

BEING BLACK, TEACHING BLACK: BLACK WOMEN REFLECT ON TEACHING AGRICULTURAL DIVERSITY COURSES



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Abstract

According to The National Research Council, there is an increased need for Agricultural and Life Sciences (AgLS) to focus on producing a “globally competent” workforce that is sufficiently able to interact with diverse populations and solve the 21st century grand challenges by increasing the numbers of marginalized people in AgLS. The purpose of this study is to illuminate the experiences of Black women graduate instructors as they developed curriculum and taught diversity courses in agricultural education departments at Historically White Institutions. This study is theoretically grounded in Black Feminist Thought and employs duoethnography as the methodology. We found three themes across our experiences: (1) Broadening Perspectives in Agriculture, (2) The Heavy Duality of Representing Blackness and Diversity, and (3) Empowerment and Affirmation. Our study supports and exemplifies the value of the experiences and feelings of Black women in agricultural education, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and could provide insight toward helping understand their lack of representation.

Keywords: agricultural sciences, Black feminist thought, Black women, duoethnography, diversity education

According to The National Research Council (2009), there is an increased need for Agricultural and Life Science (AgLS) to focus on producing a “globally competent” workforce that is sufficiently able to interact with diverse populations and solve the 21st century grand challenges by increasing the numbers of marginalized people in AgLS. Consequently, Colleges of Agriculture have been working to integrate multicultural education and training into program requirements. Despite recent efforts to increase diversity in agricultural higher education, racially minoritized representation is still minimal (Doerfert, 2011). The less diverse the faculty in AgLS, the less likely courses will include diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in any form (Lim et al., 2009). In 2021, across all disciplines, only 6% of full-time faculty were Black. Broken down by gender, 4% were women and 2% were men (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Moreover, the majority of faculty are not fully prepared to combat challenges associated with diversity (Talbert & Edwin, 2007), creating the potential for additional struggles in the classroom.

Similarly, there is an underrepresentation of racially minoritized teachers in School Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) programs (Vincent & Torres, 2015). For example, data from 2020 indicated that 80.5% of U.S. SBAE teachers were white, 3.3% were Latinx/e, 1.3% were Black, and 14.9% were Asian, multiracial, or chose not to disclose their race (Foster et al., 2020). Further, numbers of minoritized SBAE program completers are considerably low (Lawver

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et al., 2018). Therefore, it is imperative that AgLS students are aware of historical and contemporary issues in AgLS, such as food justice, environmental justice, and Black land loss. AgLS DEI courses can help students pursuing careers in extension, teacher education, and academia learn more about how power structures, lack of access, and identity shape the experiences of marginalized populations in AgLS. For this reason, institutions of higher education and colleges of agriculture are attempting to increase their numbers of domestic racially minoritized students and faculty. However, there is a gap in the literature that seeks to understand how and why Black individuals, specifically Black women are so severely underrepresented in AgLS graduate education, further compounding the lack of research on the experiences of Black women in agriculture.

There is still a need to address the dearth in exploration of these experiences and this study presents insight toward the commitment of two Black women graduate students who decided to develop agricultural DEI courses. The purpose of this study is to illuminate the experiences of these graduate instructors as they developed curriculum and taught DEI issues in agricultural education departments at Historically White Institutions (HWIs). The research question that guided this study was: What were the experiences of two Black women graduate instructors teaching a DEI course at 1862 land-grant institutions? As a note, Black and African American is used interchangeably in this study to indicate the lineage of enslaved Africans in the United States.

Literature Review

Post-Secondary Agricultural & Life Science Education

Many disciplines within the field of AgLS are closely connected to mainstream STEM disciplines, such as agricultural economics and food sciences (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2015). Consequently, AgLS disciplines share similar challenges as the larger STEM umbrella (Esters & Knobloch, 2012; STEM Food & Ag Council, 2014). Although the landscape of students entering the classrooms studying these areas are shifting gradually in socioeconomic backgrounds and diversity (Talbert & Edwin, 2007; Tindell et al., 2016), the norms, culture, and values of AgLS are rooted in those of rural, white males, and continue to be dominated by their traditional, conservative, and religious views (Hains et al., 2015). These values often leave Black women in AgLS in professional dissonance with the discipline (Hains et al., 2015), which could lead to isolation, diminished sense of belonging, and attrition from the program.

With Black women being underrepresented in doctoral programs and severely underrepresented within AgLS (US Department of Education, 2023), we must network and lean on each other for support in and outside of the classroom. Many Black students view their lack of representation as a deterrent to enrolling in or staying enrolled in an AgLS discipline. Simply, Black students do not and cannot see themselves as a part of the college of agriculture; as a result, many students do not continue in their AgLS program (Cropps, 2023; Bowen 1987; Talbert & Larke, 1995).

This further demonstrates the need for and importance of cultivated community among Black students and its impact on retention when faced with the choice of pursuing agricultural career opportunities (Westbrook & Alston, 2007).

