Disrupting the Pedagogy of Hypocrisy: How Do We Move Beyond Teaching Students How to Survive White Supremacy?

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Abstract: *This article discusses the ways that four educators experience the impacts of white supremacy in classroom spaces. We discuss the ways we navigate the tension created when we desire to foster antiracist spaces but are required to work within an academic system that is underpinned by white supremacy. Using tenets of Griot storytelling, we describe our points of origin, provide narrative examples of student interactions, and detail the reflexive lenses through which we processed these interactions. Our narratives specifically seek to center Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and discuss the ways that our training and education has limited our ability to support them in academic spaces. We conclude with an invitation for the reader to sit with us in this space of tension, and some reflexive questions to consider as we exist in this space together. We hope to offer this as a way to continue dismantling the internalizations of supremacy. We also offer this as an opportunity to move away from the problem-solving mentality often applied to issues of racism in favor of fostering a continued, collective healing from the wounds created for all of us by white supremacist systems.*

Keywords: Cultural competence, white supremacy, case studies, social justice, multicultural training

While training students to be *multiculturally competent* mental health practitioners, we train them how to survive white supremacy rather than deconstruct it. As a colonized nation, the default space is white. White cultural values underpin our definitions of professionalism. From our program interviews to our practical experience, the standard is whiteness. This is white supremacy. Multicultural competence was developed in the mental health field in 1992 (Sue et al., 1992) and is becoming a core part of our training (American Counseling Association, 2014; American Psychological Association [APA], 2017; National Association of Social Work [NASW], 2017). There is a range for how integrated multicultural curricula is in mental health programs (Pope, 2014), yet it tends to focus on training students to understand and work with cultural *others*. In other words, multicultural competence training uses White-, heterosexual-, cisgender-, middle-class-, Christian-, patriarchal-, nondisabled-, Western- (typically U.S. citizen), anglophone-centered cultural experiences and define these as the standards by which all "others" are compared (Stewart & Nicolazzo, 2018). We train students on the importance of diversity and inclusion; however, we continue to center white cultural standards. The result of this approach and pedagogy is hypocrisy. The focus of this paper, our critique of this status quo in academia, is not a road to understand how to survive white supremacy, but rather a road of deep and

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ongoing reflexivity and its associated messiness; an invitation to engage in decolonial action (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

White Supremacy in Multicultural Competence Training

White supremacy is the foundation upon which multicultural competence and training is built. Therefore, attempting to disentangle white supremacy from social work education as is currently situated within our neoliberal, capitalist system is messy and seemingly impossible (Kidman, 2019). As multicultural training within the mental health and social service fields attempts to build students' individual multicultural competence, the hypocrisy in this pedagogy arises, which leaves structural oppression unnamed, unacknowledged, and unchallenged. Rather than developing the necessary skills to develop critical reflexivity for those with power to unravel systemic oppression (Almeida et al., 2019), the lives and experiences of Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC), and Queer and Trans people (QTBIPOC) become learning points in a classroom setting, often lacking nuance (Brown et al., 2017). Our use of the terms "BIPOC" and/or "QTBIPOC" is to acknowledge political identities and experiences with various interconnected systems of oppression; it is not an attempt to lump together a heterogeneous group of individuals. By reflexivity (theory translated to action) we mean the critical analysis and consciousness skills needed to interrogate one's and one's cultural group's relationship to, and the systemic benefits associated with, white supremacy, in order to inform action and address systems, ideologies, and practices at the macro- and micro-level that perpetuate and maintain "isms," oppression and marginalization. As we ourselves engage in that critical analysis and consciousness building, we are speaking to these topics in cultural terms: who gets to create and reinforce culture and knowledge in academia generally, and in the mental health and social service professions specifically.

In multicultural training, specifically, the typically structured instruction format attempts to move away from "tolerating" to "appreciating" and "celebrating difference" (Jay, 2003; Sue et al., 1992), which serves and reinforces established and essentialist beliefs about BIPOC and/or QTBIPOC, their cultural beliefs and practices and relation to health and mental health beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Utt, 2018). If we do not also prepare our students to develop a structural analysis, critical consciousness, and reflexivity, this too serves to reify historical notions of whom, what culture, and what beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors are considered the "standards" for comparison. In so doing, we —instructors and others vested in academia— teach our students and supervisees to perpetuate and maintain systems of oppression (i.e., white supremacy). This informs students' training, how they interact with clients in practicum and future clinical practice, and ultimately maintains disparate health and mental health treatment and outcomes (Pope, 2014). Further, we do not prepare them to disrupt unethical practices —white supremacy-based psychological theory and interventions— increasing the risk for psychological harm to students, and future clients, who embody marginalized identities; this includes BIPOC and QTBIPOC (APA, 2017).

Does Multicultural Competence Center Whiteness?

There exists an assumption that difference is a deviation from the presumably objective and universal "norm," with the implicit aim of helping "cultural others" assimilate to U.S.- and Western-imperialist hegemonic standards of "normalcy" (i.e., individualistic social orientation and psychological worldview). Although frameworks for multicultural training were developed to bring awareness to exclusionary practices in the mental health field (Sue et al., 1992; Pope, 2014), our textbooks, sample syllabi, and conferences on multiculturalism continually focus on marginalized populations without acknowledging our respective field's foundation in white supremacy. Curricula operates under the assumption that white students need to be trained to work *on* populations different from themselves, specifically to help these populations adopt White-normed ways of being. This type of instruction and practice centers the experience of White people, who make up the majority of evidence-based focus psychological intervention studies (Joseph et al., 2020), and White students who benefit the most from "cultural competence" based instruction in our classrooms. Competence-based instruction, we will make the case here, paradoxically maintains implied standards and further perpetuates the marginalization, minoritization, and oppression of BIPOC and/or QTBIPOC. It reinforces the notion that we are able to identify and "solve" differences by quantifying them and placing people in boxes that fit the schemas we have formed throughout our lives.

