

SITTING AT THE KITCHEN TABLE: Fieldnotes from Women of Color in Anthropology

Introduction: Gender, Race, and Anthropological Practice

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Challenges faced by academics of color, particularly women of color—including overwork, lack of respect, underrepresentation, difficulty obtaining tenure, job-triggered mental and physical complications, and overall unhappiness—have long been documented by scholars (see, for example, Agathangelou 2002; Anderson 1979; Antonio 2002; duCille 1994; Frierson 1990; Harvey and Scott-Jones 1985; Nieves-Squire 1991; White 2008). Invocations of diversity made in many university mission statements, and the attention now paid to critical race and gender studies within disciplines such as anthropology would suggest that this is a new moment—a different time in which the academy has presumably ended explicit racism and begun seriously addressing questions of inclusion and exclusion. In this piece, however, we offer a different perspective. We argue that despite these seeming improvements, the difficulties experienced by female faculty of color have not only continued, but have intensified in recent years. We partly tie this change to the increasing corporatization of the academy, particularly the decline in tenure-track appointments in favor of nonsecure, contract-based positions (Bousquet 2008; Donoghue 2008; Reimer 2004). Shrinking endowments and the increasingly market-driven academy have led universities to divert resources to

programs with high enrollment rates, often to the detriment of programs such as gender and critical race studies. This shift is an unfortunate one for those concerned with faculty diversity, as these realms of study not only challenge gendered and raced understandings and practices, they are also spaces with high concentrations of female faculty and faculty of color.

A growing reliance on tuition-generated revenue has led higher educational institutions to increasingly treat students as consumers, whom they strive to placate (Davis 2011). This situation is especially difficult for female professors of color who are confronted with students' preexisting raced, classed, and gendered understandings of what constitutes a "professor" (Agathangelou and Ling 2002). These understandings often come to light in student evaluations, which institutions take more and more seriously given their increased dependence on tuition and their focus on student satisfaction. In these evaluations, disappointed students who feel they have been cheated out of a "real" (i.e., neutrally positioned/objective/white male) professor, often vent their frustrations. To compound these difficulties, women of color (WOC) continue to shoulder disproportionate amounts of affective labor in the academy, work that goes systematically unrecognized and remains undervalued. Finally, the conflation of WOC with their research agendas—that is, the assumption that these scholars are necessarily speaking from a "native" position—continues to be a problem for female anthropologists of color. While faculty of color face difficulties throughout academia, scholars working in anthropology departments confront roadblocks to diversity that are particularly embedded in the discipline. On the point of anthropology's struggle with processes of gendering and racialization, we push readers to consider how the discipline's ongoing fascination with binary "difference" continues to produce problems, most notably with respect to hiring practices and the validation of certain research sites and agendas that systematically disadvantage women anthropologists of color. Does anthropology's propensity for thinking in dualistic terms of difference account for the exclusion of certain perspectives and realms of scholarship? As importantly, does anthropology's limited capacity to conceptualize forms of difference affect the ways we evaluate scholars' expertise? With an emphasis on binary forms of difference, which issues, places and peoples are demarcated as "other," and what is the implicit basis of contrast? How do these demarcations affect which scholars are identified or conflated with their research?

The success and satisfaction of faculty of color is of exceptional concern for the discipline of anthropology, a field predicated on challenging notions of cultural and racial superiority and ethnocentrism. And yet, it remains undeniable

that anthropologists of color continue to face challenges not experienced by their White colleagues. Upon closer inspection, perhaps this racialized divergence of experience is quintessentially anthropological, as the field trades on a binary notion of difference and juxtaposition, where we posit ourselves as distinct from what we are researching, an idealized distance that is often not afforded to female scholars of color. Given this, we ask whether anthropology's inability to think beyond dualistic differences and allow for internal diversity may be at the root of some of the difficulties faced by WOC. That is, while anthropology is, in many ways, based upon fetishizing difference (e.g., studying exotic "Others"), we argue that the discipline continues to rely on the assumption of a white, male researcher venturing into the unknown as the neutral anthropological position. As a result, faculty who complicate or challenge this disciplinary identity (either by existing outside of this race/gender/class position or pursuing research among communities with which they have preexisting ties) often face marginalization and fare poorly within anthropology departments. This emphasis on binary difference in anthropology—the discipline's understanding of itself as existing in contrast to the communities its practitioners study—is, we argue, largely responsible for the continuing difficulties faced by anthropologists of color. Additionally, this fetishization of difference may serve to explain why many scholars with PhDs in anthropology find other disciplines, such as American Studies, Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, and/or African-American studies more welcoming environments, as these spaces are largely more tolerant of internal disciplinary multiplicity (see, for example, Davalos 1998). While some scholars may seek out and desire these affiliations, it remains the case that much work being done by scholars of color is simply more "legible" in these other disciplines, particularly research conducted on diaspora or on communities of color within the United States. We suggest that anthropology's emphasis on binary modes of thinking results in negative working experiences for WOC in concrete ways, including the following: contributing to a lack of respect and recognition for WOC both within and outside the classroom; disproportionate service expectations for WOC, affective labor that frequently remains invisible and undervalued; and the conflation of researchers with their research—that is, the assumption that WOC are necessarily "native" anthropologists.