As a result, many of these students do not go on to pursue graduate AgLS programs which contributes to the lack of Black faculty representation (McGee, 2020). A predominantly white faculty base poses a challenge in addressing the quest to meet the needs of developing a culture of inclusivity and many of them are not equipped to work well in diverse situations (Elbert, 2024; Talbert & Edwin, 2007). Research has also confirmed that the implementation of various teaching strategies and courses with diversity education can add value to the educational experience of AgLS students (Gaff, 1997; Talbert & Edwin, 2007), emphasizing the only or few Black student(s) or faculty who may feel more inclined to push for DEI in the AgLS classroom. Swortzel (1998) noted in previous research that the professoriate is dominated by white males and the likelihood of an increased representation of racially minoritized faculty was dismal due to them accounting for less than 10% of doctoral students. Few studies refute the need for concern in the scant numbers of Black faculty present in the field today.

Historical Ramifications & Land-Grant Institutions

Black Americans have a violent, troubled history with and often negative perception of agriculture. Many Black Americans' beginnings in the U.S. were rooted in slavery and continued in sharecropping (Moon, 2007), characterized by poor working conditions and low prestige. Though less than one percent of AgLS involves farming, the perception of agriculture remains as such (Environmental Protection Agency, 2013). Hence, the perception of agriculture is that of hostility, oppression, low wages (Beck & Swanson, 2003), and farm/production related occupations (Brown, 1993; Orthel et al., 1989). Black Americans' complicated history with agriculture, coupled with the white male-centered culture of AgLS serves as a barrier to Black students' engagement in AgLS disciplines.

When evaluating the current environment of AgLS programs, one should understand the historical context of agricultural programs. The establishment of land-grant institutions has grown to play a substantial role in the development of agricultural programs. Land-grant institutions were established through the passing of the Morrill Act of 1862, concluding each state would have designated land and one college focused on supporting the pursuit of practical education by whites resulting in 1862 land-grant universities (Herren & Hillison, 1996). Black Americans would later be extended this opportunity by creating 1890 land-grant universities when the 2nd Morrill Act of 1890 was passed. However, 1890 institutions would not be privy to the same amount of funding or support as their white counterparts, further fueling the racial injustices experienced by Black Americans in agriculture. The depth of racial injustices in the establishment of land-grant

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universities is complex due to the exploitative acquisition of Indigenous lands by the federal government (Stein, 2020). Nonetheless, 1862 land-grant universities currently house most teacher training programs in agricultural education departments (Herren & Hillison, 1996).

Minoritized Graduate Teaching Assistants

While there is ample research on students' perceptions of diversity courses, there is significantly less research regarding graduate student teaching assistants' (TAs) perceptions and experiences teaching diversity courses, especially from Black women. Tindell et al. (2016) described three Black TAs' (2 women, 1 man) experiences teaching a diversity and social justice course to agricultural students at an HWI. The authors described their experiences with student resistance, power struggles, and students' perceptions of privilege. They found it important when teaching mostly white male students from homogenous backgrounds to expose them to diverse voices and perspectives as often as possible. Further, the use of current events, historical frameworks, and personal testimonies were used to combat student resistance to diversity concepts.

There are studies that address the experiences of racially/ethnically minoritized TAs of color at HWIs. For example, Gay (2004) examined her own experiences with marginalization as a TA at an HWI. She discussed how she experienced physical, social, and intellectual isolation; benign neglect from faculty members who failed to mentor, teach, or critique TAs; and problematic popularity as the diversity representation on committees. Additionally, Gomez et al. (2011) discussed how international TAs and TAs of color experience and respond to microaggressions, as well as the consequences of these microaggressions to their careers. The authors found that students felt the TAs were pushing an agenda because of their race/ethnicity; students refused to answer prompts and questions in class; and TAs were continuously questioned regarding their pedagogical approaches and decisions, which caused the TAs to question their abilities. Consequently, TAs in this study no longer wanted to pursue faculty careers in teacher education and most importantly, the TAs felt like failures and questioned their own knowledge and skills. This study supports research from Williams (2011) who found that international graduate students working as TAs had to negotiate power, privilege, and respect with their students from different cultural norms. Further, these findings were in line with research from Perry et al. (2009) who found that racially minoritized faculty who taught diversity courses experienced student resistance; had their credibility, authority, and integrity challenged; and their subject-matter expertise and their legitimacy devalued.

Labor of Teaching Diversity

Acosta et al. (2005) described teaching diversity as "dancing through a minefield" (p. 26). Instructors who teach diversity must have a unique set of pedagogical skills, such as tools to relay sensitive content, helping to increase students' awareness, and self-awareness in the classroom

(Prieto, 2018). Moreover, instructors who teach diversity may experience a need to self-disclose, resistance from students, tense group/classroom dynamics, and emotional labor (Acosta et al., 2005). This is especially of concern for students and faculty of color and students and faculty who are women (Acosta et al., 2005). Padilla (1994) coined this phenomenon as cultural taxation: the hidden cost and extra work institutions often place on minoritized faculty, staff, and students due to their social identities, which is not rewarded. Examples include serving on committees as the "diversity" and being the "expert" on diversity. Scholars have also examined cultural taxation as a type of labor. Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor as emotion management at work where one creates or maintains behaviors consistent with social and organizational norms. Employees adhere to these norms that are learned through professional socialization and organizational rules. According to Miller et al. (2019), emotional labor is experienced in gendered and racialized ways and impacts those with marginalized identities. For example, research has shown that women perform more teaching and service activities than men without extra compensation or consideration in evaluation (O'Meara et al., 2017; Turner, 2002).

