

Dismantling the Master's House: Black Women Faculty Challenging White Privilege/Supremacy in the College Classroom

Olivia N. Perlow, Sharon L. Bethea, and Durene I. Wheeler

Northeastern Illinois University

Abstract

Lorde's 1979 essay, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" is a particularly useful contribution to academic discourse for scholar-activists seeking social justice within the academy. The ivory tower, as the name implies, can be seen as the concrete foundation of "the master's house" (Lorde, 2007), in which the majority of faculty, their pedagogies and curriculum, both normalize and privilege the white, Western, male, Christian, middle-class, and heterosexual human experience (Guy-Sheftall, 1997). This can be alienating and oppressive for both faculty and students that do not fit this model and can have insidious consequences that manifest within the classroom environment. Black women in particular are regularly confronted with a tripartite of student resistance related to our counterhegemonic and social justice-oriented curricula, frameworks, and pedagogies, as well as to our racialized and gendered bodies (Myers, 2002). In this essay, we will address the following themes: (1) the ways in which our raced and gendered bodies create challenges that inform our pedagogies, and (2) the pedagogical tools and strategies we employ in order to challenge some of the manifestations of white privilege/supremacy in the classroom, including our own oppression and experiences, and those of marginalized students.

Olivia Perlow is an assistant professor in Sociology, African and African American Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies. Her research interests include black feminist pedagogy, the corporatization of higher education, policing and mass incarceration of African Americans, and genocide in the African Diaspora.

Sharon L. Bethea is an associate professor in Counselor Education, African and African American Studies, and Inner City Studies. Her research interests include African-centered therapeutic paradigms, the psychosocial and intellectual development of African American youth, Oakland Freedom Schools, and culturally responsive counselor identity development.

Durene I. Wheeler is an associate professor in Educational Inquiry and Curriculum Studies, African and African American Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies. Her research interests include educational history of African Americans and women, black women and the civil rights movement, feminist perspectives in higher education, and education for liberation.

For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those...who still define the master's house as their only source of support. —Audre Lorde

Lorde's 1979 essay, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" is a particularly useful contribution to academic discourse for scholar-activists seeking social justice within the academy. The ivory tower, as the name implies, can be seen as the concrete foundation of "*the master's house*" (Lorde, 2007), in which the majority of faculty, their pedagogies and curriculum, both normalize and privilege the white, Western, male, Christian, middle-class, and heterosexual human experience (Guy-Sheftall, 1997). This can be alienating and oppressive for both faculty and students that do not fit this model and can have insidious consequences that manifest within the classroom environment. Lorde's (2007) essay reminds us that we must develop our own counterhegemonic tools and strategies in order to throw off the yoke of white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. However, even many social justice pedagogues (i.e., critical, radical, liberatory, feminist, etc.) employ whiteness and/or maleness as the standard when suggesting teaching tools and strategies and although marginalized voices are increasing in these discourses, they continue to be overwhelmingly dominated by white men and women (hooks, 1994).

Not typically considered in these discourses are the pedagogical challenges faced by faculty of color, especially those of us that are women. Black women in particular are regularly confronted with a tripartite of student resistance related to our

counterhegemonic and social justice-oriented curricula, frameworks, and pedagogies, as well as to our racialized and gendered bodies (Myers, 2002). Thus we argue that as black women faculty, our embodied reality in the classroom creates challenges and limits regarding our pedagogical options, and this precariousness informs many of our choices. We have reflected on the literature by women of color faculty, our student evaluations, syllabi, notes, and conversations with colleagues, so that these challenges, rather than overcoming us, allow us opportunities to foster a transformative teaching-learning environment.

Although we are all black female faculty with a certain level of privilege, we still experience oppression in the classroom. The different disciplines to which we are each tied (Sociology, Counselor Education, and Educational Inquiry and Curriculum Studies) however, create variations when it comes to the challenges we face, the content we cover, and the pedagogic tools we employ. In this essay, we will focus on our commonalities regarding the following themes: (1) the ways in which our raced and gendered bodies create challenges that inform our pedagogies, and (2) the pedagogical tools and strategies we employ to challenge some of the manifestations of white privilege/supremacy in the classroom, including our own oppression and experiences, and those of marginalized students.