Anthropology's concern with race in the academy is demonstrated by the recent report, "Racism in the Academy: The New Millennium," commissioned by the American Anthropological Association (AAA). The report's contributors articulate the many problematic encounters they have had in the academy. Despite the importance of these accounts, however, the voices and stories of junior scholars

of color—who frequently occupy the most vulnerable positions in the academy—are not heard. In light of these continuing difficulties, we felt it was important to write this piece in the hope that it would serve as a snapshot of academic life in this moment, in the midst of the corporatization and dramatic restructuring of institutions of higher education. The initial impetus and guiding motivation for writing this article was the surprise and isolation we each felt regarding our problematic encounters in the academy. It was only through confessional conversations with one another that we began to realize the structural similarities that shaped our experiences. That is, we became aware that the difficulties we encountered as newly minted PhDs were perhaps not singular to our own experience. We have written this piece, then, as a field guide for junior faculty of color—a record of our experiences in the present-day academy and the ways in which race and gender continue to shape academic life. It is our hope that this dialogue will work to combat the sense of isolation and inadequacy experienced by many junior faculty of color. It is of crucial importance that this article is written from the perspective of three junior faculty members, as critiques of the academy are often penned safely from the other side of tenure. While many trailblazing WOC have cleared paths for us and documented their experiences along the way (Smedley’s outstanding contribution to the AAA report on race is but one example), we felt the reflections of three untenured scholars of color would contribute to this literature by documenting the ongoing struggles for faculty of color, while getting at the particular difficulties encountered by postdoctoral fellows or assistant professors, who are among the most vulnerable faculty members.

In addition to acknowledging the importance of our positioning as junior faculty, it is equally important that we recognize the position of this article within the current body of literature. Although a dialogue about the importance of race in the academy has been long running, this conversation has often taken place outside the anthropological mainstream. As we initially brainstormed for this article, we agreed immediately that its most “natural” fit would be the journal *Transforming Anthropology*. Since 1990, the journal has been dedicated to interrogating a variety of social inequalities, including those related to race and gender. However, we made a conscious and calculated decision to engage *Cultural Anthropology* as we felt it was important to challenge this compartmentalization by having this discussion in one of the most venerated anthropological publications.

By referencing the work of scholars who have come before us and documenting our recent experiences as junior faculty of color, we seek to contribute to literature examining the significance of gender and race to the lived experiences of faculty.

Certainly, times have changed and there are more faculty members of color in the academy now than there were even a decade ago. However, researchers examining this issue have described the increase as sluggish, and have underscored that the majority of faculty of color have been hired by two-year colleges and community colleges (see Luna et al. 2010; also see Ryu 2010 and Stewart 2012). At any rate, we argue that increased representation is but one step toward solving the problems faced by WOC in the academy. From teaching and tenure evaluations, to difficult if not hostile classroom and department environments, researchers have documented the systematic racism and sexism of the academy even in the face of recent projects of multiculturalism and purported inclusion (Agathangelou and Ling 2002; Frierson 1990; Antonio 2002; Centra and Gaubatz 2000; Pittman 2010; duCille 1994). The harder—and more transformative—work for anthropology is breaking with its emphasis on binary modes of thinking and moving toward true inclusivity.

In order to highlight the significance of race and gender to the practice of anthropology, we approach this piece as an ethnography of our experiences within the discipline. We turn our ethnographic gaze to the everyday relations and spaces we encounter as junior scholars and faculty members in order to highlight the deeply gendered and racialized unspoken assumptions and practices that shape our field. Stylistically, this means that our writing here is best characterized as reportage; while we lay out our thematic and structural concerns at the outset of this piece, much of the article consists of ethnographic evidence purposefully presented without framing in an attempt to evoke the often-disorienting and ungrounded feeling of being a junior faculty member of color. As the authors of this article, we speak from different racialized and institutional positions. Tami Navarro is a postdoctoral fellow at Rutgers University who studies economic development in her birthplace and home, the U.S. Virgin Islands. Bianca C. Williams is a Jamaican American woman who is an assistant professor of Africana Studies in the Department of Ethnic Studies at The University of Colorado Boulder. With a deep love of cultural anthropology, Williams examines Black women's racialized and gendered experiences in the United States and Jamaica, focusing on strategies these women use to maintain wellness and good mental health. Attiya Ahmad is a diasporic South Asian-Canadian scholar. An assistant professor of Anthropology at George Washington University, her research focuses on transnational labor migration and religious movements spanning the Arab Gulf states and the Indian Ocean region. Though diverse, we recognize that our voices do not represent the experiences of all female faculty of color, and that we have not addressed other crucial issues that intersect with processes of racialization and gendering, most notably questions of

sexuality that are frequently neglected in existing research about discrimination and underrepresentation in the academy (for works that examine some of these questions, see Rothblum 1995, and Lewin and Leap 1996). We do hope, however, that the issues we present will provide a springboard for reflection, discussion, and action that will facilitate and create spaces for other scholars of color, women, and LGBTQ anthropologists to share their experiences—and have these experiences regarded with the importance that they rightly deserve.