Additionally, Morgan and Marin (2022) explored the experiences of instructors who taught graduate-level diversity courses. They found that instructors lacked training before teaching diversity courses, diversity courses were poorly supported by their institutions, and challenges teaching in the climate of the time (e.g., Trump's election). The instructors utilized their networks and created spaces of support to navigate challenges. Finally, the instructors saw teaching diversity courses as overwhelmingly positive despite the challenges experienced and saw it as a labor of love.

Harder for us (the authors) to articulate has been the duality we navigated as both learner and educator. In this instance, of note is work from Roland et al. (2021) on the experiences of Black women doctoral students in equity, social justice, and diversity courses. What Roland and colleagues found was that Black women doctoral students shared having to educate peers and faculty about Black research and scholars. Some participants took pride in being able to educate their peers, while some referred to it as a "burden" that hindered their own learning. The role of educator and learner shaped how the women in the study engaged in the class, and expectations of how they engaged with the course were often gendered and racialized – in this case rooted in womanness and Blackness. We did not see creating our courses as a burden, but we do recognize the labor put upon us as minoritized graduate students to educate others. We also recognized that because many of our white faculty would not have the "range" to teach these courses, the "burden" fell on us to teach diversity courses in agriculture because no one else would do it (or do it correctly). As a result, in order to learn the content we were interested in and knew was a need for the department, we had to teach it, becoming the educator and learner.

DEI Courses Developed

Critical Perspectives in Agriculture – Crops

Critical Perspectives in Agriculture was born of a want and need to learn about marginalized histories and issues in agriculture. Up until the course offering, previous courses only discussed Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, enslaved people, and briefly touched on 1890 Historically Black Land-grant Universities. I wanted more. I wanted to feel a connection to what I was learning, and I wanted to see myself in my discipline. I fielded interest and topics from my peers, took the idea to my advisor (a Black man), and he agreed that we would teach the course the next semester. From there, I started developing the syllabus and a flyer for the course.

Critical Perspectives in Agriculture was a three-hour graduate-level course that met once a week. The purpose of the course was to critically examine and explore historical and contemporary issues and perspectives in the context of U.S. agriculture broadly. Specifically, course objectives were developed to encourage students to identify, analyze, and critique the concepts, issues, and policies that shape the experiences of marginalized groups in agriculture. This course was developed with social justice in mind. Social justice as a topic and learning tool can help educate the next generation of agricultural professionals. A social justice framing helped me to uplift the voices of those who have been silenced in the field of agriculture. Furthermore, using social justice to frame a course can help students of color process how they have been and are currently situated within the discipline and consequently, become more engaged in the course (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Martell, 2018). Finally, courses developed with social justice in mind can empower students to pursue social justice for themselves and their communities (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; Wade et al., 2019). For example, assignments and discussions centering issues such as food justice, environmental justice, and critical social theories encourage students to critique power structures and oppressive systems and empower them to make change in their own lives and communities.

Enrolled in the course were six students – five graduate students and one senior undergraduate student. Two graduate students audited the course. Students' majors included agricultural communications, agricultural education, animal science, and agricultural engineering. We had six Black students, one white student, and one biracial student (white and Latinx/e).

African American Agriculture – Brown

African American Agriculture was ultimately born out of the desire to learn more about the untold truths and resilience of African Americans. The course was originally proposed by my department head (white male), who sought to educate students about the legacy of George Washington Carver. Upon reflection, I recognized the potential to broaden its focus and increase its overall impact. This course served as an opportunity to switch the lens into that of an agricultural perspective to better highlight the significant contributions of Black agriculturalists over the years, subsequently exposing how we as an American culture benefit from

those contributions. I was troubled by the neglect of the nuanced Black experience in this industry and wanted to create a course illuminating the voices often silenced. The development of this course also stemmed from a deep sense of gratitude for the Black Americans who sacrificed to open the door for individuals such as myself in this industry. I also wanted to correct the narrative and provide a counterstory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) of enslaved Africans and allow students to see the skill, strength, and intelligence they possessed to further cultivate the land we utilize today. I also wanted to expand the attention of agricultural contributions of Black Americans to the economy as a whole. Similar to the roots of *Critical Perspectives in Agriculture*, it was important to add to the often not discussed areas of Black agriculture in this course.