Challenges

In examining the challenges that we face in the classroom as black women professors, we are compelled to frame our experiences within a discussion of the body. hooks (1994) argues that in academe, the

problematic notion of a “mind/body split” is advanced. She explains:

The traditional arrangement of the body we are talking about deemphasizes the reality that professors are in the classroom to offer something of ourselves to the students. The erasure of the body encourages us to think that we are listening to neutral, objective facts, facts that are not particular to who is sharing the information. We are invited to teach information as though it does not emerge from bodies. (p. 139)

In challenging the negation of the body, feminist linguist Joana Plaza Pinto argues that the body is not simply biological, but also a site where socially constructed interpretations about those bodies occur (as cited in Freitas, 2011a). Thus the body can reveal our experiences, identities, feelings, and our place on the social hierarchy (Jackson, 2006). Since bodies are culturally signified, they are communicated in the classroom as they are in the world, ultimately impacting relationships between professors and students. Thus the body is an important construct to consider when examining privilege and oppression in the classroom because, depending on the social status of one's body, this can lead “to acceptance or rejection, to freedom or condemnation, to reward or punishment” (Freitas, 2011a, para. 5).

Within the academy, powerful systems of white supremacy and patriarchy ensure that the bodies of white male professors are privileged and normalized. white males continue to occupy the overwhelming majority of the most prestigious and wealth-generating positions

in society while making up less than one-third of the adult population (Feagin, 2010). They are also overrepresented in academe. As of 2009, white males made up the largest proportion of faculty (42 percent), followed closely by white women (37 percent)—white bodies totaling almost 80 percent of all faculty (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In addition, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), white males continue to be overrepresented among the full-time and tenure-track/tenured faculty, at the higher ranks, and at the most prestigious institutions. Adding to white male privilege in the academy is the dominant Eurocentric/androcentric epistemological, methodological, and pedagogical traditions that stake claim to neutrality, objectivity, and rationality. These qualities are especially linked to white male-dominated disciplines that are not surprisingly the most esteemed; women and racial minorities on the other hand, are concentrated in the “softer” disciplines that are considered to be more subjective, thus less respected (Harris & González, 2012). For example, within the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields at the top 100 research institutions in 2007, women of color were less than 1 percent of the total number of faculty for each science discipline (Townes, 2010).

Whereas the bodies of white male professors, their curricula (i.e., works by “great” white men”) and pedagogies are normalized, naturalized, and neutralized, those of women and racial minority professors are marked as politicized representations of the Other (Bannerji, 1995; hooks, 1994). As Patton (2004) observes, “The politics of domination and representation become played out on the body in favor of retaining the current hegemonic order” (p. 193). Because we are stigmatized as Others, the bodies of women

of color faculty are seen as “walking exemplars” of race and gender, not as “impartial purveyors of truth” (Karamcheti, 1995, p. 138). This becomes especially salient when we teach about race, where we are often accused of bias and/or advancing a political agenda in a space that should be neutral, and this sentiment commonly shows up in our student evaluations (Lazos, 2012; Messner, 2011; Stanley, 2006; Vargas, 2002). When addressing race and white privilege, because of the invisibility of whiteness, even white women are seen as neutral and respected, whereas black women, who typically are considered to be inherently connected to racial issues, are perceived as biased (Rotherburg, 1988).

Adding to the challenges faced by black women faculty in the classroom is our shortage in the academy. In 2009, black women made up less than 4 percent of the professoriate and were grossly overrepresented among part-time faculty, at the lower ranks, and at less prestigious colleges and universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). In addition, black women faculty are found within the least esteemed disciplines and teach the most devalued courses (Henderson, Hunter, & Hildreth, 2010). For example, by 2008, there was only one black woman full professor in the STEM fields at the top 100 institutions (Towns, 2010). Thus the very presence of black women's bodies as professors defies student expectations and disrupts the hegemonic classroom space (Baszile, 2006).