In discussing our experiences in anthropology and the academy, we build on the legacy of the women of Kitchen Table Press, path-clearing feminists who challenged the often disparaging and dismissive representations of WOC in academia and mainstream media, as well as insisted on intersectionality and inclusivity. They did so by publishing provocative texts that were both written by, and about, WOC.¹ The notion of the “Kitchen Table” is a rich, densely layered term we use to signify/evoke two dimensions of our writing: First, we seek to use this article as a cross-cultural space of conversation and potential alliance-building. As WOC, we share our varied personal and professional experiences with one another, as well as with our broader community of anthropologists, in an attempt to bring a discussion about diverse professional experiences to the center of the anthropological community. Second, we use the term “Kitchen Table” to refer to the largely unrecognized and undervalued labor of women faculty of color. In myriad settings not limited to our classrooms or conference rooms—but stretching to our offices, student centers, libraries, programing events, and informal meetings wedged into walks across campus and over lunch—we perform, and are expected to perform, affective labor that is vital to the transformation of campus climates and academic spaces. Inadequately encompassed by the term “service work,” our labor is crucial to shifting racist, sexist, and heteronormative paradigms of thought, and to addressing oppressive institutional structures. Yet it is precisely because of this work that we are questioned, chastised, and viewed as less serious teachers and researchers, especially during the tenure process.

On our journeys toward and through the tenure process, we take great strength and encouragement from the women of Kitchen Table Press and the feminist anthropologists before us, as we understand their desire to transform spaces by sharing their experiences and asserting their voices. It is this assertion of voice that can be difficult for junior faculty, who are frequently advised to keep their opinions to themselves in departmental or other institutional meetings until they earn the protection of tenure. In this way, junior faculty, adjunct professors, and postdoctoral fellows are taught that they sit at the proverbial “Thanksgiving

children's table," where individuals should be seen, but not heard. These scholars are encouraged (sometimes by well-meaning advisers) to wait six or seven years to assert their voices, even if their silence helps fuel racist and sexist climates that permeate their departments, classrooms, and campuses. In this piece, we share the fieldnotes of our experiences in order to move the conversations junior faculty of color have behind closed office doors, in the privacy of their homes, and in the safe spaces of special interest groups within their professional organizations, to the center stage of the academy. More specifically, by publishing this article in *Cultural Anthropology*, we desire to bring the conversations taking place at the kitchen table to the main disciplinary table. We believe if the discussions taking place at these segregated tables never converge, and if the prevalence of racism, sexism, and homophobia within anthropology is not pushed to the forefront, then the discipline remains unsuccessful in fulfilling its mission and fully applying its knowledges "to the solution of human problems" (American Anthropological Association).

CONFLATIONS OF RESEARCH/ER

The interview was already going badly when it took a turn for the worse. The three of us were seated in an alcove just off the hotel's main lobby. Guests and pedestrians bustled by. To our right a hotel employee was carefully stacking water glasses on a banquet table. I tried to block out these distractions and focus on the questions being posed to me by the two department representatives. Like other soon-to-be and newly minted PhDs, I was navigating the challenges of a preliminary job interview being conducted at the American Anthropological Association (AAA) general meetings.

It had begun awkwardly. Suit-clad, I was met by two male colleagues, one wearing jeans and a T-shirt, the other a Hawaiian shirt and cargo shorts. The contrast in our clothing did not go unnoticed: "traded a scarf for a suit, eh? I bet you don't have to wear a suit in the Middle East." I groaned inwardly. I had only just begun wearing suits, a change precipitated by recent experiences. In the months preceding I had attended two conferences where I had worn slacks and a shirt; in other words, where I had dressed more casually. The results were unfortunate. At the first conference, I was mistaken for an undergraduate student and admonished for sitting with my fellow panelists at the conference table. During the second conference, a large international gathering, the other participants repeatedly asked if I was accompanying my parents on their trip. Thoughts of these experiences flashed through my mind as I registered my interviewers' comments. Irritated and uncertain how to respond—was this the right time to discuss the complex sartorial

politics of the North American academy and my fieldsites?—I smiled stiltedly. To fill the awkward pause that ensued, the other interviewer started to ask a series of questions about my teaching experience: what had I taught? What assignments worked best to encourage undergraduate interest in anthropology? What was my biggest single teaching mistake? Things were proceeding relatively smoothly when we hit another difficult patch. Perhaps seeking to be encouraging or reassuring, but coming across as quite patronizing, one of the interviewers remarked: “they [our students] are eager for someone who can teach minority women . . . I mean [teach] about minority women; they’ll like you.” And just when I thought the interview could not get any worse, it did. After reading aloud a description of my research, one of the interviewers ended with the comment: “I guess we know why *you* are interested in globalization.” The interview ended shortly thereafter.