African American Agriculture was developed as a short course offered to undergraduate students over a span of three consecutive days. The purpose of this course was to examine the African American experience within the conceptual lens of agriculture in the United States from 1619 to the present. A multitude of topic areas were covered during the course including the following: slavery; 1890 Land Grant Institutions; New Farmers of America and their absorption into FFA; African Americans' success in obtaining land post slavery; the Reconstruction Era; and the accomplishments and leadership of Fannie Lou Hamer, Booker T. Washington, and George Washington Carver. Students enrolled in the course also had opportunities to engage with current African American agriculturalists through guest speakers and one-on-one interviews. The course concluded with site visits to African American-led agricultural operations and an 1890 Land-grant university outreach event.

Transformative learning theory led much of the development of this course. Transformative learning focuses not only on the new knowledge students gain during a course, but subsequent shifts in attitudes and behaviors (Mezirow, 1991). Learning is considered transformative when a student becomes critically aware of their predispositions, reformulates their assumptions, and decides to act according to their new understandings (Mezirow, 1990). Boyer et al. (2006) outlined a four-phase transformative learning process: 1) disorienting dilemma is when a personal crisis, triggering event, or experience challenges one's belief structures, 2) critical reflection is when one engages in critical reflection and reevaluation of assumptions about themselves and learning, 3) validating discourse is when one engages in dialogue with other students and/or the instructor, and 4) reflective action is when one takes action not only in this environment, but beyond as a result of a new perspective. Additionally, Boyd and Meyer's (1988) approach to transformative learning situates transformation in communal experiences and encourages individuals to seek greater interconnectedness. Further, Boyd and Meyer (1988) ground transformation in recognition of a collective, which is connected to liberatory notions of transformation. The transformative learning theoretical lens provided a strong guide to evaluate learning and shift in perspective. This was an important aspect because I knew a majority of the students enrolled in this course would be white and have varied or limited experiences with Black culture and experiences. To that point, over 90% of students

enrolled in the course self-identified as white.

We both published findings about our courses (Brown et al., 2022; Cropps & Esters, 2021) in our home discipline's journal, *Journal of Agricultural Education*. Our findings focused on students' perceptions and learning outcomes, which is why we found it important to discuss our experiences teaching the courses. There are small numbers of Black faculty in colleges of agriculture, and while DEI courses in agriculture are growing in popularity and necessity, they are still few in number. *Critical Perspectives in African American Agriculture* was offered for one semester and *African American Agriculture* was offered for three semesters. We would also like to note that these classes are no longer being taught.

This work of teaching about Black experiences and histories in agriculture and studying our own experiences in agriculture allows us to situate ourselves in our scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). While supporting students and student learning (Huber, 2002), we are supporting and uplifting ourselves and each other. The ability to give and receive this kind of support draws us to this work. We agree wholeheartedly with Camarao and Din (2022) who noted:

Our SoTL is rooted in our unique identities and shared motivation to enrich teaching and learning in our context. As we navigate and negotiate our teaching and learning change work, we are learning from and with each other, even as we write this (p. 1).

Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought

The theoretical framework that guided this study was Black Feminist Thought (BFT). BFT is a social theory that embraces the ideas of resistance, voice, and activism (Collins, 1986; hooks 1989). Collins (1989) defines BFT as: a critical social theory committed to justice for the collective population of Black women and other oppressed groups. The premise of BFT centers on the empowerment of Black women and the assertion of their voices as central to their experiences (Patton, 2009, p. 516).

BFT is appropriate for our study as we sought to center and normalize our standpoint as Black women, offering an outlook of agricultural higher education from our perspective. Further, we worked and continue to self-define and self-validate within our discipline, where we are often discouraged from doing so. The distinguishing features of BFT we employed include: 1) Self-definition and self-valuation of Black women, 2) Intersectionality, 3) Black feminist epistemology, and 4) Dialogical practices of Black women.

First, self-definition is major to BFT. Collins (1986) stressed the importance of this concept because Black women work to self-define themselves despite the way society defines us through negative stereotypes and global negative perceptions. By naming and defining ourselves, Black women create self-valuation. Extending self-definition, this process empowers Black women to replace society's definition of us and replace them with our own (Palmer,

2021). Second, intersectionality occurs when two or more oppressed identities interact to influence the experiences of Black women in society (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991). The unique gendered, racialized experiences are a result of how Black women are socially positioned in society, and consequently, higher education (Smooth, 2016). Intersectionality as a lens to examine the interaction of race and gender is critical to understanding power and privilege, and their influence on experiences of minoritized people in different contexts (Nuñez, 2014). Further, Crenshaw (1989) emphasized the need for analysis beyond an additive model of multiple marginalities. Third, Black feminist thought as epistemology "determines which questions merit investigation, which interpretive frameworks will be used to analyze findings, and to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put" (Collins, 2000, p. 252). The final feature we will highlight is the dialogical practice of Black women. Talking in community with other Black women, especially as we do in this study, is one way we form and affirm truth claims (Collins, 2000). As such, we will center our lived experiences and our dialogue as ways of knowing.

