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Invictus: Race and Emotional Labor of Faculty of Color at the Urban Community College

Kerri-Ann M. Smith, Kathleen Alves, Irvin Weathersby, Jr., and John D. Yi

Abstract: *This article shares the counter-stories of four junior faculty members of color, whose lived experiences provide concrete examples of what emotional labor sometimes entails in higher education. Grounded in Critical Race Theory and anti-racist methodologies, these academics identify specific ways in which they experience emotional labor: guilt, silence, anger, navigating double-consciousness and liminality, and self-regulating physical and mental health. They seek to buttress their experiences with counternarratives and, consequently, recommendations for how community college leaders may help to alleviate the emotional labor associated with junior faculty members of color through promotion, leadership, mentoring, and recognition of diverse perspectives and contributions by faculty members of color to the landscape of academe.*

Introduction

In the rhetoric of diversity in academia, the verb “reflect” stands as a ubiquitous means of performing the work of diversity.¹ To reflect something is to embody or represent it faithfully. In the urban community college, this would mean that the racial makeup of faculty reflects the racial makeup of the student body. But within the current conditions of academia, where its full-time faculty is primarily comprised of white males, (US Department of Education), the ideals of diversity seem impossible. The authors of this article—an immigrant Filipino woman, an immigrant Black woman, a Korean American man, a Black man—reflect the promise and success of diversity work. As junior scholars at our institution, we are marking a different racial landscape that diverges from the homogenous past. Our hiring reflects well on the institution. Our hiring brings credit to the powers that be that made that happen. Our hiring is diversity work at work. Writing on diversity work in higher education, Sara Ahmed posits that “you *already* embody diversity by providing an institution of whiteness with color” (*On Being Included* 4). Our bodies of color become the embodiments of diversity work. And yet, our mere presence on campus is not enough.

Our counter-stories situate our experiences, as faculty members from marginalized minority groups, on the landscape of an urban community college, and in a department where the majority of our colleagues are white. These counter-stories draw on the concept in Critical Race Theory (CRT) that centralizes, legitimizes, and validates the lived experiences of people of color as “critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching racial subordination” (Yasso 74). We share a commitment to highlight Otherness in

1. The authors respectfully request that all citations of this article include all of the names (not with et.al) of the authors to honor the collaborative nature of this project.

various ways at our institution and through our voices, to make visible the institutional barriers that may isolate or marginalize us as faculty members of color and that create complex layers of emotional labor. We also draw upon Arlie Hochschild's distinctions between the "real" and "acted" self and the tests that come about as a result of our presence at an institution where we are few in number. We seek to explore, through these counter-narratives, the idea of being disconnected from the sources of power for which we "act" as members of marginalized groups.

We teach at a community college in one of the most diverse counties in the United States, which, according to institutional data, serves a student body comprised of people from over 127 countries, who speak 78 different languages. We serve a dynamic demographic of students, and in the past few years, we have seen our full-time student enrollment shift from having almost equal numbers of students from each race to a 7% decrease in the number of white students we serve. Like those at other urban community colleges (Carter; Levin, Levin, Walker, Haberler, and Jackson-Boothby), the demographics of the faculty, on the other hand, represent a stark contrast to the dynamic heterogeneity of our students. Our faculty is mostly white (64%), and for those in the minority, our presence at work is often met with scenarios that radically disturb and uproot our sense of belonging.

Community colleges serve students with diverse interests and backgrounds, most of whom enter the workforce immediately through technical and business-related fields. Thus, the impetus is upon the faculty to create a community where our students are exposed to and familiar with a wide range of experiences that reflect the dynamic racial, cultural, and political world in which we reside. There are long-term institutional, educational, and personal benefits for students when faculty members of color are permanent and present at their institutions (Levin, Walker, Haberler, and Jackson-Boothby; Mertes; Newkirk). Having faculty members who reflect diverse perspectives is one important way to help students discuss and confront issues that are unique to their circumstances. The paucity of faculty of color to serve the needs of a diverse college community may result in extensive emotional labor for that faculty. An institution that lacks diversity in its faculty maintains the status quo of academe, which by nature of its origins, marginalizes and excludes qualified faculty members of color, while relying on those who are present to extensively render emotional labor.

Derrick Bell identifies four strands of resistance that make the academy inflexible: white superiority, faculty conservatism, scholarly conformity, and tokenism. Other research (Ladson-Billings) validates and qualifies Bell's categories, while placing emphasis on patterns of exclusionary hiring, retention, and training that reflect practices historically in line with white supremacy. All four of us have experienced these features of our institution's culture, and thus attest that the culture of this institution fosters an environment where junior faculty members are often relegated to silence and compliance. For junior faculty of color, this distinction is more palpable and emotionally cataclysmic.