As Daniel (1997) argues, “The variable of race, added to the scarcity of women in leadership positions, creates indisputable confusion and mistrust around the African American woman” (p. 173). Because many students have not had any significant exposure to black culture in a positive light, and especially to black

women in positions of authority, they tend to rely on “bodily misrecognitions,” negative perceptions of the presence of women faculty of color based on race and gender stereotypes (Ford, 2011). Research consistently demonstrates that whites hold negative stereotypical beliefs about black Americans (Feagin, 2010). The stereotypes about black people are rooted in white supremacy, where prominent business and religious leaders, politicians, philosophers, scientists, and journalists have placed a significant amount of effort in creating and reinforcing the concept of black inferiority in order to maintain the status quo (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2011; Feagin, 2010). Thus racist attitudes and images about black people are reproduced in all the major social institutions as well as in everyday discourse. From social Darwinism and eugenics, to more contemporary versions such as *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996), the notion of black inferiority has become an integral part of the American ethos.

Black women in particular have been hegemonically cast as unintelligent, dishonest, promiscuous, aggressive, irresponsible, immoral, lazy, emasculating, irrationally angry, and beasts of burden, just to name a few of the stereotypes (Collins, 2009; Harris-Perry, 2011; Jewell, 1993; Jordan-Zachary, 2008). Thus our black female bodies are inscribed with a set of meanings that perpetuate both racial and gender ideologies that have been ingrained in America's collective consciousness. Jackson (2006) posits that these scripts are enacted at the moment of “the gaze,” which is situated “within the interplay of race relations, corporeal zones such as that of the skin color and hair texture, automatically evoking feelings, thoughts, and anxieties, if they are already resident or dormant” (p. 10). For example, Bannerji (1995) discusses

her experiences with the stereotypes associated with the gaze:

I want to hide from the gaze. I don't want to be fixed, pinned with a meaning. I hear comments about a Jamaican woman with 13 children being "related to rabbits or something." It hurts me, I don't want to have to prove the obvious, to explain, argue, give example, images from everyday life, from history, from apartheid, from concentration camps, from reserves. (p. 102)

Therefore upon the first gaze, the unfamiliar bodies and identities of black female faculty are often inferiorized and even pathologized by students. This is complicated by cultural hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) in which the dominant culture is legitimated and celebrated while black culture is subjugated and denigrated. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) suggest that because of the prevalence of stereotypes and negative images about black women, our actions are misunderstood at best:

If she's opinionated, she is difficult. If she speaks with passion, she is volatile. If she explodes with laughter, she is unrefined. If she pitches her neck as she makes a point, she is streetwise and coarse. So much of what black women say, and how they say it, pushes other people to buy into the myth that black women are inferior, harsh, and less feminine than other women. (p. 102)

Ignorance of black culture leads to a great deal of misperception regarding the demeanor and actions of black women faculty, especially among those students that have subsumed white middle-class

educational values that say emotion has no place in the classroom (hooks, 1994), as well as the patriarchal notion that women should be passive. In addition, deeply rooted fears that non-black students often hold based on stereotypes of black people as dangerous or violent "cause them to overreact to any emotion, real or imagined expressed by black women faculty" (Baraka, 1997, p. 238).

Black women are very rarely portrayed in a positive light and/or associated with intellectualism. The first female president of Spelman College, Johnetta B. Cole, declared that because of the general belief in black inferiority, "the last image that many Americans would have of an African American woman is that of an intellectual, an academic ... a person of academy" (as cited in Trotman, 2009, p. 77). The misperception of black women faculty as intellectually incompetent pervades the literature and has a tremendous impact on our experiences in the classroom (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012; Myers, 2002). These sentiments are often captured in student evaluations where black women professors are often rated as less credible and less intelligent (Pittman, 2010a, 2012). In addition, research has demonstrated that the credentials of women and racial minorities are constantly being underestimated by students (Miller & Chamberlain, 2000).

An additional challenge faced by black women faculty arises from our focus on social justice, which includes an emphasis on the discourses of marginalized groups. Because marginalized voices have been largely excluded from academia "as definers, producers, and dispensers of knowledge" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 39), this re-centering disrupts racial and gender hierarchies as well as what many students

consider to be valid pedagogy and credible curriculum (Ford, 2011). This challenge to the hegemonic order is threatening to privileged students, especially to white males, which often results in a multitude of negative consequences for black female faculty. In addition, research has demonstrated that differences in political views of students from the professor have led to perceptions of incompetence (Woessner & Kelly-Woessner, 2006). Thus we black women faculty who emphasize social justice and equality are in an especially vulnerable position when it comes to the weight that student evaluations hold in the retention, tenure, and promotion processes.