Methodology: Duoethnography

Duoethnography was deemed most appropriate for this study. Duoethnography can be defined as "a conversation... between people and their perceptions of cultural artifacts that generates new meaning" (Sawyer & Norris, 2013, p. 2). Further, duoethnography is a relatively new research method in which two participants interrogate the cultural contexts of a social phenomenon using autobiographical experiences (Breault, 2016; Sawyer & Norris, 2013). Here, we used duoethnography to gain insight related to our personal and professional identities as graduate instructors teaching DEI courses in agricultural education. Duoethnography is often linked with social justice due to its promotion of the inclusion of multivoiced perspectives (Sawyer & Norris, 2012). We were also informed by Black feminist autoethnography (BFA). According to Griffin (2012), BFA "renders Black women more visible in the realm of autoethnography" (p. 143). As duoethnography is often predicated in juxtaposing differences, BFA helped us facilitate our collective experiences with one another while telling our distinct stories. Together, we engaged in this approach to reflect on our classroom experiences as instructors.

First, we met to discuss our approach to the interview and personal narrative. Specifically, we developed a prompt to respond to for our personal narratives, which was: *Describe two to three meaningful course experiences*. We wrote our narratives separately as to not influence each other's work. We also finalized our interview/discussion questions. We exchanged narratives to read and reflect on, and then conducted two 90-minute interviews via Zoom. The first interview focused on our reflections writing our prompt responses and reading each other's responses, the meaning and importance of teaching our classes, and what it was like teaching the courses in our departments. The second interview focused more on our experiences explicitly as Black women in the classroom, the department,

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and in our profession. Interview audio, interview notes, and observations were transcribed and checked for accuracy.

Analysis

We conducted two cycles of coding. Initial and simultaneous coding were used during the first cycle. During initial coding, we read interview transcripts line by line for familiarity with the data. Simultaneous coding allowed us to assign multiple codes to content that may have more than one meaning (Saldaña, 2015). During the second cycle of coding, we used focused coding to organize the data around the most salient categories (Saldaña, 2015), then used those categories and codes to develop themes. Our practice for trustworthiness, informed by Roby and Cook (2019), is found in self-reflexivity, not validity and/or truth claims. Furthermore, as suggested by Breault (2016), member checks were conducted independently for clarification and accuracy. After we made minor spelling and grammatical corrections, we reviewed the conversation data to ground our memories and ensure accuracy. Our co-constructed narrative and interview protocols encouraged self-reflexivity and open, transparent dialogue during data collection and analysis.

Positionality

We are two Black women in agricultural education and agricultural leadership who met virtually at the 2021 American Association for Agricultural Education national conference. This initial meeting was where we found we had similar interests and taught similar courses in our departments. The first author is currently a research scientist who finished her doctorate in agricultural education in 2020 from an HWI. The second author completed her doctorate in agricultural education with an emphasis in agricultural leadership in 2022 and is currently an assistant professor in agricultural leadership at an HWI. We bring with us experiences of working for and with Black agriculturalists while simultaneously acknowledging and working to remedy the severe underrepresentation of Black people in postsecondary agricultural sciences and education.

Results

We found three findings across our experiences: (1) Broadening Perspectives in Agriculture, (2) The Heavy Duality of Representing Blackness and Diversity, and (3) Empowerment and Affirmation. In keeping with Sawyer and Norris's (2015) tenets for duoethnography, we share several brief vignettes in exemplar of most of our findings.

Broadening Perspectives in Agriculture

In our discussions, we found that we were both interested in broadening perspectives about marginalized experiences in agriculture. In both of our courses, students learned about perspectives different from their own, and read and listened to works from marginalized scholars. Students were able to connect our histories to current issues and how they may affect the future. Further, white students appreciated being

more aware of racial agricultural issues and gained skills needed to work in diverse spaces.

The courses also heightened the sensitivity of those enrolled to the challenges faced by marginalized communities. Through facilitated discussion, students were faced with the reality of how problems based in racial injustice could be solved. Students realized more conversations such as these should be had, but had conflicting views on the likelihood of a future where obstacles based in the unequal distribution of power would become obsolete. While this finding is more student-centric, it gives insight into our motivations for the class and subsequently, how we ran our classes. We were able to see our students immerse themselves in the class and expand their knowledge of diverse perspectives.

T. Cropps (TC): My students said the same thing about FFA and NFA [New Farmers of America] and HBCUs [Historically Black Colleges and Universities]. Even those of us that went to HBCUs didn't know the extent to which they weren't getting funding. I really hope that you make your class longer; I really want people to sit with it a little longer and really get into it.

C. Brown (CB): Yeah. My students were saying the course should be required and I should keep teaching it. We weren't arguing about whether Black folks experienced what they did. The big problem is that these people [agricultural students] can matriculate through a whole ag experience and not learn about any other perspective other than their own. I think it puts a lot of weight on those of us who choose to go into this space and take on teaching this stuff because you're trying to give them so much in a little dose because you know the odds of them getting it anywhere else.