In a recent interview, Hochschild clarifies that emotional labor is "work for which you're paid, which centrally involves trying to feel the right feeling for the job. This involves evoking and suppressing feelings" (Beck). In extending Hochschild's definition through a theorization of racialized emotional labor in academe, we propose solutions

to help ameliorate the effects thereof. We posit the necessity of unmaking institutional life centered on marginalization and power in order to create an environment that moves beyond the empty rhetoric of diversity. Rinaldo Walcott proposes that “something more radical and sustaining than diversity is now required if whiteness is to be understood as the foundation and barrier that preempts nonwhite others from the structural arrangements that currently govern human life” (394). Whiteness depends on phenotype, but whiteness is also a structure—the structure—that works to replicate white people’s superiority through a set of ideas and practices that endow and affirm that superiority. We can no longer tolerate the myth of unconscious bias, for it moves the attention from the recipient of racism to empathy with the person who benefits from phenotype and social structure. Unequivocally, white faculty wear the face of and benefit from white supremacy. Walcott argues, “The structures that require radical transformation to change the ongoing global administration of life and death cannot be transformed without the transformation of whiteness, and such a transformation can occur only if people marked as white are implicated and fully understand their implication and are prepared to act on it” (398). This understanding and willingness to act by white faculty is requisite for change and transformation in institutional structure and human relations.

In this article, we offer the lived experience of four marginalized scholars and our counter-narratives depicting guilt, silence, anger, navigating double-consciousness and liminality, and managing our physical and mental health. We present these counter-narratives as testaments to the labor required to thrive in inequitable conditions. Occasionally, we have experienced moments of clarity through a willingness to allow room for growth, believing in our own labor as transformative, as a force that fosters transcendence and mobility. But, frequently, carrying this labor is a huge weight, one that threatens to crush our careers. If we manage to survive and embrace the struggle, however, we believe that we can effect radical change.

Alves: The Emotional Labor of the Tenured Professor of Color

On the tenure track for six years, I was granted tenure and promotion last year. I am one of two female associate professors of color in a department of 63. Since I was hired, more faculty of color have joined the department, but at the time of my hiring, there were no full-time men of color and only two women of color in the entire department. There were no full-time professors who identified as queer or disabled. Indubitably the department was homogenous, with the majority of full-time professors white. While the racial landscape in the department has definitely become more heterogeneous since my hiring, this change has positioned me in an unexpected political location, one resting on my racial identity.

When I was on the tenure track, I tried to be careful. I avoided conflict. There were many moments when I wanted to air my frustration, my disagreement, my opinions. I knew that to survive on the tenure track I had to play the game of civility. I did not want to be known as a shit-stirrer, someone who causes trouble, makes people uncomfortable, forces people to confront their own problematic prejudices and viewpoints. This “effort not to stand out or stand apart” is what Ahmed calls “institutional passing” (Cultural Politics127). I thought I played the game of institutional passing well. I silently consid-

ered every word, every gesture, every microaggression with care. I shrank my body's occupation of linguistic and political space, a symptom of fear. Ahmed writes that "fear works to restrict some bodies through the movement or expansion of others," and "to contain bodies within social space through the way it shrinks the body, or constitutes the bodily surface through an expectant withdrawal from a world that might yet present itself as dangerous" (*Cultural Politics* 69, 79). Though I was on the tenure-track, the professional world I inhabited was precarious.

Silence and Silencing

"How does it feel to be a problem?" W.E.B. Dubois' words in *The Souls of Black Folk* continue to haunt us a century later. In higher education, faculty of color who expose racism within the institution become the problem. Ahmed writes, "To talk about racism is thus to be heard as making rather than exposing the problem: to talk about racism is to become the problem you pose" (*On Being Included* 153). If our bodies of color "fix" the diversity problem in academia, that we are the political solution, speaking out can mean becoming the problem that you bring. When we speak out, we become the problem. And in becoming the problem, we can see how diversity as a commitment to antiracism in the institution is a performance.

In the space of exclusion, we have two choices, both rooted in anger. We can bring up the problem, become the problem, and be seen as the angry women of color that they see us as anyway; or leave it alone and be angry at the performative dimension of anti-racist work in the institution.

Ahmed observes that people of color are careful to avoid the language of racism because of the saturation of racism in institutional spaces: "If you already pose a problem, or appear 'out of place' in the institutions of whiteness, there can be good reasons not to exercise what is heard as a threatening or aggressive vocabulary" (*On Being Included* 162). Bringing up racism is aggressive. Embodying the figure of the angry person of color presents an impossible situation. When we criticize racism, it is perceived as an expression of anger, anger heard without cause: "It is as if we talk about racism because we are angry, rather than being angry because of racism" (Ahmed, *On Being Included* 159). And in transferring the burden of talking about racism onto us, whiteness is recentered.

Tenure and the Meritocracy Myth

Before tenure, I never would have asked pointed questions about race with my white colleagues. I never would have asked them to confront their own ways of enacting white supremacist practices in their teaching. I never would have asked them to think more deeply about their own whiteness, to call that whiteness into account. I never would have asked them to think about how inequity occurs through homogeneity, how as white people they are not aware of the barriers nonwhite people face, the barriers in thinking through and writing in the imperialist language of standard written English. I never would have asked them to think about how this homogeneity provides an advantage they feel entitled to as white people who wield the power of recognition.