As a result of this instructional focus, BIPOC students are not allowed to be students in the same way that White students are. The current orientation to "appreciate and celebrate" difference and develop "competencies" or *be* "culturally sensitive" does not allow for the development of a structural analysis (Shaia et al., 2019) that challenges the field itself and our internalization of its established (and harmful) norms, worldview, and historical assimilationist practices. Additionally, it does not allow students to engage in needed critical self-inquiry related to how their own beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors reinforce these norms and potentially harmful practices. This sets up a fallacy of innocence (Hemphill, 2019), which allows White students in particular (and those who benefit the most from systemic privilege) to rely on the "not knowing:" "not knowing" that the foundation of the social service and mental health fields, as well as the knowledge that we rely on for our training and practices, are informed in large part by scientific racism. Thus, this framing is not a road to purity. It is not innocence; it is quite the opposite – at the very least, it is complicity.

The Emphasis on "Fixing"

Multicultural competence training can be framed as a continuum, with one end being superficiality in practice and the other end being social justice (Writer, 2008), and while its goals overlap with the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), in practice, CRT often remains absent from the curriculum and enactments in our training (Jay, 2003). CRT examines the relationship between race, racism, and power. As a pedagogy tool it allows us to analyze and acknowledge the inequities that exists in all aspects of our society and lives (e.g., education, economics, housing, healthcare, law, etc.), and how these are socially constructed, racialized and baked into historical systemic arrangements (i.e., power

hierarchies) so that we can do the work of transforming these arrangements toward equity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). It aims to make visible the invisible, it informs action in order to redistribute the power to create and inform "culture," outcomes, and relationships in ways that are non-oppressive. One way this is done, is by bringing marginalized stories and voices to the forefront of conversation through what is called counter-storytelling, which at its core aims to do the work of healing. However, in postsecondary education and learning institutions, as most of these spaces are predominantly white, this healing process gets interrupted by the ongoing suppression of racially marginalized students' voices (Patton, 2016; Tom et al., 2017).

Attempts to Shift Toward Sitting With the Tension

It is important to recognize that many frameworks have already been developed in an attempt to address the tension that emerges when multicultural competence continues to center white supremacy and white cultural experiences in the classroom (Dawson, 2020; Faison & McArthur, 2020; Kidman, 2019; Matias & Mackey, 2015). While critiquing the complicity of educators in predominantly white institutions (spaces which often heighten students' experiences of racialized trauma), cultural justice- and abolitionist-based pedagogical theory have been offered as strategies to help meet BIPOC students' needs in the classroom (Faison & McArthur, 2020). In addition to the breadth of research conducted on the effects of racism, neoliberalism, and capitalism in educational environments, more attention has also recently been focused on how this relationship is enacted in settler-colonial societies which hold a history of imperialism and violence (Kidman, 2019). While Indigenous academics have formed scholarship that speaks to decolonization and Indigeneity, their inclusion in the academy has often been as "diversity partners," keeping Indigenous voices out of the conversation and in the institutional margins (Kidman, 2019). This is just one example of many cases being built by scholars for transformative resistance "within, against and beyond" the historical and ongoing Westernization of higher education (Dawson, 2020, p. 82).

The Westernized university or institution is entrenched in both colonialism and neoliberalism, and thus the scholarly efforts towards transformative resistance are and must continue to be anti-colonial and anti-neoliberal (Dawson, 2020). Scholars have argued that in order to pursue greater equity and anti-racist practices and futures, both micro- and macro- systems must name and subsequently work to dismantle the deep-seeded roots of dehumanization that has been enacted and maintained through capitalism and colonization (Dawson, 2020). Multicultural competence training can be viewed as one manifestation of the work to dismantle the overwhelming power that white supremacy holds. However, while the creation of pedagogical frameworks and teaching strategies for critical whiteness studies involving self-interrogation and deep introspection adds to the existing field of CRT (Matias & Mackey, 2015), it continues to place White students' experiences of unpacking their White racial identities at the center of the classroom conversations, which highlights the tension that arises amidst our efforts, as educators, to ultimately practice racial and social justice informed teaching. This very tension presents: the pedagogy of hypocrisy.

Naming White Supremacy in Multicultural Competence Training

For this paper, we are naming and acknowledging the professional gatekeeping practices and professor pitfalls that are a byproduct of the white supremacist air we breathe. In our work with students, we have observed the following professional gatekeeping practices: the pendulum of expectations for students, social passes, white cultural standards of professionalism and politeness, and professional jargon as class privilege. The tension arises when we tell students to disrupt white spaces yet develop gatekeeping policies around professional behaviors that maintain white spaces. Additionally, there are a variety of ways that professors may perpetuate oppression within classroom settings. Professors, particularly White professors, may find themselves operating somewhere at either end of a pendulum of expectations for Black students and students for whom English is a challenge: Possibly enforcing paternalistic and rigid attitudes that fallaciously equate intelligence to a student's ability to use Edited Standard Written English (ESWE), or being overly lenient on students of color out of fear of the conflict that might arise if the student gets a poor grade. Both mentalities are derived of white saviorism and often educators are not encouraged to reflect on their lens of experience within the context of the classroom. This protects White teachers and further marginalizes BIPOC students (Miller & Harris, 2018).