Black women professors are also often subjected to student microaggressions (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012). Sue and Sue (2013) describe microaggressions as:

brief and commonplace daily verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults that potentially have a harmful or unpleasant psychological impact on the target person. This can include environmental factors such as being unwelcomed, isolated, unsafe and alienated. (p.150)

Microaggressions can be overt or subtle, verbal or nonverbal, conscious or unconscious, self-identified or anonymous. Many of these microaggressions are the result of privileged students attempting to re-center the classroom to reflect the white supremacist, heteropatriarchal social hierarchy. Research has demonstrated widespread student harassment of black female faculty, especially by white male students (Harlow, 2003; McGowan, 2000;

Pittman, 2010b). While some behavior consists of blatant threats and intimidation tactics (Pittman, 2010b), derogatory comments are also a powerful form of oppression for black women professors in the classroom (Myers, 2002). In addition, names such as “bitch” and “angry black woman” have anonymously shown up on our student evaluations. However, subtler, passive-aggressive nonverbal affronts such as eye-rolling, glaring, silence, lack of collective class participation, and excessive absences can often be just as harmful. Microaggressions can also take the form of students complaining about black women faculty to our chairs and/or deans without consulting us. As Henderson et al. (2010) state:

Further, student complaints often are viewed as accurate and credible, although students' comments, behaviors, and language may be hostile, disrespectful, and seasoned with racism and sexism. ... Validating student complaints by not insisting that students meet with the professor further undermines the credibility and power of the black women professorate; it also strengthens, validates, and sustains white privilege. (p. 33)

This problem is exacerbated by the fact that black women professors often report being unsupported, marginalized, discredited, and silenced in their departments and in the academy at large (see Benjamin, 1997; Berry & Mizelle, 2006; Gregory, 1995; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Harley, 2008; Harris, 2007; Hendrix, 2007; Myers, 2002; Patton, 2004; Stanley, 2006; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner & Myers, Jr., 2000; Vargas, 2002). In the same vein, we have found one of the most insidious types of microaggressions that we commonly experience to be what Moore

(1996) terms “inappropriate challenges,” that require black women to “justify their teaching methods, defend their knowledge, and prove their grasp of the material” (p. 202). These types of challenges have been well documented by the research literature (Harlow, 2003; Moore, 1996; Myers, 2002; Pittman, 2010b). For example, these assertions are supported by Harlow’s (2003) study, which found that the majority of black faculty reported that students instantly reacted to their race, challenged their academic authority and qualifications, and many felt that they had to prove their competence and intelligence to students.

Luthra (2002) concludes: “When one is written into the margins, then one enters the situation differently from the beginning. . . . One can certainly work to make oneself credible, authoritative, and so forth, but one is always working with, against, around the already-present doubt and suspicion”. (p. 110.) In essence, it feels as if we are forced to prove ourselves every time we enter the classroom. Williams (1991) has described these perpetual challenges as “spirit-murder” (p.73). However, if we do not learn the art of “negotiating the minefield,” then we will not survive the academy (Luthra, 2002).

Guy-Sheftall (1997) asks, “Are we willing to endure the anger and frustration and even hostility, at times, of students . . . when we challenge their most cherished ways of seeing the world and themselves?” (p. 116). For us, the answer remains an emphatic “Yes!” Faculty truly seeking fundamental social change inside and outside of the classroom must learn to accept the chaos and emotion that can occur when disrupting students’ worldviews. Thus the task for us has been finding a place where our marginality can produce opportunities to employ transformative pedagogical tools and strategies.

Tools/Strategies

Guy-Sheftall (1997) asks the following question that we argue critical educators often wrestle with: “Can we undo the ‘miseducation’ that most students have been subjected to by the time we get them in our college classes?” (p. 116). When our students first enter our classrooms, the overwhelming majority has deeply internalized the dominant ideological myths such as meritocracy, post racism, and white superiority. As Akindes (2002) argues, “Learning is easy; it’s unlearning that is difficult” (p. 163). In-keeping with Ford’s (2011) notions of “transformative strategies of resistance,” our classrooms provide us with a space to actively aid students in the construction of counterhegemonic knowledge and frameworks (p. 11). Many of our courses are designed to raise consciousness regarding the ways in which powerful systems of white supremacy and privilege reinforce differentiation and devaluation of non-white people that severely impact our personal, social, and political realities. Thus many of our pedagogical tools and strategies seek to aggressively demystify the dominant ideology as well as debunk myths, stereotypes, and inaccuracies about Others.