We think of tenure in the future abstract, but tenure is rooted in material and concrete advantages: a promotion with higher pay. But tenure is *granted* by the college Personnel and Budget Committee (P&B), then the president. Whenever I speak up in meetings now, I feel that tenure has endowed me some power, a small space to speak from my position in the minority for the minority. I can say I earned that power. I can believe in the myths of individualism and meritocracy, but I can also say that the college P&B and the president (who is white) *allowed* me to stay and *allowed* me to move a step forward in my career trajectory. This distinction is crucial, for no matter how competent a professor is, that professor cannot stay if the institution does not allow it. Access is denied. Tanya Titchkosky notes that access is not merely a bureaucratic practice, but demonstrates how access opens toward specific bodies. Whiteness obfuscates racism by paradoxically presenting whites, white privilege, and racist institutions as unseen. As Robin Diangelo observes, whiteness creates and buttresses the dominant narratives in American society, such as individualism and meritocracy: “These narratives allow [whites] to congratulate [themselves] on [their] success within the institutions of society and blame others for their lack of success” (27). If I believe I *earned* tenure, then I do not have to think about the uncomfortable truth that I am a character of these narratives, narratives written by white people.

The Professional Consequences of Rage

A few days after a racially insensitive meeting held by the department’s Composition Committee, where roughly half the full-time faculty were present, I decided to Tweet my thoughts, my anger and frustration palpable. A day or two after, my chair asked me in an email if I could stop by her office for a chat. I knew immediately that this chat would be over my Tweets.

My chair is a white woman. She is kind and gracious. We talk about our kids and the pressures of parenting. She has never given me any reason to fear her. But her position as chair and the power she wields as a member of the white community with the collective social and institutional power and privilege over people of color, people like me, frightened me. I was filled with dread. I was like a child called into the principal’s office: The principal could deliver positive news, but that office symbolized power—a power usually imagined as punitive authority. Was I going to detention? Would I be expelled? Is it worth putting my partner and children under economic pressure if I lose this job to make a point? I fell into a chasm of guilt, resentment, and shame.

The meeting was awkward; both my chair and I acknowledged the discomfort. But she listened to the source of my anger. She recognized and validated my experience by asking how we could begin antiracist work in the department. We brainstormed some ideas, and one of the major changes instituted that semester was a department Diversity and Inclusion Committee. Junior colleagues of color on the committee insisted that two members should be senior faculty with their concomitant influence in the college, and she made this happen. In my entire professional career, this has been the strongest example of a supportive white person who demonstrated a commitment to breaking with white solidarity.

I am heartened by the positive direction in antiracist work in the department, but I still feel the weight of acting as an ambassador for the faculty of color who are on the tenure track or in contingent positions. I cannot say with certainty that my colleagues of color feel similar pressure to play the same game of civility and silence that I felt when I was on the tenure track. I can say that in the course of the two hours of that meeting, the majority of them did not say anything. Was this the work of “institutional passing,” the kind of work I did and continue to do? Carrying this crushing weight of responsibility takes an enormous toll on my body, my spirit. It is an impossible balancing of what I feel is my obligations to them, to myself, and to my relationship with my white colleagues.

Smith: On Being Black and Young-ish

According to institutional data, I am one of 43 Black faculty members in a body of 415. That’s 10.4% at a college where 26% of the students are Black. In my department, at the time of writing this, I am the only Black woman who is tenured and who has earned that distinction in recent history. The Department made a historic move by finally granting tenure to a Black man in 2019. These milestones are significant because only tenured members can hold leadership positions in our departments, and with the exception of one, everyone on departmental and college-wide personnel and budget committees must be tenured. The absence, over the course of many years, of a tenured Black person means that none of the key stakeholders in my department has ever been Black and, more significant, none has held a full professorship. The personnel and budget committee makes key decisions related to hiring, promoting, and funding faculty members. A committee that reflects only the culture of power reinforces the exclusionary tactics historically practiced in higher education.

Professors with tenure, especially those who have reached the highest rank of full professor, can advocate with impunity. They can lead, advise, advocate, and choose to say “no” when overwhelmed. College-wide, there are only six full professors who self-identify as Black.

Professors of color, in general, rarely occupy advocacy roles. Instead, we are often found in advisory or supporting roles where votes are not essential to the hiring, firing, or reappointment process at the college. Four years ago, however, only 8.9% of the overall faculty were Black, so we have grown in number, and our attrition rate has been fairly low in the last two years. The absence of faculty of color in key advocacy roles reinforces the foundation of white supremacy upon which higher education was built.

People on campus are not used to seeing us in leadership roles outside of student affairs. Pamela Newkirk notes that a 2016 study by the Teachers Insurance and Annuity Institute confirms that “administrators of color were disproportionately in diversity or student affairs positions” (93). It is, then, no wonder that when I enter offices, I’m sometimes met with strong animadversion and reproach. Incidents I have encountered reinforce the historical and stereotypical mindset of white supremacy and its agents on my campus. I often find myself suppressing rage and sarcasm for the sake of maintaining decorum in a professional world—something my offenders rarely seem to have to consider for themselves. This mindset is consistent with Austin Channing Brown’s assertion that, “it’s work to always be hypervisible because of your skin...it’s work to

do the emotional labor of pointing out problematic racist thinking,” all while struggling to maintain a sense of worthiness and avoiding “bitterness and cynicism” (21). The double-consciousness of suppressing rage on the inside, and maintaining professionalism on the outside, is what John Levin, Laurencia Walker, Zachary Haberler, and Adam Jackson-Boothby describe as “the divided self,” and what Hochschild identifies as “deep acting”—a method that is used to “personalize’ or ‘depersonalize’ an encounter at will” (133).

After about the third time, I began recording the instances when I would walk into offices and receive either the cold shoulder or be completely ignored while standing and waiting for assistance. The offenders were mostly college assistants—invariably older white women. Outside of campus office spaces, white men were the other prominent offenders.