The language of social justice is rapidly evolving, with terms like diversity, inclusion, and equity showing up in everything from job titles to cultural competency workshops. Similarly, terms like "intersectionality" (Crenshaw, 1989) and "decolonizing" (Brayboy, 2005) are being more widely used. While these terms describe processes that are based in the liberation of marginalized people, it is difficult to ascertain whether changing our language has begun change processes or has become merely the rebranding of oppressive ideals, given that this language is often used in academic spaces that still operate under the dominant, class privileged educational industrial complex. This sort of "performative wokeness" is dangerous, it is misleading to students, and often promises safety that is not backed up by a robust understanding of the systemic and interpersonal issues that marginalized people face in academic spaces.

Moreover, being a disruptor in academic spaces is often a privilege for some and a risk for others: individuals who have racial or gender privilege are seen as "mavericks" while individuals with one or more marginalized identities are identified as "problems." The privilege of disruption is also related to faculty rank. A professor with tenure is more likely to have the power to subvert systemic norms, but even tenure practices in the U.S. favor cisgender, White men (Croom, 2017; Hanasono et al., 2019).

Reflexivity and Storytelling

In an effort to move away from Colonized approaches to learning and education in academic writing, we will be utilizing an African Centered approach to discussing our experiences. What follows is an introduction to the authors who currently work and teach in academia, with an emphasis on who we are as a collective versus the individual (Traoreé, 2003). Personal narratives will be written in the oral tradition of the West African Griot, serving as stories to explain and offer commentary regarding the experience of education

in academia (World Affairs Council of Houston, n.d.). This effort serves to disrupt the way we routinely approach multicultural training as we center our individual stories as first-person anecdotes detailing what is noted in our literature review. This storytelling contributes to our healing as practitioners navigating the ongoing traumatization in American academic settings (Chioneso et al., 2020).

The Collective

Academia determines that when we live in our truth and when we speak it, when we dare to live in joy and thrive, this makes the "good White folks" too uncomfortable. So, we are forced to code-switch, that is, speaking, behaving, engaging and relating in ways that align and collude with whiteness (in ways that make us more palatable to white people), forced to fragment, disintegrate, reintegrate, shut up and teach, and write, and smile. We are forced to deny and question our reality: *we are not seeing, feeling, or experiencing the things we are*. This process of maintaining and perpetuating whiteness forces some of us to leave academia, because we refuse to (or decide to stop), play(ing) *their game*, we refuse to stop asking questions, we refuse to shut up and teach, write, smile, and repeat.

We seek to share our collective narratives as an offering for consideration and reflection, for ourselves, each other, and the reader. The following reflexivity statements and shared stories are intended to demonstrate the different ways we show up in academic spaces, and as such, the reader might experience some lack of fluidity in them, as we have chosen not to homogenize the way we use words to construct our experiences and have instead chosen to allow our collective to be constructed in a culmination our own unique styles of writing.

She Wears the Mask. I identify as an African American, Christian, heterosexual, cisgender woman. I grew up in a small city in the mid-Atlantic region of the Eastern coast of the United States. The city has a history of racial unrest, which resulted in segregation between predominantly White, affluent suburban areas and predominantly Black and Brown inner city neighborhoods. A decade of gentrification has altered the racial makeup of the city, yet lingering and unaddressed racial trauma manifests in episodic violence within disempowered communities. The area of the inner city in which I was raised was challenged by issues of poverty and community violence. Due to educational desegregation in the 1960s, children in the inner city were bussed out to suburban, mostly white schools. I was forced to assimilate in many ways, including learning to engage in code switching by altering African American Vernacular English with American English, and identifying which aspects of myself were deemed inappropriate or offensive to my mostly White peers and teachers. The need to assimilate was learned through a never-ending series of macroaggressions and microaggressions which often left me feeling embarrassed and ashamed. I was subsequently placed in "Honors" classes during the day, with a largely White cohort of students. The combination of my school and life experiences resulted in a dichotomous view of my community, where I simultaneously feared community violence and empathized with its perpetrators. Still, this view of my community did not overshadow the experience of racial trauma I experienced in suburban classrooms and neighborhoods with White peers. Safety felt elusive under either circumstance.

These experiences have informed my professional journey as both a social worker and academian. I maintain a therapy practice specializing in serving in BIPOC families, while working full time at a predominantly white institution as a program administrator and professor. Much of my experience in academia has been colored by not only my past, but my current perspective as a therapist and professor. A common experience of faculty of color, BIPOC students often request my guidance and emotional support as they navigate the program and their future careers. I am privy to their private pain in a predominantly white academic space, as they learn to navigate the field of social work, where their predominantly Black and Brown clients are feeling the impacts of systemic oppression.

Me in Fragments. To tell my story, I'd have to do it in fragments. It's the only way words come to me. It's painful to write, and I guess that's where the story could start. My paralyzing fear related to writing. The thing that will make or break "my career," the thing that I say I love so much yet have so much fear about. Even writing about myself, my position, my locations, my identities, feels like a process that could destroy me. I have internalized that voice that is not mine, but sounds like me, *"You are not good enough," "Your words don't matter...and by extension you don't matter," "The concerns you bring up don't matter, therefore your people and the work you do does not matter."*

Being a Black-identified Latina (Afro/Black Dominicana), I hear that voice echoing in the halls of academia, from the time I was a student as far back as I can remember. This is not my only identity, yet when inside academic walls it seems the *only* identity that shows up, front, center, ready for battle. Yes, there are other parts of me that, truth be told, I am still in the process of accepting: I am a bisexual woman, internally I feel less femme sometimes than what I present to the world (so I am told). I'm just now in my early forties focusing on this, but it has always been with me. The majority of my life lived in the space of *Bi-Bye* erasure. Bear with me, as I bare my soul. This is trauma work... it's the work of liberation.