One pedagogical method that we have found to be particularly useful is to strategically utilize our syllabi, initial readings, classroom exercises, and discussions to engage in an initial “coming-out” process regarding our counterhegemonic frameworks as well as raced and gendered bodies. This strategy supports Pittman’s (2010a) findings that black faculty often engage in anticipatory actions through which they clearly convey their expectations in order to circumvent potential racial issues that can arise in the classroom. To illustrate, in order to prevent

or minimize accusations of bias, on the very first day of class we inform students that we reject the notion that the curriculum, the teacher, or the student, can ever be apolitical, neutral, or objective. The very notion of this possibility reflects a Western bias that grossly distorts education in order to reproduce social hierarchies and legitimize inequalities (Giroux, 2001; hooks, 1994). John (1997) states, "If there is not a blatant discussion of this in the classroom, then it normalizes Eurocentric ontology and epistemology and makes the status quo appear organic" (p. 57). Thus we maintain that "scientific knowledge" and "truth" are socially constructed and are therefore "relative to the observer, theoretical dogmas, physical and social context, cultural beliefs, and prevailing paradigms" (Benjamin, 1997, p. 6). This is especially relevant in the discipline of education where Hirsch's (1988) call for "cultural literacy" is really a call for maintaining white male dominance.

We believe that students must learn to engender a "radical form of being" (Freire, 1978), the ways in which our social locations have shaped our interpretations of the world. We discuss with our students how it is incredulous to think that one can turn off all their prior years of socialization when they enter the classroom, be it students or professors. In challenging the mind/body split, Dr. Perlow engages her students in dialogue regarding their interpretations of the following hooks (1994) quote:

Significantly, those of us who are trying to critique biases in the classroom have been compelled to return to the body to speak about ourselves as subjects in history. We are all subjects in history. We must return ourselves to a state of embodiment in order to deconstruct the way power has been traditionally

orchestrated in the classroom. (p. 139)

Thus we immediately draw attention to our own racialized, gendered, politicized, and inferiorized bodies. Because we are the Other and *live* oppression both inside and outside the classroom, we have to first attend to our own notions of what it means to be black and female in a society that has historically degraded and dehumanized black women and our communities. Baraka (1997) poses the following question: "So where does the black woman fit in institutions of higher learning that are finishing schools for notions of European superiority?" (p. 235). After decades of enslavement and segregation, black people have been subjected to an educational system that instills a sense of inferiority, pacification, and the internalization of white superiority; thus we are forced to negotiate the impact that an oppressive society has on *us*, before we even enter the classroom. hooks (1994) states that "teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (p. 15). Integral to this notion is that we are vested in debunking white supremacist ideologies and rescripting negative beliefs about our own cultural context and authentic selves by being intimately engaged in a clear sense of history, cultural consciousness, self-awareness, and identity (Hilliard, 1985). John (1997) states, "The ontology of African American females is a constellation of collective memories, race experiences, and definitions of strength and integrity that stand counter in imagery to the roles we currently hold" (p. 61). Being in touch with our authentic selves first and foremost allows us the knowledge and strength to challenge notions of our inferiority in the classroom.

Patton (2004) argues that the “body has become the site of gender and race struggle in the academy” (p. 197). Our embodied reality as black female faculty enables us to use our “outsiders-within” (Collins, 1986) status in order to counter the marginalization of our bodies within the classroom. Our pedagogical practices are in keeping with Freitas’s (2011a, 2011b) “pedagogies of the body,” teaching strategies that seek to deconstruct the subaltern status ascribed to marginalized bodies in the classroom. Thus in order to put cracks in students’ preconceived notions of our own bodies, we blatantly discuss with students our personal experiences as racialized and gendered human beings, the research literature regarding stereotypes about black women, and microaggressions to which we are often subjected. Openly addressing these issues from the beginning leads to heightened awareness among students regarding the ways in which they can participate in oppression, even without being conscious of it.