Why are moments such as these important to account for when examining the practice of sociocultural anthropology today? Was this simply a bad interview—where ideas and personalities come into jarring contact, an experience best shrugged off and forgotten? Were these colleagues’ comments, misguided as they seemed to me, the result of a social awkwardness intensified by the circumstances of a short, condensed job interview? Should I attribute their utterances to the timing of the interview—an early morning meeting scheduled toward the end of the annual general meetings, a time when few of us are at our lucid or loquacious best? While these factors were certainly at play, my colleagues’ repeated invocation of my gender and ethnicity/race points to a more systematic process shaping the course of this interview. In the span of 15–20 minutes, during which my qualifications were being assessed, they repeatedly intertwined my background with my work to the point where my scholarship was conflated with my background rather than the product of my training and work. This interview indexes in acute form an issue many scholars, most especially junior scholars who are WOC, have to contend with in sociocultural anthropology today: exhibiting the wrong kind of difference and interrelation to our work.

Although what we consider to be “the field” has changed and continues to change (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, 1997b; Weston 1997), there is little dispute that the research of sociocultural anthropologists is predicated on our fieldwork. In the field we develop sustained interrelations with our sites and interlocutors, ones shaped by our class, age, sexuality, age, race, gender, religious/secular predispositions, etc. Few of us leave the field unaffected by these interrelations. Our subjectivities, affect and sense of belonging are transformed by our experiences in the field. This can include developing a sense of identification with the peoples or

places that comprise our fieldwork, or an increased sense of distanciation, including visceral experiences of aversion. Within this context, why is it that certain scholars are not just identified or seen to be shaped by their fieldwork experiences, but are conflated with them? Who goes unmarked as researchers and who gets identified as “native ethnographers”? Despite years of groundbreaking and incisive feminist, critical race studies, and postcolonial critique in anthropology, does the ideal anthropological self (still) lurking in our rhetoric and research remain masculine, White, and associated with the secular, modern West?

At the crux of these questions is the issue of how difference is understood in sociocultural anthropological practice. Influenced by scholarship as varied as Malinowski’s diaries, feminist standpoint theories, and writings by Foucault and Said that demonstrate the interrelation between power and knowledge, most sociocultural anthropologists recognize that we are not neutral, impartial observers separable from our research. We do, however, continue to trade in difference where we posit ourselves as distinct from what we are researching. Anthropological research privileges logics of contrast and comparison. Whether it be commonsensical understandings versus underlying logics, modern Western practice versus other realms of experience, liberalism versus other political forms, dominant Judeo-Christian and secular traditions versus other religious systems, there is a focus on binary difference and juxtaposition within anthropology. Even works that challenge us to think about resemblances and sameness, such as Annalise Riles’s work (2001), are themselves predicated on contrasts with previous anthropological scholarship. Focusing on binary and contrasting differences has yielded crucial insights and accounts for a great deal of anthropology’s critical edge—including challenging purported universals such as the sovereign subject, and provincializing the modern West. But what are the limits of an analytical stance predicated on binary differences? Does it stymie our ability to account for other forms of difference and configurations of interrelatedness?

As a junior scholar focused on questions of transnationalism who conducts research in a diverse, cosmopolitan milieu, it is striking to me how difficult it has been to make my work legible to fellow anthropologists. The problem is not mine alone. The majority of my colleagues whose work focuses on diasporic formations and transnational processes, especially those who research communities with connections to North America and Europe have had difficulty finding appointments in anthropology departments. Those whose scholarship pushes our understanding of plural forms of difference and interrelation tend to be hired by other departments, most notably ethnic studies, gender studies, American studies and African

