

Body Projects of Young Women of Color in Physics: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Science

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Summary

Most research on underrepresented members in science focuses on gender or on race/ethnicity, ignoring intersections embodied by women of color. This article, which draws from a qualitative, longitudinal study, addresses this gap by focusing on ten minority female physics students who negotiate three incongruent realms: field of study, gender, and race/ethnicity. It examines ways in which these students sense that their belonging and competence in science are questioned because their bodies do not conform to prevalent images of the "ordinary" white male physicist. To persevere in physics, they engage in bodily projects of (1) approximating ordinariness through fragmentation, which entails using strategies of racial or gendered "passing," or (2) rejecting these practices in favor of multiplicity, which entails employing stereotype manipulation or performances of superiority. By highlighting accounts of individuals who persevere in the elite physics field, this article provides insight into how university departments should reform to promote more women and underrepresented minorities in science.

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