TC: You mentioned your students saying it was important to them to learn what happened in the past and how it's connected to what's happening now. And I'm sad because I asked students 'Do you see a just agricultural future?' and everyone was like 'No, I don't see that happening anytime soon.' Honestly, me either.

CB: Did they say why?

TC: Some people were like not with these current white people. Some mentioned that people don't want to understand other perspectives. In our environmental justice unit, we talked about what's happening in Hawaii. We watched a documentary about scientists who wanted to put a telescope on a mountain that has religious meaning to the people there. The scientists did it anyway. My students felt that people don't care about people who don't have power, are not loud enough, and don't have someone to speak up for them. They're not wrong.

CB: I know, right?

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We also found that by offering the class, learning alongside our students, and reframing the narratives, we helped to normalize seeing diverse faces and hearing diverse perspectives in agriculture, as well as seeing Black women as instructors and leaders in the classroom. Brown later mentioned in our conversation that she felt we were “taking it back,” it being stories of our ancestors and as a result, our collective power in agriculture. The concept of “Blacks as an anomaly in agriculture” arose during this discussion. Brown declared, “We belong in agriculture... you built a whole economy off our backs. I don’t understand why there wouldn’t be a place for us in agriculture.”

The Heavy Duality of Representing Blackness and Diversity

While teaching our courses did not necessarily feel like a burden, we did acknowledge feeling an “invisible burden” of being the representation and diversity flagbearer in agricultural spaces and to some extent, our courses. As a point of clarification, Cropps did not feel this way in her class but did feel it in her department. Brown felt this way in her class and in her department. It was also revealed how the pressure associated with holding the role of “one of few” as a Black instructor could prove to be a burdensome weight. The variation of the “weight” experienced could be explained by Brown’s statement, “When I say weight, it doesn’t necessarily mean a negative thing, but [it] can be that way too.” The unspoken expectation to perform on an exceptional level at all times coupled with the self-declared responsibility to ensure the voices of marginalized communities are articulated added deeply to our experiences.

CB: Sometimes we are put in positions as the only one and we’re expected to be the flagbearer of ‘Hey, everybody else should care.’ That’s too much weight to put on somebody. I’m feeling pressure to perform and do well and be a good representation. But when you mess up and you’re Black, it’s different than when you mess up and you’re not Black. It’s so much more pressure. We don’t have as much wiggle room to make mistakes.

TC: That is similar to what someone said in my dissertation. She said it’s like everything just feels so heavy. I have to represent Black people, Black women, and I have to be a good representation for Black people so I can’t mess up. And then protect Black students. That’s making sure Black students don’t make the same mistakes I made.

CB: It’s like an invisible burden that no one else sees, but you have it. I feel like I have to be the racial educator in the other courses I teach. There are no other Black instructors or professors in my department; I don’t know if there has ever been. Have these students ever had a Black teacher before? Are they basing who they think Black people are on me?

TC: Yeah. It should not be solely the responsibility of Black students and faculty to educate on DEI issues. But who’s going to do the work if we don’t? And not just who will do it, but who will do it right? It’s like a vicious cycle: we shouldn’t have to do the work, but no one else is going to do the work. So, then we have to do the work, but we shouldn’t have to.

CB: I agree with that completely. It’s unfair to make us wear all the hats.

Earlier, we mentioned that Cropps did not have feelings of having to be the representation in her course but shared Brown’s feelings in regards to her department. Cropps’ course was comprised of mostly racially/ethnically minoritized students and many were part of her advisor’s research group. Additionally, as a graduate course and elective, students chose to be in the course and wanted to be there. We also discussed the complexity of Blackness in America and the lack of understanding of those differences from our white peers. The differences in the intersectionality of being a Black woman in agriculture were uncovered as we shared our differing experiences.

TC: Because my class was made up of my peers and also minoritized people, I didn’t quite feel the same burden. Most of these students were also my friends, so it was often more like leading a discussion about something we all wanted to learn more about. But I definitely felt it outside the classroom. Do you feel you are seen more as Black or being a woman or being a Black woman? While you think, in my department I definitely felt being a Black American first because of the inferred preference towards Black international students. But by my peers, I felt fully recognized as a Black woman teaching class. Does that make sense?

CB: It does. I was the only Black faculty member in a meeting, and it was assumed I was from Africa. I don’t know how many Black Americans have been in this department in this role to where it is a natural assumption that I must be from Africa. This makes me think that it is such an anomaly for a Black American to be an instructor in agriculture. I think it expands on the point of the Blackness perceived; there’s depth to it that I don’t think our white colleagues fully understand. When I’m in meetings, I feel they view me as Black more than a woman because I feel the discomfort. I think my white female students connect with me as a woman and I feel they don’t really see the Blackness. Not to say they don’t see color, but they do not see it as a barrier to connect with me. And I think some colleagues see the Blackness as a barrier.