American studies departments. As my interview at the AAA meetings highlights, and as subsequent conversations with colleagues further underscore, being identified with our research has profound implications for how our scholarship is assessed. Those of us who are conflated with our work often have our professional training and expertise ignored. Our scholarship is thought to be an extension of our personal experiences and to constitute a form of testimony, if in a more refined or jargon-laced form—effectively limiting the recognition of the scope of our work and our contribution to the field of anthropology. As numerous scholars before me have noted (for instance, duCille 1994; Spivak 1989), WOC in the academy are often expected—by colleagues as well as students—to serve as “native” anthropologists, the experts on “themselves.” Systematically scripted and positioned into this role, we have to contend with the persistent assumption that our “background” puts us at both an advantage and disadvantage in relation to our work, most notably by giving us easier access to our field sites and interlocutors, yet making it difficult for us to find critical distance in relation to our work. Such formulations, which effectively undermine our credibility and work as scholars, belie the myriad, complex, and dynamic interrelations, characterized by both difference and commonality, that all anthropologists, both unmarked and “native,” have in relation to the people and places that comprise our research. Let me be clear: the issue I am pointing to is not that differences do not matter—they do—or that all differences matter in similar ways—they do not. The questions I am raising are what differences are legible and why; and relatedly, which ones are considered legitimate and authoritative to anthropological practice? As I have sought to explain to my students and colleagues on multiple occasions, when I (the daughter of migrants to Canada, diasporic South Asian and Muslim) am conflated with my interlocutors (South Asian migrant women in the Gulf Cooperation Council states, domestic workers, newly practicing Muslims), this not only flattens out vast realms of social experience and homogenizes immense population groups (i.e., South Asian, Muslim, migrant, diasporic subject), it also constitutes sloppy scholarship insofar as it assumes rather than pushes us to investigate the significance of these categories and realms of experiencing.

LACK OF RECOGNITION AND RESPECT

In my mind’s eye, her hand shoots up again. And again. I see neither the burned orange of the fall leaves nor the picturesque campus unfolding in front of me as I make my way to class. I can see none of this because I spend the entire walk attempting to preempt the flood of accusatory questions I know await me.

My student, a white female just beginning her undergraduate education, has spent much of the semester attempting to engage me in a power struggle in class: if I said that “culture” was a contested term with multiple meanings, she argued at length that this could not possibly be so. This business about a power struggle sounds paranoid, even to me as I write the words. However, maybe paranoia is an indication of something real (Jackson 2008). In this case, that “something” is an assumption that my grasp on the subject matter was shaky, my ability to execute the role of professor unsteady.

As a scholar whose pedagogical philosophy centers around engaging with students and challenging them to support their (sup)positions (the point of being in the classroom is, after all, to *teach*), I was initially excited about exchanges, as I am whenever a student is visibly engaged with course material. However, after the first few weeks of the semester, it became clear that her primary goal in these exchanges was to undermine my authority in the classroom by heckling me throughout much of the course period. During my PowerPoint presentations, she would have a counterpoint for nearly every bullet point. Certainly, this example can be read as an instance of a newly minted PhD learning to embody the position of professor and mediate classroom dynamics. However, even in the most generous light (a curious student anxious to know more), I want to hold on to the structural significance of a white student feeling comfortable enough to attempt to “one-up” a scholar with a doctorate in the subject matter. Of course, I had the “answers” and the literature to support my position as any instructor should. In many ways, though, that isn’t the point. Rather, this small example points to the ways that WOC in the academy are frequently dismissed and not afforded the respect and recognition automatically granted to white faculty.

Women of color in the academy often have to work (at least) doubly hard to earn the intellectual respect of their students—a struggle for acknowledgment that unfortunately often extends to administrators and colleagues as well. My most vivid experience of being marginalized by fellow faculty members came while advising a student on a semester-long essay project, a process during which I had to regularly insist upon my role as the final arbiter of the assignment. This student’s casual refusal to incorporate my revisions, a decision in which she was supported by faculty members who provided alternate revisions on structure and literature, was rooted in her inability to recognize my position as a legitimate faculty member. In this instance, the difficulty was not primarily the student’s assessment of my role, but rather the validation she received on this count from my colleagues.

In both of these problematic encounters, the underlying issue is the ideological chasm between “black woman” and “professor.” This distance, one that results in WOC often being marginalized within the academy, is a structural issue in academia as a whole and within anthropology in particular. Making the case that WOC in the academy are *structurally* disadvantaged, Agathangelou and Ling (2002) argue that our raced, classed, and gendered identities lay outside of tacit understandings of the label “professor” (see also Bonner and Thomas 2001; Gregory 2001; Medina and Luna 2000; Nieves-Squire 1991; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001; Turner 2003). This association of “professor” with “white male” is so strong that we, and fellow WOC in the academy, are often addressed as “Miss” (or “Ms.”) or by our first names by students, while white male colleagues are called “Dr.” or “Professor”—a misstep we are bound to correct, despite the likelihood that it will reinforce the notion of an aggressive or “angry” black woman.

If white male professors are the embodiment of intellectual authority, earning the respect and deference of students by their mere presence—what Messner (2005) calls “white guy habitus”—black women are its opposite, often being expected to justify their presence in the classroom, on panels, and in academia on the whole (see Pittman 2010). It is just speculation, but I suspect that perhaps this lack of respect and recognition of authority is the reason many WOC in the academy spend an extraordinary amount of time considering the implications of their teaching wardrobe and often choose to dress in particularly formal or conservative clothing, while many of our white male colleagues do not (see Messner 2000; Buchanan 2005).