The Work of Liberation. In order to teach my students how to do the work of Liberation, I have to not only "list" my identities, but situate myself in them, this work cannot be done without embodiment (Owens, 2020). I cannot do this work without acknowledging my trauma(s), because while they do not define the whole of me, they most certainly inform who, how, what and why I am. My people were enslaved: kidnapped, held captive, transported, exploited and raped in what is now known as the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the island that goes by the colonized name "Hispañola," named by its pre-colonial Indigenous inhabitants as Ayiti. It is important for me to name historical trauma, as it continuously shows up in *our*, *my*, fragmented cultural and personal narrative. It shows up as anti-Blackness based socialization, intergenerational racialized-, sexual- and gender-based trauma. I have personal and intimate experience with all of this, undisclosed and unresolved. And so, in a toxic environment like academia (inside and outside of the classroom), and given the political landscape we are currently in, I feel constantly on loop, endless repetition: surfacing and suppressing trauma-based content because I have to *do* the work of survival.

Writing and narrative-storytelling is trauma-processing work. While my work is trauma- focused and informed, I push against viewing Blackness (Bi-ness, woman-ness,

etc.) only through the lens of trauma, as this (these) aspect(s) of who I am are also tied to joy. *And* I cannot talk about my work in academia, without its acknowledgment. Inside these walls, our stories are ignored and/or *cannibalized* — consumed — for the benefit of White people's learning. Our voices silenced via denials and complaints.

Light, Bright, but Not Quite White. There are many identities that feel salient as I think about this article. My social identities, as a biracial, Black, and Jewish, cis-woman of color, who is currently able-bodied, middle class, but raised upper-middle class, in my mid-thirties, identifying as spiritual not religious, straight, and U.S. born. I am racially ambiguous and most often assumed to be "other," however, this has always been context dependent. Most often, I get asked "what are you?" whether it is at dentist appointments, doctors' appointments, on the street or even a doctoral program interview. I'm often expected to serve as a voice for BIPOC faculty and students in majority white spaces on campus. My parents both experienced oppression and survived Corporate America by assimilating, which showed up in their shared emphasis on education. Secondly, as an assistant professor working toward tenure who coordinates the multicultural curriculum for a master's program in counseling and practices as a licensed psychologist serving women of color. My clinical approach is feminist and trauma-informed, social justice oriented, and relationally based. And lastly, I cannot disentangle my approach to this work with my motherhood as I am continually aware of my responsibility to the next generation and juggling the demands of childcare while expected to meet the same tenure expectations as my non-parenting and cis-male counterparts. As a breastfeeding mother, I experienced the impact of how "equal" parental leave was not equitable.

The Invisible Queer. As a white, queer, nonbinary femme with thin privilege who lives with invisible illnesses, and who is from a working to middle class background, my ways of existing in in the spaces that I inhabit are influenced by the interactions between my privileged identities, many of which are visible, and my oppressed identities which are largely invisible.

While the invisibility of my gender identity, my queerness, and my disability can leave me feeling unseen, that invisibility also affords me privilege in spaces where invisibility means that students, colleagues, or clients don't read me as "other" unless I choose to inform them. The theoretical lenses through which I try to conceptualize my teaching and practice also influence the ways I experience professional spaces. In my work as a trauma therapist and educator in social work and psychology, I am increasingly informed by frameworks that are rooted in abolition and collective liberation, but it is difficult to resolve the dissonance I experience when trying to apply these frameworks within the confines of neoliberal professional spaces. These are some of the components of my identity that influence my position in this topic.

As I considered sharing my example for this paper, I found myself having to resist creating neat headings to detail the events, analysis, and reflexivity. This is one of the ways that my academic training has limited my ability to fully language the messiness of these experiences. I have been trained to identify gaps, provide clarity, analysis, and critique, and to make neat that which is tangled by identifying patterns – structuring that can at times minimize the depth and complexity of the affective process that inevitably influences the

structure of knowledge building in this topic. I have been versed in a language that has limited my capacity to address the impacts of structural oppression in the academe. In fact, I feel at times as though this language only allows me to continually create the same faulty structures.

Collective Narratives

Just as our positions in this work are diverse, our narratives are as well. We have each given our story a title and seek to share it in a way unique to our own perspective and style. As such, each story is self-contained, and not edited for homogeny as we believe that our individual voices must be honored in this work for us to contribute to a dismantling collective. Our aim is to sit in a space without answers, so our stories do not offer "solutions" as we believe that while solution seeking is a tempting course to take, it is an illusion that allows us to perpetuate the notion that white supremacy is a "problem" easily "solved," when many of the solutions are wrapped up in the same expert mentality that perpetuates these issues in the first place. Instead, we invite the reader to grapple with the loose ends and sit with ourselves and with each other in the messiness of this work.

Preserving White Comfort as Multicultural Training. My story is told from the perspective of my multiple identities in the room: our program's multicultural curriculum coordinator, junior tenure track faculty, a mentor, and a biracial Black woman. I share my reflexive process within the interaction with the student and faculty. This particular scenario captures professor pitfalls as I navigate academia and being responsive to the student. In my role as the multicultural curriculum coordinator, I'm grappling with a dynamic where White students receive a different training experience around race than BIPOC students. For White students, the focus is on increasing awareness through vulnerability and sharing biases. However, BIPOC students regularly receive feedback about developing professional skills to support White people in developing their awareness.