TC: That is so interesting. So, every month STEM Noire has a Wellness Wednesday where you bring your wine or work, and we just update and support each other. The first month I participated I introduced

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myself and my research, and an African woman, I don't recall where from, didn't understand the issue of the underrepresentation of Black women in agriculture because Black women in Africa where she was from are engaged in agriculture. And I told her there's a historical context that bleeds into what's happening today of why Black folks don't participate in agriculture. It's just not received the same here. And, Blackness as a barrier struck me. It made me think about how when we ask for diversity, we often get white women. So, what is the acceptable kind of diversity in agriculture? I'm glad your students connected with you in other ways. But on the other hand. You got to see me as Black. Understand that it's part of who I am and it's part of how...[it] influences how I interact with my environment and how people perceive me.

Empowerment and Affirmation

Finally, we found empowerment and affirmation in teaching our courses. In reflecting upon how far Black people have come in agriculture, teaching our courses makes us feel connected to our roots and proud to be Black in agriculture. Changing the narrative to include the profundity of Black contributions to agriculture was important to us. We both were fueled by the ability we had to introduce curriculum to students who may not otherwise have that opportunity to learn about such subject areas. Brown mentioned, "I find more peace in helping the Black community with my research because I feel I can support them, I feel empowered...this class empowers me because I am lifting up their voices." Further, we felt affirmed from our students who expressed that our courses should be taken by all agricultural students.

TC: Outside of agriculture...I saw on twitter where a girl graduated from A&T [North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University] and was an ag [agriculture] major. She was in a field, maybe cotton. You and I would have been like 'Oh, she must be an ag major or something.' People were lighting that post up. They were like, 'Why would you go back into the fields? You know we're no longer in slavery.' But you know for us, we think of it differently, like we are taking back the narrative. We are reclaiming the land. And when you mentioned struggling to get Black students to take your class, it made me a little sad because it's so important for us to know more about our own histories. Black folks are so against being involved in ag because of its association with slavery.

CB: Yeah, that was a challenge because when I was developing the class, I was learning more about my own history, which is dope. And from my perspective, we're taking it back; this is a class about what we built...our ancestors did this. We are not going to talk about slavery in the way you

probably are used to talking about it. We're going to acknowledge the brutality and the negative things that happened. But we're also going to talk about how strong these people are, how skilled they are, how resilient they are. We need to see the strength that comes from us instead of thinking 'Oh another sad song.' We also need to see the beauty and strength and understand that their blood still runs through our veins.

TC: So the title of this is Being Black, Teaching Black. What does it mean to you to be Black and teach about Black people in agriculture?

CB: I feel empowered by doing that. I'm telling a story which is very connected to our roots as African Americans in storytelling. I'm telling a story that hasn't been told in our agricultural space, so I feel empowered to have the opportunity to do so. I've gained so much from looking at all these scholars before me and all the people in industry, learning about my family history, and reading all this literature. I gained so much from that and so much pride that I feel I owe them [my ancestors] to tell their story. So when students take my class they're going to read the NFA book in class. It will be a required text. I have the power to do that and make sure students are exposed to diverse perspectives. I am very proud to be Black. It don't get no better than that. What about you?

TC: Empowered, proud, validated, affirmed are the big ones for me. I remember taking classes like 'I want to hear about my people.' Why did it take me developing a class to learn that Fannie Lou Hamer was more than one kind of activist? She was heavy in the co-op, ag space. Why haven't we been talking about Black women canning, doing extension work, teaching each other how to make it through certain seasons? Then feeling very thankful for the affirmation from the students. You mentioned owing ancestors and telling stories. My dissertation was a narrative inquiry, and I chose that because I didn't want my participants to just answer questions; I wanted them to tell their stories. We must tell our stories and our ancestors' stories, do it justice, and make sure they're heard.

Discussion

In our study, we found a depth of perspectives that provided an insight into the experiences of two Black women creating opportunities for students to learn agricultural content within the context of DEI and justice. The findings of this research revealed three distinct perspectives: 1) Broadening Perspectives in Agriculture, (2) The Heavy Duality of Representing Blackness and Diversity, and (3) Empowerment and Affirmation. Each of these themes spoke to the ebbs and flows of experiences Black women encounter not only teaching but also existing in these predominantly white spaces in agricultural education/

leadership. As the discipline of agricultural education/leadership strives to shift the limited representation of racially minoritized individuals (Doerfert, 2011), the illumination and elevation of experiences such as ours through research will undoubtedly provide perceptiveness toward strengthening those efforts.

Broadening Perspectives in Agriculture detailed much of the internal drive we had to share an accurate and in-depth depiction of the Black agricultural experience. The values are similar to those from Tindell et al. (2016) who indicated Black women often feel obligated to teach diversity courses, more specifically to white students in order to expose them to a world outside of their own. We both wanted to challenge the current reality of our students and expose them to a curriculum not only about the importance of this area of study, but also its relevance in developing solutions to current issues. Acosta et al. (2005) drew attention to the savviness diversity teachers had to have in the classroom by comparing it to dancing in a minefield. We were able to employ a variety of teaching mechanisms to increase student awareness (Prieto, 2018) and in doing so we were able to learn and grow with our students. Ultimately, our practices led to normalization of conversations regarding inequity and social challenges with our students.