Throughout the term, we also utilize student microaggressions as teaching moments, providing support from scholarly literature and engaging students in reflection and dialogue. For example, Dr. Bethea often experiences student microaggressions upon first gaze concerning her Afro hairstyle. When students ask questions such as, “How did you get your hair that way?” Dr. Bethea promptly responds that her hair *is* “normal” and she was born that way and then asks students to examine the societal messages that have led them to think that her hair is an anomaly, while straight, European hair is normal. Freire (1970) argues that the oppressed state creates a distortion of reality, in that the consciousness of the oppressor group is seen to represent reality in the world. In unpacking privilege, we encourage students to “re-examine the very

ground of their historical-social identity, their own subjectivity, their ways of being and seeing” (Bannerji, 1995, p. 48). Thus Dr. Bethea addresses the microaggression while simultaneously engaging her students in a conversation about the normalization of whiteness and the othering, exoticizing, and invisibilizing of non-whites. Wise and Case (2013) argue that this focus on the psychological/affective dimensions of white privilege effectively minimizes defensiveness among white students.

In our classrooms we teach that racism and oppression are not just the burden of people of color. We believe that whites in the American context are central to the problem and indeed must be central to the conversation. Thus we create a classroom atmosphere where white students must grapple with white supremacy and privilege, which tends to evoke student resistance and create pedagogical challenges. To minimize resistance, we make sure that students are aware from the first day of class that we will be discussing these topics, very clearly specifying these objectives in our syllabi. Due to our “no nonsense” approach, at the beginning of our careers, white students often accused us of reverse racism and/or trying to make them feel guilty, which are sentiments that students who are decentered and forced to examine their own privilege often express (Wise & Case, 2013). Since then, we have implemented several strategies to prevent these perceptions. For example, Dr. Perlow often uses the following Lorde (2007) passage in her syllabi as a point of discussion on the first day of class:

I cannot hide my anger to spare you guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor answering anger; for to do so insults and trivializes all our efforts. Guilt is not a response to anger: it is a

response to one's own actions or lack of action. If it leads to change then it can be useful, since it is then no longer guilt but the beginning of knowledge. Yet all too often, guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness. (p. 130)

This passage is particularly useful in the classroom, for it helps white students to understand the disutility of guilt as a response to counterhegemonic ideas and materials as well as “the right of the oppressed to feel and express anger” (Brown, 2002, p. 89). As illustrated by the perception of guilt expressed by our white students, many times students are able to recognize their own victimization while neglecting to conceptualize their actions that subordinate others (Myers, 2002). Strategically utilizing articles such as “Moving Beyond white Guilt” (Edgington, 1998) and “Detour-Spotting for white Anti-Racists” (Olsson, 1997), students are encouraged to examine their privilege and contributions to the continued oppression of marginalized groups. However, as Torres (2003) argues, “Dealing with the sensitivities, hostilities, and defensiveness of privileged students cannot be my full time concern. It robs marginalized and oppressed students of my attention and takes valuable time away from their engagement in the learning process” (p. 91). Because inordinate amounts of attention and catering to white students only reinforces their privilege, we make sure to devote equal time and energy to less privileged students.

Students with less privilege, such as those that are racial minorities, first-

generation, working or lower class, and English language learners, often find college to be a daunting, “even hostile—place, full of opaque cultural codes and academic challenges for which they are poorly prepared” (Harris & González, 2012, p. 2), which impacts their academic performance. To begin the process of countering the marginalization of less privileged students within the classroom environment, we engage students in a discussion of the arrogance of cultural capital, in that people are rewarded for their knowledge and/or ability to emulate the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1986). As an example, we often emphasize language as a site of oppression and how the mastery of the standardized American English dialect is tied to power. Research has consistently shown that participants view standardized English speakers more positively and as more intelligent (Hudley & Mallinson, 2011). Conversely, dialects of marginalized groups such as our own African American English have been delegitimized.

Although it has long been established among the linguistic community that African American English is rule governed like other varieties in terms of grammar, syntax, phonology, and lexicon (Perry & Delpit, 1998; Smitherman, 1973), it is nevertheless dismissed by the dominant culture as broken English or slang. In class, we unapologetically employ African American English “to challenge the totalizing authority of the mainstream discourse and the cultural matrix it represents” (Nelson, 1997, p. 25). In addition, this is an act of resistance that counters the “assimilation blues” we sometimes experience as a result of constant pressure to conform to the dominant culture (Tatum, 1999). We therefore employ a pedagogical approach that recognizes the legitimacy of other language varieties,

which has been shown to help students develop skills in the standardized variety (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008).

