of all people that look like them, we lose much of the vibrancy of the narrative.

Why is that bad?  
Don't we want  
native informants  
to tell us what's  
wrong???

Yes we do!

- The problem comes due to *nuance*
- When there's one native informant, we can end up *tokenizing*
- When we rely on only native informants we can have a steep black tax

# Discussion time!!!

- Breakout rooms? Or nah?
- How do we eliminate the black tax?
- How do we get the priesthood to leave their church?
- How do we lower the degree of separation?
- How do we avoid native informants *in the classroom?*