INVISIBLE AND UNDERVALUED AFFECTIVE LABORING

“Remember, this space was not made for you.”

In 2011, during a conference discussion about maintaining good mental health in the academy, a senior scholar stated this to the WOC in the room. I immediately understood what she meant. Academic institutions, particularly the predominantly white institutions at which I have taught and earned degrees, were created by men who could not fathom that one day I, a woman of African descent, would be standing at the front of the classroom. This scholar’s statement about academia’s origins of exclusivity highlighted the ways the academy has been historically gendered and racialized, while also reminding me of how the discoveries of interdisciplinarity, a legacy of mentorship, and my own agency helped me to survive and thrive on my road toward the tenure track. Choosing to no longer remain silent about the

affective costs of my journey in the academy as a WOC, I present here a frank discussion about my own experiences in order to destigmatize these experiences for other junior faculty members of color.

I am currently an assistant professor at a university that is popularly known as the second whitest university in the country. While I was aware of this label before I was hired, I never imagined how much the racial and gendered demographics of the campus and surrounding cities would affect my personal and professional lives. During my first semester, there was a two-week period when I did not see another black woman besides the three African-American and biracial women in my courses. Periodically, to comfort the emotions I was feeling as both a hypervisible and invisible person in this area, I would call my best friends, jokingly don my ethnographer suit, and report on the racialized and gendered state of affairs. “Nope, no black people today. Yes! I saw a black man on the bus, and he actually nodded at me. No, no black women, though.” I began to throw my whole self into work, as the possibility of creating social community or dating people who understood or experienced some aspect of what I was experiencing seemed impossible. In addition to the rigors of one’s first year on the tenure track, this type of work/life imbalance can become an obstacle to maintaining wellness and good mental health, particularly if the campus environment one works in reinscribes the hypervisibility and invisibility one is experiencing off campus.

While I was supported in multiple ways within my department, outside of this space it seemed that most people were unaware of the sometimes traumatic experience of living and teaching while black. I quickly learned that I was expected to be interchangeable with the theoretical discussions we had in my courses: my body and identities were always on display and actively implicated by students in classroom conversations. I became aware that since I chose to teach in departments like anthropology, ethnic studies, and women/gender studies, disciplines where students are taught to cast a critical eye on their lived experiences and society, they expected me to bring my whole self to the classroom and be open to being studied. If we had discussions about the racialized and gendered politics of presidential campaigns, students hardly hesitated to ask how “my people” felt about being surveilled under “Stop and Frisk” policies or being viewed as welfare moms. If I presented the research documenting the politicization of black hair in the United States, some students asked me for details about my own hair grooming routine or wanted to touch my hair, since they had never felt black hair before. These moments, where I am put on display as a research subject because of who I am and what I research, are ones I rarely hear my white colleagues experience or discuss. Emotionally,

I became exhausted as I continuously reminded students that I was not an ambassador for “the” black community, although I was constantly aware that as the first black person/professor many felt comfortable asking questions of, I was exactly that. These emotions deepened as various departments on campus (ones I did not have any previous relationship with) began to invite me to meet with their faculty of color potential hires in order to calm any fears these candidates might have about coming to a predominately white campus or moving to the state. Ironically, these departments did not see that their efforts to make the potential hire comfortable by providing time for me to address these race-related concerns further highlighted the objectification and invisible (affective) labor expectations placed on faculty of color. In these ways, scholars in some disciplines, particularly WOC, do not have the privilege of the illusion that what they teach and/or research is separate from who they are. And while my pedagogical and research philosophies embrace the idea that lived experience is a valuable unit for learning, I am not afforded the luxury of taking a day off; of being unmarked in the classroom or on-campus if I choose to be, or at least have this form of exhausting labor be recognized as a fundamental part of campus and societal transformation. If this work of transforming and creating new spaces is a disciplinary responsibility for *some* scholars in these fields, then it should be recognized as a valuable form of labor, particularly during the tenure process.

While it is frequently unrecognized and undervalued labor, it is during office hours that some of my best pedagogical work is done. As students build the courage to speak one-on-one with me, they open up about the troubles they are having both inside and outside the classroom. My white students in particular seem to experience distinct moments of identity crisis and transformations of racialized consciousness. As we mark whiteness and white privilege through readings and classroom discussions, these students begin to recognize that contrary to the notion that “other” people are raced, they are also raced and part of a racialized community. With these new lenses, some are hyper aware of the racist comments family members and friends make, and exhaust themselves trying to correct every potentially insensitive comment made around them. Some enter my office in tears, feeling guilty about choices or comments they have made in the past, and come to me to figure out what to do with this guilt. Others are angry, feeling as though I am forcing this new set of lenses on them, and want to express their disagreement or discomfort. More often than not, my guidance on these journeys of identity transformation is requested (and happily provided) through emails, phone calls, and letters long after students have graduated and left the university.