When meeting with a Black student in mentoring, we were reviewing her feedback from her multicultural lab and she pointed out that she was being given feedback on how to hold space for White classmates' vulnerability. Specifically, she was told that her comments expressing frustration with the expectation that she has empathy for a classmate's racist White family members might impede her classmates from sharing. While the student voiced her feeling conflicted about this feedback, she kept reiterating how she tried to sit with it. Internally, I was cringing, it didn't sit well with me that this student was being asked to preserve white comfort.

Outwardly, my face *told on me*, a quizzical expression prompted me to disclose that I could understand her feeling conflicted. The student then shared more of her frustration that she felt like she was being told not to be "the angry Black woman," but felt like she had the "right to be angry." I was nodding and verbally affirming her reaction with, "I can understand that." My reactions in the moment stemmed from my personal identities (where I was considered "angry") as well as my mentor role with the student. We spent a few more moments collaborating on a plan for me to bring it up with our faculty before we moved back into other mentoring topics. In reflection, when meeting with the student, I felt

grounded and connected to what she was sharing with me. I was honest in reflecting back to her that I could see the difference in the expectation that she created space for people to share while her White counterparts were invited to share vulnerably.

On the faculty side, my role as junior tenure track faculty, the multicultural curriculum coordinator, and my value of boosting students' voices were salient. In the faculty meeting, I shared the students' observations, and it was suggested that the student go back to the instructor (a White woman) who gave the feedback to process the student's reaction. This suggestion did not sit well with me so I voiced my concern and was told that I could also meet with the professor. Internally, discomfort around how to proceed arose. The student gave me the feedback and we collaborated on a plan for sharing this with the faculty. The pressure to conform to the culture of the faculty impacted my next steps. It is the program's view that students should be redirected to share feedback with the instructor. Self-doubt crept in, was I missing something?

Was I participating in a student's avoidance as it is sometimes framed when students go to another faculty member rather than provide the feedback directly to the instructor? I didn't question the instructor's receptiveness to the feedback, but rather our curriculum. I ended up meeting with the instructor as well as following up with the student. The student was open to following up with the instructor, but I couldn't help but feel like I failed her by bringing the ball back to her after she thoughtfully and meaningfully handed it to me. Why did she have to do the extra work because our curriculum was rooted in white supremacy and protecting white comfort? Eventually, I was invited to re-envision the curriculum and whether affinity groups would be appropriate. This work was hindered by the disparity in the number of White students to BIPOC students who would be taking the course each year. We named it yet the system cannot respond to it. Also, there was additional workload placed on me as a junior faculty member to meet with two professors individually and the student again. Where is the space for rage? Why is vulnerability welcomed while anger is silenced? How can we change our training when we are beholden to the limitations of our academic systems?

The Illusion of "Safe Space" in the Classroom. The following experience I share is intended as a way to present the multi-tiered, difficult-to-capture processing of an email interaction that I had with a BIPOC student regarding the difficulty they had with a white professor. The intent of my structure is to present a view of the messiness of the analysis and reflexivity happening in tandem with the event itself, as separating them out feels to me like making neat that which is inherently not. I will detail the events in **bold print**, with my [thoughts/observations] in square brackets and my {reflexivity/feelings} in curly brackets. I invite you to read only the bold text first, reflect on the "facts" of the interaction, identify how you might have responded to this interaction, and return to the beginning to read my bracketed internal processes. I wonder how our processes might converge or diverge and what components of our identities or experiences might account for these similarities or differences.

A BIPOC undergraduate student who was in one of my classes first reached out to speak with me via email about an experience they had that semester where a White professor who was discussing LGBTQ issues equated the historical use of the word

"queer" with the use of the "n-word." {I roll my eyes as I read that this comparison was made.} [This comparison is familiar. I recognize the pattern and having heard similar arguments when I was a student.] {Unsurprised. A little smug?} [We are often taught to make comparisons to attempt to anchor knowledge in mutual understanding and how do we walk the line between creating connection for the sake of clarity and implying homogeneity of experience that results in the minimizing of people with one or multiple oppressed identities? Is this the result of being taught in binary and valuative hierarchical frames?] {Tangled.} [I think back on the ways that White, queer people perpetuate racism and how we/they often (mistakenly) presume that being part of an oppressed group allows us/them to understand the experiences of racially oppressed individuals.] {Satisfaction at identifying something complicated, gratitude at being a person this student reached out to.} [Am I gratified because I want to be the "good" White professor?]

{Guilt.}

The BIPOC student explained that they asked for clarification from the professor about this comparison and attempted to express their thoughts regarding why they did not agree. [I recall doing work to move away from comparing oppressions. At one time, I would have done this.] {Guilt.} **The student specified that they felt they were respectful in the way they presented their counter argument** [Would a White student have qualified this? Is this related to respectability politics? Is the person defining "respectful" a professor who is unable to recognize the ways that white supremacy influences the concept of "respectful conversation?" This creates an unwelcoming space for BIPOC students.] [I want to tell the student this while also telling them that knowing it is useless if the person who has the power isn't willing to hear it]. [Will my job be threatened if I advocate?] {Powerless.}