Once I was assigned to share rooms with a white male colleague from my department for our final exams. I had arrived a few minutes before he did, and my students and I were enjoying a spirited conversation when he walked in with authority, declaring it was time to begin, while instructing me to take my seat before he distributed the exam. I registered my disapproval by ignoring his directives and continued to talk to my students, who were vocally and visibly annoyed. We were in a large lecture hall, with all of his students and all of mine, and his response to being ignored was to speak louder. I was standing in front of the lecture hall, facing students, wearing professional attire, and holding a stack of blue exam booklets. At the very least, his perception should have been that I was there to assist the professor. Yet, he continued to direct me to “sit down now,” all while referring to me as “you.”

Once he finally realized that we were colleagues, he came over to quietly apologize. He attributed his ignorance to my youthful appearance, stating (ironically) that times have changed and his children, who are around my age (whatever his perception of my age was) are also professors. I found it hard to separate this man’s perception from that of other racists, who fail to see us or situate us, Black women, in the frame of the professoriate. I reluctantly accepted his “quiet” apology and noted to myself that he had not apologized as publicly and emphatically as he had imposed his misguided older-white-male authority when he insulted me in front of a large group of students. I walked away from the situation regretting that I had not insisted on a public apology with the same gusto with which he spewed his insults. The consequence of these unfortunate encounters is always ours to bear. We leave angry, agitated, and anxious about things we should have said and the offenders walk away bearing little to no emotional consequence.

I imagine that I did not represent, to him, the image of what a professor should look like, confirming Ahmed’s observation that “being asked whether you are the professor is a way of being made into a stranger, of not being at home in a category that gives residence to others” (*On Being Included* 177). I am Black, and youngish, and while I dress “professionally” (again reinforcing the white supremacist mindset of what a professional embodies), I somehow did not represent what his mind conceived as a person worthy of the title, Professor.

The Diversity Hire

I define emotional labor through the lens of microaggressions that I experience before I enter my classroom. These microaggressions render me both hypervisible and invisible simultaneously, since part of my commitment to changing my surroundings now includes heavy involvement in all things connected to diversity on my campus. My hypervisibility in diversity work is what Amado Padilla calls “cultural taxation” and what Tiffany D. Joseph and Laura Hirshfield would describe as “pioneer” work, which in many cases comes with “important consequences for faculty of colour’s academic performance, subsequent promotion and tenure” (129). Patricia Matthew issues a clear warning to faculty of color that we must maintain focus on scholarship, rather than attempting to solve problems of inequity that were created and maintained at our institutions long before we arrived. In 1992 Derrick Bell tackled the notion of hiring Black professors for the sake of “diversifying the academy.” In *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, he proposes that power brokers should consider an academy where the statistics were reversed and the number of Black faculty members outweighed whites. He asks, “what action, then, would whites take?” (138). In such a scenario, he says, those in power would certainly find solutions—and rapidly.

A white woman in a leadership role once casually referred to me as “a diversity hire,” and by this she meant no harm, but I decided to embrace the title and proverbially “come whiffing through the tulgey wood” (Carroll 170) of white complacency and status “quoism” on my campus. Still, like Alice’s fall down the rabbit hole in *Alice in Wonderland*, my desire for inclusion, coupled with my “pioneer” efforts may very well be “nonsensical” because issues of race are often disguised in policies, cultural practices, and “norms” that are part of a “deeply embedded ideology of White superiority and Black inferiority” (Newkirk 77) often perpetuated in the hiring, promoting, and retention of Black faculty members in the academy.

Nonetheless, as an appointed member of the president’s faculty advisory committee for diversity, I use my voice as an advocate for change. Membership in this group is an emotionally taxing task that every member must undertake if change will ever transpire at our college. Since joining this committee, I have seen small shifts, but there is still much to be done. The composition of the select group of faculty members is worth noting. Of the ten selected faculty members, only one is white and male. There are three Black men, one Asian-American man, one Asian-American woman, one Latinx woman, and three Black women. Being a member of this select group allows me to be what Brown calls a bridge builder, though she reminds us that “the role of a bridge builder sounds appealing until it becomes clear how often that bridge is your broken back” (69). The task is laborious, and I may never see the full impact of the work in my lifetime, yet the work must be done.

As Newkirk points out, diversity is a buzzword in the academy, and despite the efforts and copious amounts of funding to help shift the tide, our institutions continue to be hostile spaces where our cultural capital is exploited in many cases (for example, we are called upon to use our networks for diversity talks, or are asked to join panels and discussions to fulfill a diversity quota, or are given the courses for which most students of color register) and devalued in others. Walcott reminds us that, “diversity interrupts

and delays more radical calls for human transformation” (405), and oftentimes the term is used, but nothing radical occurs to impact change. Internalized racism and institutional racism (Bell, Funk, Joshi, and Valdivia) are interwoven in the seams of academia, and as a Black woman interested in making a difference, I must protect and preserve my position as a scholar. Even as much as my institution has made efforts to effect change in the area of diversity, I am reminded that “American college campuses have historically been inhospitable environments for people of color” (Newkirk 96), and even with the efforts put forward, there is much to be done to ensure true inclusivity. Much like the unnamed narrator in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, I am aware that although I have been so involved in the work of diversity on my campus, I have been doing it at the risk of being “sacrificed for my own good” while everyone else benefits. Ellison calls this the “sacrificial merry-go-round” (505).