As WOC faculty are made acutely, and often painfully, aware of the double-burdens and double-binds we face, so too are students of color. This reality frequently results in faculty of color serving as mentors (both officially and unofficially) to students of color thrilled to see a black or brown face behind the lectern. The novelty of this experience often leads these students to ask faculty of color for help with issues ranging from acclimating to university life to understanding the GRE. This frequently invisible work of mentoring regularly comes at the expense of publishing—a reality that becomes stark at tenure evaluation. Far from being simply a personal decision or a matter of poor time management, this uncounted labor is indicative of the *structural* position of WOC. To say “no” to the lion’s share of these requests (to serve as adviser, mentor, counselor, panelist, letterwriter) often amounts to a lack of good “citizenship” in the department. In addition to this burden faced by faculty of color, the office hour lines at the doors of *women* of color are often the longest, given students’ frequent expectation that female scholars will be more nurturing and understanding of students’ various predicaments. WOC are expected to perform affective labor that improves the environment for the entire academic community, and moves the discipline of anthropology forward, but are frequently viewed during the tenure process as less rigorous researchers and teachers because they perform these types of labor.

One might ask, “Well, after all of this, why have you stayed in the academy?” While I am still in love with anthropology, my safe haven became the interdisciplinary spaces where I could combine the insights of anthropology with the narratives and complex theories of Africana studies, feminist studies, and diaspora studies. I gained strength from the works and experiences of thinkers like W.E.B. DuBois, Zora Neale Hurston, Angela Davis, Johnetta Cole, Patricia Hill Collins, Sara Ahmed, Wahneema Lubiano, bell hooks, and Kathleen Stewart. These people seemed clear that their personhoods, research interests, and community commitments did not comfortably fit into traditional notions of whom a writer, scholar, and/or anthropologist should be. These *published* individuals helped me realize that being different, writing, speaking, and teaching differently are first steps toward blazing a new trail in spaces that were not made for you. In fact, this passion for doing things differently is the fuel that drives many interdisciplinary conversations, and may be why so many scholars of color can be found in these programs and departments. Living as a cultural anthropologist in an ethnic studies department releases me from some of the disciplinary anxiety that can torment anthropologists of color, and has enabled me to envision where I can sit at the academic table. I less frequently have to prove how my research on black women in the United States is

legitimately anthropological; whether the methodologies I use are valid; and whether this research is worthy of grant funding. This is not to say that fields like Africana Studies, Gender Studies, and American Studies are without their own research and pedagogical problems and biases, or that I would never desire to “come home” to anthropology. However, as a black woman scholar interested in studying black American women, I have found interdisciplinary spaces especially supportive of this type of research in ways that anthropology currently is not.

To be clear, anthropologists, particularly those present during my graduate training and who comprise the Association of Black Anthropologists (ABA), have tremendously impacted me and supported my research throughout my academic career. These individuals became my mentors and advisers, providing me with scrupulous advice, dedicated professional advocacy, and numerous pep talks. Texts like Faye V. Harrison’s *Decolonizing Anthropology* (1997) and *Outsider Within* (2008) made it clear that anthropology was the discipline that I should be trained in. While I continue to struggle with some of the ways gendered and racialized privilege is unmarked in the academy and anthropology, I am excited by the forms of exploration, experimentation, and cultural exchange these individuals show me is possible. I chose to remain in the academy because of the mentoring legacy of faculty members whose research, institutional work, and dedication to mentoring young researchers demonstrates that they believe, like I do, that education is an important motor for institutional and cultural change (Adams 2007). And as they and other members of ABA made room for me at the table, I wanted to make room for the up and coming researchers behind me. As I fiercely inhabit my seat at the table and claim academic spaces as my own, I am strengthened by my victories which frequently come from the mouths of my students. Last semester, I earned one such victory.

As I collected my teaching materials on the last day of class, a white male student slowly walked up to the lectern. I prepared myself for a difficult and potentially heated conversation, as this student had spent most of the semester in the back of the classroom rolling his eyes or shifting uncomfortably when we discussed white privilege and the notion that colorblindness is racist. He paused for a moment and then said to me, “Professor, at first I wasn’t feeling you or your class. I was trying to deal with all this guilt I had, and I kept feeling like an oppressive asshole. But now I want to thank you. You really made me think about my life and all the privileges I have. And you didn’t just make us read a boring textbook. You got up in there and *made* me think about it. I just want to say ‘thanks.’” These moments are what I live for as a professor of anthropology and ethnic studies. So

while this space may not have been made for me, I'm here now and I'm pulling up my seat to the table.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