In the same vein, we vocalize our rejection of a deficit model of education that is used to justify the subordination of marginalized groups (Pai, Adler, & Shadiow, 2006). Instead, we put forth that all of our students have valuable knowledge to bring to the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Bell (1997) notes that social justice education is both a process and a goal that is “democratic, participatory, inclusive, and affirming of human agency and human capacities” (p. 4). For example, in Dr. Perlow’s syllabi, she states her goals of an egalitarian and inclusive classroom by quoting Project South (2005): “We are equal. All of us have knowledge to share and teach. All of us are listeners and learners, creating new knowledge and relationships of trust as we build for our future” (p. 20). Valuing and utilizing students’ existing knowledge bases through strategies such as culturally responsive instruction is critical in challenging the deficit model (Macedo & Bartolome, 1999).

We argue that presenting an inclusive curriculum is also critical for undoing ethnocentrism and white supremacy in the classroom. In so doing, students gain a deeper conceptualization that truth does not originate just from their privileged worldviews, while marginalized voices are simultaneously affirmed. This process must be an integration, not just an anomaly in educational programs. For example, in her core courses such as Theories of Counseling, which covers the history of theories in psychology, Dr. Bethea begins in ancient Kemet and the Sudan, then traces the evolution of psychology across Asia, Assyria, and Greece to explain how these diverse ideologies shape and define what we

consider to be “American” psychology. It is critical that all courses, not just those geared towards social inequalities, maintain liberatory frameworks in order to deconstruct white supremacist ideologies and help students to see the interconnectedness of all human beings.

We argue that truly valuing each other’s differences is the first step in creating community in the classroom, which is an additional strategy we employ to disrupt Eurocentric/androcentric epistemology. In keeping with this notion, Dr. Wheeler includes the following passage from Lorde (2007) in her syllabi:

Certainly there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions that result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation. (p. 115).

In order to facilitate social transformation, we must begin to view our differences as strengths. Lorde (2007) also argues, “Without community, there is no liberation” (p. 112). Whereas Western culture stresses individualism, black culture tends to be more communal, focusing on the interconnectedness of humanity (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). In keeping with our culture, in class we stress the African-centered principles of cooperation, interdependence, and collective responsibility (Johnson, 2003). For example, Dr. Bethea employs the African concept of *Ujima*—collective work and responsibility—into her syllabi and classroom structure (Karenga, 1997). To begin the process of community building

within the classroom, Dr. Bethea utilizes an exercise that employs a “patchwork quilt” to symbolize the cultural diversity in the classroom where students are asked to describe the characteristics of their racial, cultural, and ethnic background of which they are proud (Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, & Love, 2007, p. 89). This allows students to learn each other’s background and experiences. This exercise creates community and an atmosphere of self-disclosure to discuss stereotypes, knowledge construction, as well as the opportunity to learn about their peers’ lived experiences (Wijeyesinghe et al., 2007). hooks (2003) states, “To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work that we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination” (p. 36). Also to encourage community building within the classroom environment, we tend to focus on the active creation of mutual respect. In so doing, we argue that “safe space,” as Phelan (1994) states is “not about nurturance but ... about stretching past the limits of comfort and safety to the work that needs to be done” (p. 74). That is, in the radical process of building communal relationships, growth cannot be achieved without risk and striving for mutuality is often accompanied by conflict. Also in attempts at establishing mutual respect, we have found it necessary to humanize ourselves through counternarratives and storytelling. According to Baszile (2006), “Counterstories are not only a form of resistance and recognition, which disrupt the culture of power; they also depict a kind of complex that is unattainable through traditional academic discourse” (p. 200). Thus we use our personal experiences within and outside of the academy not only to challenge Eurocentric and androcentric epistemology that says the personal is biased, but also to tackle racism and sexism

within the classroom. hooks (1989) states that:

oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, telling their story. ... Theorizing experience as we tell personal narrative, we have a sharper, keener sense of the end that is desired by the telling. ... Storytelling becomes a process of historicization. It does not remove women from history but enables us to see ourselves as part of history. ... Used constructively, confession and memory are tools that heighten self-awareness; they need not make us solely inward-looking. (pp. 109-110)