Brain-Picking Without Benefits

Research on faculty experiences at American colleges and universities show that while they engage robust diversity initiatives, faculty of color persistently grapple with exclusion and marginalization (Joseph and Hirshfield). As a Black woman, I often rely on my navigational capital (Yosso) in order to cope with conditions that were never created to include or accommodate me in the first place. I must also be conscious of my status as a junior faculty member, and I must continue to grapple with the double-bind of the oppositional culture (Ogbu) that resides within me and the double-consciousness of holding my head down, while treading murky waters (Levin, Walker, Haberler, and Jackson-Boothby). This state of being is emotionally onerous, and morally degrading, yet like Paul Ruffins suggests, I must maintain decorum and “navigate minefields” (qtd. in Joseph and Hirschfield 123) to ensure financial and scholarly security, while defending my right to exist in the academy.

Equally emotionally exhausting is the fact that while navigating these spaces, I am still called upon to share ideas, gratis, for which others would be compensated or credited. For example, senior colleagues have asked me to share entire bibliographies on topics related to my specialty without an invitation to co-author a piece. The power differential, coupled with the unspoken demands of collegiality, can become complicated. I have had countless incidents where senior faculty members have scheduled meetings to “pick my brain” about a research project, with no consideration for my time or the fact that it would be beneficial for me, then an untenured faculty member, to earn co-authorship of the article or research project.

Furthermore, in exchange for the brain-picking, no mentoring is offered to help support my advancement as a junior faculty member despite the widely understood benefits of mentorship (Padilla; Laden and Hagedorn). Only once did a colleague—a senior faculty member who is a Black woman—deliberately invite me to co-author a now-published article, for which my expertise was requested. Her example speaks to the necessity and benefits of having senior faculty of color available to support, mentor, and collaborate with junior faculty members. As noted by Levin, Walker, Haberler, and Jackson-Boothby, Black faculty members often work collaboratively, and so when they are institutionally underrepresented, such support systems cannot exist and thrive.

Yi: Not Your Asian Ambassador

I am a co-coordinator of the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) and have the opportunity to lead a cohort of faculty who teach a co-requisite ALP section designated for students who need to exit from reading and/or writing remediation. I am responsible for leading workshops, creating and updating the collective body of curricular and pedagogical work of ALP faculty that helps with student achievement and success. It is a role that I am both serious and passionate about; and one that I am really fortunate to have been given by the chair of the department.

Although I am a coordinator within the English department, I sometimes feel pigeonholed by my white colleagues whenever the topic of Asian, particularly Chinese English language learners, becomes the topic of discussion. These conversations embarrass and upset me because, for one, I am not Chinese and have no professional teaching background in working with Chinese English language learners, and secondly, I did not come to work for the English department to be an ambassador for Asian students.

Jane Hyun, in her seminal work, *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling*, articulates my anxieties of balancing interpersonal relationships within the overly-ambitious American work environment. As a Korean, I demonstrate respect for my elders as is expected in my culture, but this approach often works to prevent Asians from reaching leadership positions. A former HR executive, Hyun has looked at the ways in which Asian cultural values may be limiting/hurting Asian professionals in career advancement and fulfillment. She presents numerous case studies and anecdotes on Asian professionals of diverse age groups and professions working in the US to highlight the ways in which one's cultural background plays into how they are perceived and treated in the American workplace.

Hyun looks largely at Confucian cultural elements that limit Asian Americans from excelling in the American workforce—such elements that center on deference to authority and elders, collectivism, and self-control/restraint. Hyun's work identifies and affirms the cultural nuances that I bring to the department as a Korean American who straddles both Korean and American cultures. My role as a co-coordinator allows me to “break,” if not crack, the bamboo ceiling and both challenges and inspires me to no longer restrain myself before it is too late to say something, especially when I want to be heard. As one of only two Asian American male faculty members, I can see how my colleague and I both confide in each other, especially when navigating through our respective work. The bond that we have formed (re)affirms much of the internal tensions I feel as someone who may sometimes seem invisible in collegial conversations. When I do speak out, however, it seems as if I am moving out of that “other” space.

Seeing how my colleague is treated as less than, interrupted during meetings, and is reluctant to talk first, I get where he comes from. I understand what it is like to feel invisible in the presence of white colleagues. And yet I can see there is a difference in how each of us is treated. In a recent cohort meeting that was aimed at creating additional resources for ELL students, this Asian American colleague was rudely interrupted by a senior white colleague when he finally shared out his points, after patiently waiting for everyone to offer their feedback. I was very angry and regret not standing up for him in that moment like I wished I had stood up for myself in those moments when I have also felt silenced or interrupted. But DiAngelo writes that “White people often define as

respectful an environment with no conflict, no expression of strong emotion, no challenging of racist patterns, and a focus on intentions over impact. But such an atmosphere is exactly what creates an inauthentic, white-norm-centered, and thus hostile environment for people of color” (127).