As WOC continue to face inequalities within the academy, including the conflation of research/researcher, a lack of recognition and respect, and labor we undertake that often goes unrecognized and is undervalued, the question becomes: What can be done? By no means are we attempting here to answer the question of how to achieve racial and gender parity in the academy. However, we have written this piece in large part to share the resources and solutions we have found helpful as emerging scholars and faculty members. Given the limited options many WOC have for partnership or community, it is important for institutions which claim to value diversity to make an extended commitment to this goal by remaining engaged with incoming junior faculty *beyond* the initial hire. Far from suggesting that departments coddle or hold the hands of faculty of color (an insulting notion, at best), we do think it is important that steps be taken to foster community both within and outside departments. Hiring scholars of color in clusters might also prove helpful in staving off the loneliness and depression that beset many WOC in the academy. This approach proves helpful to departments as well, as the increased possibility of support may result in faculty of color settling into communities and positions they may otherwise have left, thus decreasing the speed of the “revolving door” of junior faculty of color who leave positions after one or two academic years.

As scholars trained in anthropology, we argue that the discipline should be at the forefront of transforming raced and gendered inequalities, given its emphasis on self-reflexivity. Anthropology possesses tools—such as a willingness to look inward—that may prove invaluable in dismantling oppressive environments. The work that remains to be done is applying these tools to the discipline itself, looking starkly at its embedded assumptions and hierarchies. Beginning this difficult work of critically examining the discipline will allow for not only the validation of more diverse research and researchers, but a radical transformation of the field of anthropology.

It is necessary that the academy take a holistic approach to *all* faculty members. We argue that the wellness, comfort, and value of WOC—and their research—must become an institutional priority in order for the climate of academia to change. Additionally, the academy, and anthropology in particular, must recognize and value the additional labor these women do as part of the transformative process of educating students.

To address this imbalance and support WOC as they move toward tenure, institutions should provide funding for WOC to organize a group of senior and peer reviewers from various disciplines to offer feedback on their first book-length manuscripts. This would nurture the type of interdisciplinary discussion universities claim to be invested in, while assuring that junior faculty of color receive critical feedback and mentorship from a variety of scholars and researchers. In this way, institutions would show that they value the research of these junior scholars; facilitate connections that may be helpful as these faculty reach out for external reviewers during tenure; and ensure that increasing numbers of WOC are able to publish quality manuscripts that bring accolades to the university and book presses.

Further, academic institutions should encourage and support co-teaching for all faculty, and especially for WOC, which would provide students with dynamic and critical examinations of race, gender, and sexuality from diverse personal and interdisciplinary perspectives, while enabling alliance-building inside and outside the classroom. This would transform classroom spaces, possibly generating cross-disciplinary theoretical examinations outside the classroom. In this moment of economic downturn, academic institutions frequently espouse the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity and student-centered pedagogies, while discouraging faculty from participating in such a radical exercise as co-teaching because of the significance of class sizes, department class counts, and disciplinary biases.

These interventions will ensure that institutions and departments realize the solution to ensuring faculty of color success is not merely sticking more racially marked bodies behind the lectern. While increasing the number of faculty members of color is important, this alone will do nothing to challenge or change sexist and racist institutional processes and climates. These small suggestions are merely the first steps in moving toward a reality in which WOC scholars are as respected, fulfilled, and successful as their colleagues.

ABSTRACT

This text explores the difficulties faced by faculty of color, particularly women of color, in the academy. Building on existing literature on these issues, the authors deploy their experiences in the academy to argue for transformative work to be done in order to make academia—and anthropology in particular—more inclusive.

NOTES

1. In 1980, a group of women of African-American and Caribbean descent joined activist and feminist writer Barbara Smith in creating Kitchen Table Press (Smith 1989). Contrary to the narrow and frequently negative depictions of WOC in mainstream media, through this press these women, feminists, and lesbians of color published texts all by and about WOC, enabling

them to own and control media that valued their voices and experiences. According to Smith, they chose the “kitchen table” as their name for two reasons: (1) they saw the kitchen as “the center of the home, the place where women in particular work and communicate with each other; and (2) they wanted to express the fact that they were a “grass roots operation [sic]” run by women who could not rely on class privileges, such as family inheritances, to fund their contrarian work (Smith 1989:11).

2. We are aware, however, that not all researchers of color have chosen to approach their professional careers in the same way, and we want to be careful not to essentialize all WOC anthropologists as scholars committed to social justice, or as representatives of anyone but themselves. With that said, we have observed that WOC scholars are frequently asked in classrooms, department meetings, and other institutional spaces, to act as “native” representatives of communities they are assumed to be a member of, sometimes against their will. Subsequently, we believe their experiences are a significant contribution to the kitchen table, as this form of representational and emotional labor becomes an important aspect of their experiences within the academy.

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