According to the student, the professor became defensive and shut down the conversation [a memory of seeing this happen in classes before.] {Disappointment.} {But it fades quickly, like the ghost of something I thought I should feel but then remember is not new or unusual.] {Unsurprised. Jaded.}, **leaving the BIPOC student to feel unheard in addition to inhibiting their willingness to attempt discourse in future classes.** [Shutting down the discourse clearly invalidated the BIPOC student's thoughts in the classroom, stifling a conversation instead of encouraging one. It showed other BIPOC students in the classroom that speaking up isn't welcome. It showed White students that the White professor's comfort was more worthy of protection than the BIPOC student's viewpoint was worthy of consideration.] {Frustration, but unsurprised; like anger without teeth.} {Anxiety.} [Is this what the illusion of expertise does to us? Is this one professor's fragility? Can I find the origin point to disrupt the ways these individual manifestations are fed by white supremacy?] {Uncertainty.} [How is this showing up in my classes? What am I still not seeing?] {Curiosity. Guilt. Judgment.} [I cognitively reframe, attempting to resist judgment, knowing that {fearful that} distancing myself will only serve to create the illusion that I can distance myself from a system that I am inextricably a part of.] [It's tempting to intellectualize and point out the pattern but doing so also seems useless. It's so embedded. It twists and turns into other things.]

The student went on to say that they felt fearful but committed to seek resolution for the sake of creating change but worried it would impact their treatment in the class or their grade. [I think this is a common fear, but also think back to a BIPOC student who told me once that similar interactions are the reason they don't participate in class. How does this influence participation grades? How does that thereby influence student outcomes?] **It was clear to the student, by their report, that the professor did not have the ability to tolerate conflicting views in the classroom. The student wanted to address this for the sake of other BIPOC students in addition to their own need to feel heard and understood.** {Hopeless.} [I want to tell the student that they will be heard and not penalized, but I have no way of assuring that.] [A memory of a BIPOC student telling me once that "'safe spaces' in the classroom are for White people."]

The student stated they were experiencing tension between wanting to have the matter addressed and uncertainty about whether they wanted to meet with their [White] **advisor and/or the** [White] **chair of the department about it** [It's understandable why after this experience and others like it, this student doesn't expect support in a meeting with a room full of White academics. I think of all the times that BIPOC students have been silent in my classes. I wonder how we expect them to participate when they have experiences like this.] {Frustration.} [I reflect on my fear — is it just a fear? — of not being asked back to teach as a result of my advocacy for the student.] {Fear.} [I think about how I rely on the health insurance from the university, having to grapple with limited time and an overloaded schedule to assist this student.] {Frustration. Guilt.} [Am I showing up enough?] **I offer to attend the meeting with them, but we are unable to find a time in our collective schedules that works for the chair of the department. Due to my schedule, I am unable to attend the meeting with the student.** [Is this another failure for the student? Does my willingness to advocate matter if my obligations under Capitalism limit my ability to show up? Is it white saviorism to be so attached to needing to be a support for them?]

Trigger Warning for Academic Interactions. What follows is a scenario in which I detail an instance in which my personal identity impacted my role in academia as both an educator and gatekeeper. The scenario will be described in detail, to include the complexities of my personal reactions and internal dialogue. An African American faculty member and I were concluding an activity with a group of students, when one of the participants requested to meet with us privately. The student, a young Black male reported that while eating in the lunchroom at his internship, one of his fellow interns began to make self-deprecating comments about her body aloud. The male student, reportedly to attempt to lighten the mood, responded by complimenting her body. He stated that as soon as the comment was spoken, he noticed an immediate and significant shift in the energy of the room.

The student stopped at this point in the story to emphasize to us, that he had been the sole Black, male identified person in a room with a group of White female interns at the time of the incident. At the time, he stated that he had not responded to the tension and instead chose to make a quick exit from the room. However, upon reflection he now felt making the comment was a professional mistake on his part that could negatively impact his relationships at his Field Placement. He now was seeking advice regarding how to

rectify the situation. I could empathize with this experience. As an African American, I too have a nervous system that bears the weight of generational racial trauma, which is attuned to sense discomfort of White people, and seek to soothe it in an attempt to minimize likely consequences (Menakem, 2017). My colleague and I validated his concerns. My colleague, also a Black male, offered to schedule a time to talk with him at length about how he might approach the issue. My colleague and I later discussed how the impact of this student's interaction with his young, White colleague activated us to reflect on the generational history of centering of White women's feelings, in spite of potential harm to Black people.

Prior to the meeting between my colleague and the student, the student's field professor, a White woman in her early seventies, approached the two of us regarding the incident in a faculty meeting. Unbeknownst to the Black male student, the White female intern had reported him to the internship supervisor, citing the reported comment as sexual harassment. The other young White women present when the comment was made corroborated her story, stating they had experienced the Black male student leering at them in a manner that had made them uncomfortable. After a meeting with his internship supervisor, the field professor had decided to speak to us about the incident, due to our relationship with the student in our activity group. She directed my Black, male colleague to have a talk with him, letting him know that he was "big and scary" and needed to be mindful of how he might make women uncomfortable in his presence. My colleague and I shared a look of shock with one another, non-verbally communicating our discomfort with the racial undertones of the statement. Neither of us responded in the moment, and the professor turned and began to chat innocently with our colleagues.

Following the incident, my colleague and I met privately and discussed our feelings about the exchange. Although we had to acknowledge we only had our student's perspective of the incident, we both knew this student well. Nothing beyond the stereotype of him living in a Black, male body qualified him as scary or intimidating. What initially was understood as a professional misstep, now had potentially serious academic, professional and legal implications. It was clear to us that the female intern and her peers' perception of events were taken as fact. Protecting their well-being was the focus of the professor and his supervisor, resulting in my colleague being called in to teach the student how to make his fellow White, female interns comfortable.