Balancing Two Halves

Being Korean American affords me a unique lens through which I understand the work that I provide to the department. ALP allows me to use my strengths of navigating this liminal space. I find particular enjoyment in my classroom conversations because my ALP students also navigate this world of two halves. At least 90% of students are either bilingual and/or bicultural, sometimes even tri-lingual, and belong to more than two cultures, not including American. Further, these students participate in an English composition course and a corequisite remedial reading and/or writing course simultaneously. Often our discussions extend beyond the scope of composition and literacy, and my students and I *really* talk about the things that matter most for us in the context of who we are, where we come from, what matters most to us, and how all those things inform the ways in which we approach our writing and reading identities.

I love to teach Freshman composition unlike many of my colleagues. Often, I find that they dislike it because of the work it requires of you as an instructor. You are not tasked with teaching composition alone. You are challenged to teach soft skills like note-taking, college etiquette, academic professionalism and other life skills. I suppose it is in this role that my liminal, Korean American identity becomes a strength and aids my effectiveness. There is always movement and flux between different modes and mediums related to identity, learning, philosophizing, interpreting, defining and sense-making. This fluidity complements my passion and contemplative practices which help me meet the demands and challenges of teaching an ALP course.

In a recent freshman composition course I taught, an Asian male student, who identified himself as both (and neither) Korean and Chinese, shared some insightful commentary on his identity. Although he was quiet during class, he came up to me once class was over and all the other students had left the room to express his feelings of not belonging within the Korean community, as well as the Chinese community at our college. He taught me that I am very privileged to not have to deal with the stigmas, fears, or labels of being accepted by neither the Chinese nor Korean community. We then got into language, and his own social fears of speaking in class. That day also happened to be the first day he actually spoke out during class discussion, and he was eager to seek my feedback since he was afraid that he was being inappropriate or too personal. It was a very illuminating conversation that lasted for about an hour, and I was able to share with him the very same feelings of what it is like to live in a very liminal space, and how sometimes being of two or more worlds and not fitting in perfectly in either one can be unique and uplifting. Our conversations made me think about the notions and meanings behind “Korean,” “Chinese” and “American,” as well as the other insights about the neighboring borders all around us.

When I establish connections with students on a personal, cultural level, we each straddle a liminal space wherein we are faced with identities that are often conflicting.

The spaces we occupy seem dissonant, not the norm, or what is expected. A part of the work is undoing notions of irrelevance or feelings of insignificance that many students feel. This work provides an opportunity for us to share and teach each other about our feelings of uncertainty and/or psycho-socio pensive moods that intersect race, ethnicity, religion and class. The opportunity to create dialogue around these meaningful discussions helps me to understand that emotional labor for a faculty member of color is not so different than the emotional labor (and trauma) that students of color face.

The reading and writing class I teach gives me such an opportunity. And while this happens I cannot help but wonder if I am good enough, if I am put into this role because of other reasons—because I look like the majority of ALP students enrolled in my class, that I am some sort of physical prop to reflect the demographics of ALP students. As an ALP faculty member, I am seen both as an “expert” and someone who may understand students. This duality often plays into and challenges me to reconsider my role. Still, I love giving students the opportunity and space to learn comfortably, in the way they best make sense of their own learning process—not to press them or see them as blank slates, or empty vessels. But to what extent do my peers really see me as just an expert of ALP or remediation courses?

The experiences of feeling out of place, or not deserving to be in a space with other “qualified” students is something that I have struggled with throughout my doctoral journey, which possibly stems from my own internal struggles I’ve had with being both Korean, as well as Korean American. I was raised in a household where I was encouraged to speak either Korean or English, unlike my two older sisters who were born in Korea. My father made it a point that they study Korean at an early age, but he deemed it unnecessary for me. As I grew older, I yearned to learn it, particularly when I became a teen and K-Pop, or Korean popular music, was becoming more popular, especially among second and third-generation Asian Americans. I vividly recall teaching myself how to read in Korean after spending an entire month just watching a Korean music show after school called *Music Bank* (a music show devoted to the hottest Korean music videos for the week, much like MTV’s *TRL* or BET’s *106 & Park*) where popular artists would perform live. In short, I learned to read in Korean without having to literally understand what I was reading. Essentially, my limited understanding of the Korean language in a way shapes how I perceive my limited access and entry into Korean culture and traditions. I do not entirely see myself as Korean, nor entirely American. I am neither, but I am also both in a sense. This in-between space is where I speak often from when discussions of identity surface around culture, race, and ethnicity. It is also a space where many of my students reside.

Being an ALP faculty member and now a co-coordinator within the program encourages me to see past all the internalizations that I have put up with. This role enables me to move beyond the space of seeing myself as less than to being a vital member of the department.

Weathersby: Denying Discomfort

When asked about being awarded a MacArthur Fellowship, Claudia Rankine has described the recognition as not necessarily about her work but its subject which cen-

ters on racism and the deconstruction of white supremacy (Begley). In *Citizen*, a collection of prose poems, Rankine mines expressions of racism and how they correspond with the imagination in vignettes that grapple with the quotidian experiences of Black Americans. Some of these experiences illustrate the racist encounters that she has been subjected to as a professor and speak directly to the racism that I have also experienced in academia. When she veers into these spaces, the psychic burdens I bear are revisited.

