

Abstract for Plenary on Ideas for the Future
“Critical Mass” Unchecked?

Maritza Reyes
Florida A&M University College of Law

Are women in the “critical mass” changing the status quo, providing cover for the status quo, or perpetuating the status quo? The concept of “critical mass” hiring and retention of women in the legal academy has been touted as one of the solutions to the unequal treatment that women face in our roles as law professors and administrators because we are women in a patriarchal system. But “critical mass” measured by numbers alone does not necessarily translate into equality for all women. We should scrutinize whether the women who get hired and retained as part of the “critical mass” are actually advancing equality for all women in our institutions and in the legal academy in general. It is also important to analyze whether the “critical mass” beneficiaries replicate the same systems of oppression once they achieve positions of power, including the power to exclude women unlike themselves, thereby defeating the goals of diversity and inclusion. I propose that women may be the deciding factor on whether equality for all is achieved in the workplace. Therefore, it is important to be cognizant that women may be promoting and enforcing the same old norms and “isms” that the “critical mass” was supposed to fight against. Are we ready to tackle these “controversial” issues? One way to begin our research is to follow the feminist tradition of telling our stories. We should encourage women to come forward and tell stories that move beyond oppression by White men. By doing this, we will identify and propose solutions to the “Next Generation Issues of Sex, Gender and the Law.”