Therefore, our student was being impacted by generations of racist ideology, lending itself to a view that the Black body is hypersexual, dangerous and needs to be controlled for the safety of White bodies (Menakem, 2017). Hearing our Black, male student referred to as "big and scary," elicited memories of Emmitt Till, the recent news stories surrounding Botham Jean, Christian Cooper and countless other Black men who had their lives endangered due to White women's perceptions of being unsafe in their presence.

Knowing the implications of what had occurred, my colleague and I had to confront our silence when our student was alluded to as "big and scary" Why had this caused our nervous system to "freeze" in this moment of being triggered by this phrase? We acknowledged that in addition to this freeze response embodying a "Traumatic retention" or generational trauma response, the dynamics of Academia complicated this issue (Menakem, 2017). It felt unsafe to address this, due to this particular professor's former

Administrative position in the faculty and observed instances of her utilizing this power to cause emotional or professional harm to other faculty members. Following our conversation, my colleague decided to follow through with his conversation with the student but chose to eliminate conversation about how he should alter his "scariness." Instead, he emphasized authentic validation and psychoeducation regarding how to navigate racial dynamics within our field. We also identified the somatic methods of pausing and intentionally creating "Reprieve spaces," free of white supremacy to strengthen ourselves to engage in intentional confrontation with this professor in future racist interactions (Menakem, 2017).

Liberation Work and Professional Gatekeeping. This section will draw from my experiences (observations and reflections) since I started as an assistant professor 4 years ago. Most will be tied to my development as a professor, which in a white institution, is inextricably linked to my racial identity process as this aspect of my identity is the most salient when I am *doing* teaching, service, and research within academic walls (the brick-and-mortar *Ivory Tower*). I will be pulling from critical autoethnography for this section, and because I am not a person who thinks, speaks or writes linearly I will be using parentheses, italics, and, when needed, brackets to provide readers with a sense of my internal process (Sheth & Croom, 2021).

My first encounter with "professional gatekeeping" as an Assistant professor at an undergraduate institution came very early post-hire. As someone who values learning from others, I decided to observe two courses that I would be teaching that coming fall. One of these courses was our clinical practicum/internship course (hereafter referred to as "the practicum course"), which I ended up revamping and have been teaching every Fall semester since. This practicum course offers undergraduate students the opportunity to engage in fieldwork for 8-10 hours a week in mental/behavioral health-, school-, residential-, and hospital-based settings. During practicum (fieldwork), students interested in pursuing graduate school or post-bachelor careers in behavioral/mental health, school, and health/medical fields engage in skills-development work in a variety of direct service community-based agencies/settings.

Additionally, they engage in a 2.5-hour seminar focused on readings related to main course objectives and goals: student intern development (personal), development of basic skills (attending/listening, development of empathy, trust/therapeutic alliance building), multicultural responsive/cultural humility development, and self-care (these last two being my additions to the course).

During a debrief after a course session I observed, I experienced what would be the first of many instances of White faculty wanting to help BIPOC students "manage" their emotions related to injustices experienced in their schooling (including at my institution), and those they were witnessing in their practicum placement (and presumably in seminar). At the time I was not as adept at responding to these "well-meaning" comments from White faculty, and responded by saying *"Well... isn't this a justified response to what they are experiencing?"* At least, I think this is what I said (recall can be tricky), I know for sure I said something similar to this taking care not to sound too "emotional" myself. I was after all a new (Black-Latina) assistant professor developing a relationship with a White

colleague who would thereafter become a mentor, friend, and what I would consider an ally *to* co-conspirator (*"to"* here denotes my perception of said colleague's White racial and allyship developmental process). There were, and continue to be, many examples of this.

To my surprise, at the time there were no requirements related to developing culturally responsive skills before students enrolled in the practicum course and were sent to the *field*. This to me was an ethical issue, specifically, students were not being taught to work within the bounds of their "competence." What was then known as cultural psychology (now "multicultural psychology" used hereafter), was the only course in the curriculum that focused on "Culture," and not a pre-requirement for the clinical practicum course. The necessity of this as a prerequisite became apparent to me when I started teaching the course as the work students were learning to *do*, in my professional opinion, was the work of *saviorism*. Thereafter, I petitioned the department to make multicultural psychology part of the required courses for practicum. My rationale for petitioning the prerequisite was that we as a department were not helping students (many who were interested in further study in the helping professions) develop the necessary skills and/or theoretical foundation to engage in *ethical* practice (e.g., standard of working within the bounds of one's competence; APA, 2017).

I developed multicultural psychology in 2016, during my first semester at the college. In the development of this course, I borrowed elements from the previous professor who taught it as an adjunct, from a course a colleague of mine taught at a different institution, and further informed it by evidence-based multicultural and social justice informed pedagogy (Singh et al., 2020). The main objective was/is to help students develop critical consciousness in order for them to understand their identity development (including their professional identity) as happening within a specific social, cultural and political context (i.e., positionality), as well as to develop critical thinking skills as it relates to the consumption of knowledge and knowledge production (theories, scientific research, and practice) in the field of psychology. I used the Awareness, Knowledge and Skills (Sue et al., 1992) model for counselor education and development, and Janet Helms's (2020) racial identity model to inform the critical (e.g., racial) consciousness development aspects of the course, which are main components of course goals and objectives. While teaching this concurrently with the practicum course a question popped in my head that became louder as the semester progressed (and as White student's displeasure with how I taught both of these courses grew): "*How are we sending students out into the field without requiring them to think critically about their identity and how this identity impacts how they interact with community-members most of whom are not White?"* I definitely had my work cut out for me.