One of the most difficult incidents that I endured actually involved the teaching of *Citizen* during my formal observation. I hadn't planned for the text to fall on my observation date, but the professor assigned to assess my performance needed to reschedule, and in a way I was grateful for the change if for no other reason than for him to actually engage with racism and see me, not as a competent instructor, but more as a competent Black man, product of a rich legacy of pride and excellence. I had wanted to detail this much to him and more in our earlier exchanges but had demurred for the sake of my employment. I am untenured, and like many professors of color, I am fully aware of the tenuous circumstances that define my existence. "Unemployment rates for black workers have been consistently higher than for white workers over the past 60 years" (Perry), so causing a disturbance in the name of discomfort seemed impractical.

DiAngelo articulates many of the challenges that I face when people of color must confront their oppressors. Additionally, Rachel Alicia Griffin, Lacharles Ward, and Amanda Phillips have identified experiences of Black male faculty members, in which they, too, have managed racist structures, while navigating academic spaces. While DiAngelo offers "rules of engagement" when broaching racism, she also concedes that "the only way to give feedback without triggering white fragility is to not give it at all" (123). This revelation wasn't a new concept, for white supremacy has long taught me to keep my mouth shut when I feel compelled to describe the regular offenses perpetrated against me. It goes without saying then that I couldn't detail my grievances to someone entrusted with rating my performance. How could I tell him that my name is not Irwin after not correcting him in so many exchanges? How could I tell him that his glowing description of the joy that his son receives from participating in Civil War reenactments is offensive, that my ancestors' suffering is not the subject of pageantry? Even if I had questioned him, I'm sure he would have relayed that his son fought on the right side, that he's progressive and voted for Obama. But as DiAngelo suggests, "white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color," which explains why I felt so powerless to describe my feelings at every step of the observation process (5).

At every meeting and in every email, I wanted to speak up for myself. Even more, I felt doubly burdened by shouldering the task of detailing his racism, especially after learning that he had requested to observe me again after having done so years before when I was an adjunct. Bell hooks underscores that bad feelings about racism or white privilege work as a kind of self-centeredness, returning the white subject back to itself, back to the one whose feelings matter. On this point, Ahmed asserts that "happy whiteness" allows racism to continue to press on the backs of racialized others. In my observer's eyes, we maintained an amicable relationship, so how could I heed DiAngelo's advice and tell this well-intended white man to be "less white" (150)?

The Imagery of Racism

Fortunately, I let Rankine's *Citizen* do the talking. In the excerpted poem I selected for discussion, Rankine depicts the causal assertion of Black inferiority as she drives with a colleague who bemoans the hiring of a Black writer "when there are so many great writers out there"; Rankine's subsequent reflection of the exchange as she sits in her driveway alone, hoping the solitude would mitigate her pain; a scene at Starbucks wherein a white man standing ahead of her in line casually refers to a boisterous group of Black teenagers as "niggers"; the quiet strength in numbers that emerged in the aftermath of a Black boy being knocked over on a subway platform without regard for his well-being; a trip to see a therapist who mistakes Rankine for an intruder and screams "Get away from my house?" until Rankine reminds her that she made an appointment to see her.

My goal for the excerpt was to focus on imagery, and from Rankine's vignettes, I asked my students to identify the sensory language employed and describe the corresponding feelings that Rankine hoped to convey. Their answers were mostly accurate but guarded as many of them had never been asked to discuss racism openly. They felt themselves "slam on the brakes" in a fit of rage so that their faces could crash through the windshield of Rankine's car and "be exposed to the wind." They saw the black boy being unseen by a man who "has never seen him, has perhaps never seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself." They smelled the rosemary plants lining the pathway to the door of Rankine's therapist before hearing her scream like "a wounded Doberman pinscher or German shepherd" (from *Citizen*). Viscerally, they experienced the poem but denied my requests to expound.

In the end, my post-observation report was complimentary and effusive which was unsurprising as this is the case for all of my observations. I never doubt my ability although I often doubt my place. It was obvious that my students learned to interpret imagery in poetry, but what I don't know is whether my colleague was able to see himself in the poem and in turn, see me.

John Henryism and the Adjunct's Plight

In one of the excerpted selections, Rankine details a medical term called John Henryism, "for people exposed to stresses stemming from racism. They achieve themselves to death," she continues, "trying to dodge the build up of erasure." I first read this as hyperbole until I came across "The Death of an Adjunct" (Harris) and began to see myself reflected in the story of a promising professor who resigned from a tenure-track post due to the overwhelming stress of the racism she encountered on campus.

Thea Hunter earned her doctorate in history from Columbia University, and by many accounts, was a pioneer in her field of study. But at Western Connecticut State, she was subjected to many of the same microaggressions detailed by my co-authors. Her credentials were questioned by her students, she was mistaken for a janitor, and eventually the emotional toil became too much to bear. In search of a more welcoming environment, she left her post optimistic that she would find another full-time appointment. What she found was the unrelenting life of an adjunct. After a year of filling in for a professor on leave at Princeton, she worked at the New School, NYU, Montclair State University, Manhattan College, City College, and even at a private high school. She

often taught five to seven sections to support herself which effectively left her no time to do what she was trained to do—research and write.

Before her untimely death, she shared the costs of the years devoted to doggedly pursuing another tenure-track position. In an email to a friend she wrote, “I have been saying I am done, emotionally drained and without reserves. There has just been too much going on in my life that has been drawing upon whatever emotional reserves I have. That plus the constant financial crisis that has been my life for years takes its toll” (Harris). The tragedy of her death could and should have been avoided. She died of respiratory failure after battling asthma, a condition that became more severe and undetected because she lacked the security of health insurance. Had she been employed full-time, she wouldn’t have succumbed to the racist practices infecting the academy.