We therefore return to the body again and again. To illustrate, Dr. Bethea assigns her students an article “Illumination of the Human Spirit: The Evolution of an African Centered Social Justice Counselor” (Bethea, 2013), which chronicles her life experiences, familial and cultural strengths, community influences, and responses to oppression and racism that impacted her journey to becoming an African-centered social justice counselor. This coming-out process not only seemingly humanizes Dr. Bethea, but it also contributes to an atmosphere conducive to disclosure and open dialogue.

Dr. Wheeler engages in a similar coming-out process where she articulates her experiences of growing up in a low-income, single-parent household. Her background mirrors many of the students that these pre-service and practicing teachers may encounter in their own classrooms. Thus her life and journey serve as a model of untapped and prejudged potential to

facilitate the deconstruction of deficit views about the Other. By taking risks and making ourselves vulnerable by familiarizing students with our authentic selves, we enable students to feel comfortable in sharing their own narratives. To prevent the personal from enveloping the political, we ensure that narratives are contextualized within relation to discourse, to forms of domination, and so forth (Macedo & Bartolome, 1999). This process becomes especially meaningful for our marginalized students. As McLaren and Farahmandpur (2004) posit, "By using their lived experiences, histories and narratives as tools for social struggle, subaltern groups can interpret and reconstruct their oppressive social condition into meaningful social and political action..." (p. 147).

Research has demonstrated that black women educators tend to encompass a "collective social conscience" in which they see their jobs as a deeply political communal responsibility (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). We therefore overtly reject a "neutral" stance and come out to students regarding our counterhegemonic frameworks from the beginning of class. We explicitly state our "political agenda" through our teaching philosophies and other places in our syllabi. For example, Dr. Perlow bases her teaching philosophy on a Freirean model of popular education, which includes, but is not limited to, the following elements taken from Project South (2005):

[Education with an attitude] We are not neutral: through dialogue and reflection we are moved to act collectively—creating change that will solve the problems of those at the bottom in our communities, those of us who are most oppressed, exploited, and marginalized.

[Education for liberation] Popular education is essential in developing new leadership to build a bottom-up movement for fundamental social change, justice and equality."

[Strategic] We are moved to collective action, developing a plan for short-term actions to address the immediate causes of our problems, and long-term movement building to address the root causes of our problems. (p. 20)

Freire reminds us that the notion that our teachings must be bound to the classroom is elitist (McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2004). Conversely, the concept of praxis, the process by which education leads to action, is central to social justice education (Freire, 1970). We therefore stress the importance of human agency in changing oppressive conditions. In so doing, we provide our students with a variety of experiential learning opportunities where we "purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values" and to develop their transformative potential (Association for Experiential Education, para. 2). In our race and multicultural courses, we bring students into the community and/or connect community members and organizations to the classroom. For example, through participation in service learning, students combine the carrying out of what Kendall described as "needed tasks in the community with intentional learning goals and with conscious reflection and critical analysis" (as cited in Seider, Rabinowicz, & Gillmor, 2012), which has been shown to positively impact students' commitment to activism and to promoting racial understanding (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000).

In addition, we require that students participate in activities such as taking part in a "Communiversities" in a black neighborhood, in Native American peace circles, in plays and art exhibitions by marginalized groups, and the like. Through critical analysis, dialogue, and self-reflection regarding previously held stereotypes and the roles that students play in reproducing white supremacist ideologies and practices, many students report a paradigm shift in their basic beliefs concerning the diversity of human beingness.

Over the course of the years, we have had the pleasure of witnessing the growth and development of remarkable and talented students as they gain a greater understanding of structural issues faced by marginalized populations, a sense of social responsibility, and an awareness of the potential for a more just world. The very writing of this essay provides "a radical space of possibility" (hooks, 1994, p. 12). In naming the privileges and oppressions that can occur within the classroom, we encourage our students to engage in

challenging these structures of domination. However, we argue that we must also challenge our departments and universities as a whole to acknowledge and work to redress the ways in which white supremacy, sexism, and ethnocentrism impinge upon us as black women faculty, as well as on our students.

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