The second theme, The Heavy Duality of Representing Blackness and Diversity confirmed much of what previous studies revealed about the hidden weight of racially minoritized faculty or staff. Padilla's (1994) explanation of "cultural taxation" and the expectation of minoritized individuals to serve in various capacities related to diversity with no true pay off was in good agreement with our results regarding the need for diversity courses in AgLS while expressing how we should not feel the pressure to be the one to take on the added work of creating them. Rather than dodge this, we took the initiative to create our courses because we felt we were best equipped to shed light on this infrequent area of study within our department. Our actions as doctoral students were much like Roland et al.'s (2021) finding on Black women doctoral students who feel the need to educate themselves and their peers on Black research and scholars, especially in agriculture. This, coupled with our overwhelming pressure to perform better than our peers to overcome negative stereotypes associated with our Blackness supported Miller et al.'s (2019) depiction of emotional labor.

Empowerment and Affirmation was our final theme. We knew the depth of Black and minoritized agricultural history had not been explored deeply within our departments and knew we had the ability to shift the focus. As Black women we felt obligated to create the opportunity to uplift the voices of Black agriculturalists. In doing so we felt personally fulfilled and empowered. This fits Collins' (1989) notion of Black women's drive to not only advance the voices of Black women but also those of other oppressed groups through BFT. Our work gave us the ability to assert ourselves within our departments and combat the limited representation of Black agriculturalists.

Few researchers have addressed the question of what Black women are experiencing in AgLS programs. Studies such as ours allow Black women to define themselves

and their experience while stressing the importance of our existence in these spaces. There is still an apparent need for courses focused on elements of DEI and justice in AgLS programs and the evidence from this study, as well as our separate studies (Brown, 2022; Cropps & Esters, 2021) supports the idea that students greatly benefit from learning about the experiences of others. Despite the need to create more DEI courses, this charge should not be placed on the shoulders of racially minoritized faculty, staff, and students. The strain placed on these racially marginalized individuals often goes unnoticed or ignored, perpetuating the inequity often explored in the DEI content being taught.

Faculty, regardless of race, should be reflecting on the diversity of authors in their course materials. Cropps did this by presenting materials from authors of all backgrounds and due to the nature of her class, Brown focused on Black voices. This practice is related to issues stemming from citation inequities, where scholars of color are cited less frequently than their white counterparts, essentially erasing voices of color from the discipline. Inclusive citation practices in our syllabi can improve the relevance of our scholarship and can contribute in the longer run to equity in the tenure and promotion process (Ballard et al., 2020). Faculty and students of color should not have to create courses just to hear from all voices within our discipline. Strategic effort is needed to review and analyze their current curriculum to reveal opportunities for more inclusive integration of multicultural experiences from those authentic viewpoints. We also recommend that agricultural faculty educate themselves on DEI concepts and not rely on students to lead the way. We are not saying that students should not read the foundational texts from white scholars. However, students need to engage with materials and assignments that force them to interrogate structures and systems, how they fit within those structures and systems, and how those structures and systems have contributed to the continued oppression (Roland et al., 2021) and marginalization of minoritized populations in agriculture.

The results of this study offer compelling support toward the value of the experiences and feelings of Black women in AgLS and could provide insight toward helping understand their lack of representation. We acknowledge that our discussion and findings are very race-forward. However, though we are often seen as Black first, there are various elements of our identities as Black women that would serve the discipline well if given more attention. Results so far have been very encouraging because the Black women who advocate for us and for these issues appear to be intrinsically motivated to remain in agricultural education/leadership. A deeper investigation of this displayed motivation would be beneficial toward solving the problem of recruiting and retaining racially minoritized students, faculty, and staff in AgLS broadly. The relationship cultivated between us provided insight into the community needed for Black students to stay in agriculture as indicated by Westbrook and Alston (2007). Due to the benefits we experienced in developing a community from our relationship as well as support from other Black agriculturalists, AgLS programs should also consider the implementation of mentoring programs that focus on providing connections between

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Black graduate students with experienced Black faculty. Creating a space for Black graduate students to potentially gain support from individuals who have shared experiences could aid in positively influencing the retention of Black graduate students in AgLS programs.

Our resulting sisterhood has provided an opportunity to explore the connections of BFT to our overall desire to push the voices of the marginalized into the forefront of our discipline and stand up for ourselves and our people. Consequently, the honor and pride in doing so exceeded the challenge of battling the overextension experienced by many of our Black peers within the profession.

Summary

Our findings highlight the burdens and motivations of two Black women who taught DEI courses in agricultural education departments at PWIs. This study lends more reason to continue the exploration of the experiences of Black graduate teaching assistants in AgLS programs at PWIs. We were fortunate to have the autonomy to create DEI courses in our programs, but that may not be the case for other graduate teaching assistants. Understanding their opportunities for experiences of empowerment in departments where they are severely underrepresented would serve the discipline well in its efforts to create more inclusive environments.

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