When I think of Hunter’s story, I ask myself if the unjust treatment I accept is worth it. Was she not strong enough to weather the storms, or am I just an unprincipled fool? Even more, why must I be burdened by such a zero-sum proposition? I have earned my professorship after working as an adjunct for seven years at my institution. I’ve schlepped from campus to campus on the subways and busses of New York City—sometimes for two hours one-way—teaching composition courses at hosts of schools as an adjunct. My resume is just as scattershot as Hunter’s, and I recognize that I’m no more deserving than she. The tragedy of her life then emerges as a cautionary tale that instructs me to embrace the occasional comforts of my full-time status, for if I don’t, if I don’t learn to manage the stress of being Black in an unwelcoming space, John Henry will surely chop me down.

Conclusion: But We Are Brave

In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks reminds us that in order to create the kind of academy that we hope to see, we must embrace both the “struggle and sacrifice.” In order to transform the spaces that so violently bludgeon us with words and oppressive policies and practices, we must be steadfast. hooks counsels, “we cannot be easily discouraged. We cannot despair when there is conflict.” She reminds us that “our solidarity must be affirmed by shared belief in a spirit of intellectual openness that celebrates diversity, welcomes dissent, and rejoices in collective dedication to truth” (33). What hooks leaves us to solve is the problem of true solidarity through inclusion. Faculty of color are susceptible to burnout (Bellas), isolation, silencing, and tokenism as a consequence of the lack of representation, resulting in extensive emotional labor.

We offer these ways in which the emotional labor of faculty of color can be allayed. First, institutions must hire and promote more full-time faculty of color. Newkirk highlights the many benefits of hiring a diverse faculty. The norms of whiteness are reproduced and maintained when there is a lack of access, and for those who manage to break through, their presence in a sea of whiteness is a demoralizing reminder of the lack of access. Power lies in the ability to serve on personnel and budget committees, speak without fear, object with impunity, and lead without feeling marginalized (Levin, Walker, Haberler, and Jackson-Boothby). Without the security of tenure and promotion, faculty members of color lack the agency to conduct any of the above, thus finding themselves in a cycle of emotional labor, with very little support or security. Weath-

ersby relates his own and Thea Hunter's struggles to land a tenure-track job, and Alves' tenure and promotion gave her the space to honestly articulate the racist conditions in her department to her Chair, which became the catalyst to the formation of the department's Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

Second, as a testament to the collaborative effort placed into creating this piece, faculty of color must be present in order to provide affinity groups and engaging scholarly communities for other faculty of color. Environments that support active and collaborative techniques, in both teaching and scholarship, are beneficial to students and the college alike. Smith's report of senior white faculty requesting her time and expertise without recognition or compensation, while the senior faculty member of color provided opportunities to collaborate, is a strong testament to the importance of this support. Faculty members of color are often called upon for their cultural capital in the name of collegiality, which has very little bearing on whether they will secure tenure and, subsequently, promotion. Such practices reinforce oppressive structures that facilitate the exertion of emotional labor on the part of faculty of color, often resulting in a loss of valuable research and preparation time needed to secure tenure and promotion.

Third, faculty of color should have substantial leadership roles in which key decisions are made beyond their respective departments and outside of committees centered on diversity and race to avoid tokenism. Their Black and brown bodies are not the beginning and the end of diversity work. As an antiracist act, structures must be set in place to protect faculty of color when their white colleagues exercise their privilege. Yi highlights the importance and positive impact on his emotional health of this action in his account as a co-coordinator in the ALP program. Institutions must recognize the work of faculty of color outside of white centeredness as legitimate and also recognize the contributions of faculty of color to the scholarship of their colleagues.

Finally, junior faculty members of color must have consistent access to a senior faculty mentor with whom the mentee can build racial trust. The proper guidance and support from a senior faculty mentor would help lead the mentee in making strategic professional and scholarly moves for promotion to associate and then full professor. In this way, institutions will have more faculty of color in higher positions, thus allowing access to advocacy roles. In such advocacy roles, faculty of color gain opportunities to unmake the status quo and reduce the amount of emotional labor tied to their presence as diverse members of the faculty.

These suggestions by no means serve as a wrecking ball to the fortress of white supremacy embedded within academic institutions. Perhaps they may open the door a few inches. If our colleagues are to truly engage diversity, then they must also consider inclusion as its byproduct. The push to hire and subsequently boast about diverse faculty members should work in tandem with an effort to ensure that the spaces in which these diverse faculty members operate are not hostile or harmful to their emotional health or scholarly pursuits. To do this, there must be a shared commitment by all stakeholders to enacting change and allowing faculty of color to present their authentic selves in the workplace, without fear of retribution. In order to transform the academy, the academy must perform brave acts by investing in a commitment to undo oppressive structures that result in emotional labor for faculty of color. A shared belief cannot transform the academy until the academy dedicates itself to decimating the racist practices at its

core—those that deny faculty members of color their right to be included in the policies and procedures, the conversations, the spaces, the scholarship, and the new and more colorful fabric of the academic quilt. What we as faculty members of color can no longer continue to do, however, is to wear a mask while proverbially “setting ourselves on fire” just to keep the academy warm.

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