In helping students engage in a systemic and critical analysis of the field, to understand how psychology is inextricably linked to systems of power, oppression and marginalization, I was in essence emphasizing that we *have* to acknowledge "color/power" (Syed et al., 2018) if we are to engage in developing culturally responsive skills. This alignment with APA's multicultural guidelines (2018) challenges students to not only be critical consumers of psychological science, but also helps them understand the importance of engaging with and developing critical awareness/analysis of their own worldviews. This

approach intentionally creates dissonance for students, which then propels them to make informed choices about how they consume, understand and/or engage with what they learn. This dissonance is centered in process- and content-aspects of the course, which I then help guide them through. This process, while difficult for students who benefit from systemic privilege, allows them to work in the service of what they personally define as social justice, while also helping them develop and engage in cultural humility (openness to learning and being ok with *"not knowing"*; Rogers-Sirin & Sirin, 2009; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998), ethical practice (APA, 2017) and liberation-based praxis (merging of theory and reflexive practice; Singh et al., 2020).

In my experience thus far, White students in particular have had the most difficulty engaging with the critical consciousness process. As evidenced in my early course evaluations, some did not see why we talked "*so much"* about *"Culture*,*"* others saw this as a "personal" *thing* I was doing to them, or that I was intentionally trying to make them feel guilty about who they were and their upbringing. To say that the first three years as an assistant professor was a long and drawn-out uphill struggle, does not fully capture how it felt to navigate this process and the impact (physically, psychologically and morale-wise) it had on me. What these student reactions indicated to me was that they were not being prepared to think about, or engage with, their personal identities and the internalization of whiteness, inculcated in them via their schooling and other socialization, much less do the work that is called for if we are truly engaging in the service of social justice and liberation.

What about students with marginalized/minoritized identities? A question that comes up for me every semester is: *"What about our students of color, and those with other marginalized identities (BIPOC, Queer, Trans students), in my attempt to 'decenter' whiteness, am I centering it?"*

As an educator in an institution that markets itself as "*Highly selective* and *Elite*," where white supremacy is reflected in the curriculum, interactions on campus and in our classrooms, and where "diversity and inclusion," "multicultural competence," "full participation," and "equity pedagogy," (most recently "anti-racism") have become buzzwords, I often grapple with this question: *What are we to do?* This is the edge I am constantly navigating. *What about my students who are not White, Cis, middle class, heterosexual, documented, etc.? Am I really teaching them what they need to know?* I believe that part of the work I take on is helping to counter (at least I would like to believe) the burden marginalized students (BIPOC & QTBIPOC) have to take on (*am I acting as a "savior?"*); keeping them from having to carry the learning for their White counterparts and those who benefit the most from systemic privilege. In my attempts, I'd like to believe that I am interrupting/disrupting the *cannibalizing* of their stories, narratives, and learning.

Whose experience is centered in our (my) attempts at "decentering" whiteness in the classroom? This is a tough question to ask, because it is a tough question to answer. Yet, I know this is the work of reflexivity and liberatory praxis (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Owens, 2020; Sheth & Croom, 2021; williams et al., 2016); perhaps arriving at an answer is not the point. Perhaps the point is to be in that *in-between* space, the space where my edges feel the sharpest. *Is this not praxis?* I inhabit this space in a context where I am perceived as *knowing*, and expected to *do* my "expertise," yet encounter push back seemingly at every

turn. As I ask this question, I think of the students who sat and bore witness to their White peers' racial identity process unraveling before them. I would like to think that there was learning in this, but their earnest learning did not happen in the classroom, their learning really occurred during my office hours, away from the white gaze. All BIPOC and QTBIPOC students had different experiences, yet their process coalesced (for me) around a central question… *"What about us? How do we learn to navigate and negotiate 'cultural differences' in our daily lives, practicum, and eventually for some of us, as therapists/practitioners?"* I do not fully have the answer to this, but each semester I work hard at making my pedagogy more responsive to their needs. This is my edge.

Our Collective Edges

The process of transformation in our current institutions will be an ongoing struggle and is, by its nature, more time-consuming and complicated than the solutions offered in diversity and multicultural competence initiatives (Davis, 2020). In order to continue on the path of transformation, we must show up with a willingness to be accountable to the ways we have internalized and perpetuated white supremacy in classroom spaces. We offer the following questions to move toward this transformation together and we hope to sit in these spaces of discomfort with you, as a community, compassionately holding space for our collective pessimism of intellect and optimism of will (Antonini, 2019).

Questions for Continued Reflection: Deconstructing the Pedagogy of Hypocrisy

1.) How is our awareness training structured? Do we focus on supporting White students in their process of identifying their biases while telling students of color how to change professionally?

2.) Does our terminology reflect our educational and career practices, or are we merely paying lip service to the increasing market for social justice?

3.) How can we as professors disrupt these systems to foster robust change? How can we reimagine an educational system that seeks to dismantle oppressive forces as opposed to reifying them?

Conclusion

In West African tradition, Griots were oral historians, storytellers and entertainers whose messages served the societal "duty of ..."tell[ing] the people who they are, where they came from, and where they're supposed to head to...by dealing with the reality [of] things that happened within the society in the past". (Webster, 2017). We encourage educators to engage in a reflective process regarding their classroom and program curricula. The questions for continued reflection are a starting place, but the process never ends. Our stories and collective edges are examples of where we are at the time this article was written. However, they are not resolutions or templates. Our hope is that this article and concluding reflection questions serve as an entry-point (and/or mechanism), to (start) the honest, arduous and intentional work of valuing (our) oft-marginalized narratives and experiences. The historical legacy and art of story-telling is not only a healing technology, but so too valuable and effective pedagogy.

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