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So, You Want to Attract and Retain Diverse Faculty???: An Autoethnography

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An Autoethnography

So, You Want to Attract and Retain Diverse Faculty???

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Abstract

This is an autoethnography about epistemic injustice (i.e., diminished credibility as a knower) and resilience of an intersectional tenured faculty member who transformed harm into opportunities for rebuilding intellectual confidence and for exercising intellectual courage. Personal stories are used to examine and make explicit epistemic injustice harms by situating them within everyday contexts (Glesne, 2006). The purpose of this essay was to introduce theoretical perspectives with different language for improving discourses about an old challenge, racial bias, and to make explicit the types of harms experienced. Important research questions are posed for consideration by researchers. The stories shared in this essay and their implications will hopefully influence administrators, researchers, and faculty to see the need for reconceptualizing the ways they support diversity within their institutions. These stories and the implications demonstrate the complex subtlety of supporting diversity and this is especially important for institutions who audaciously pursue the goal of attracting and retaining diverse faculty.

An Autoethnography

This story is about how writing an essay about epistemic injustice (i.e., diminished credibility as a knower) and resilience that transformed harm into an opportunity for rebuilding epistemic confidence and the reemergence of intellectual courage. Additionally, my story uses language outside the context of racism that may be useful for adoption by others who have been marginalized or are underrepresented within

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spaces that feel less than ideal and likely uncomfortable. I identify intersectionally as a Black woman, STEM (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) professional, wife, and Nana, who has earned tenure in the same year that President Barack Obama, the first Black president, left office. I research and teach at a predominately white institution (PWI) that is ranked as very high research by Carnegie classification and is located in the southeastern United States in a state where the schools shut down for two years in resistance to school desegregation and where one would expect large support for the 45th president.

This essay is an autoethnography; I use personal stories to interrogate and make clear experiences situated within complex sociocultural contexts (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Glesne, 2006). One less obvious purpose for writing this essay is to afford intellectual enlightenment for administrators of PWIs who claim priorities of attracting and retaining diverse faculty, but lack understanding about supporting such faculty or implications related to extant cultures within their student bodies. A second purpose is cathartic, self-healing the harm from my most recent epistemic injustice experience. Stories from my life are shared in the following pages and interspersed with the introduction of different theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and language for communicating injustices related to racial bias; process and product are intertwined (Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011). In my stories the bias is racial, but the perspective and language introduced in this essay can be applied to other biases, such as gender, sexual orientation, etcetera that allow others to tell their harm stories in a way that is less emotion-laden so their voices can be heard by those in power who need to hear. This language segregates the harm from the unpleasantness that accompanies the language of racism, oppression, and for some multiculturalism.

My argument is that extant language of racism has limiting effectiveness because it carries negative cultural implications, such as demonization or othering. The language of racism requires that someone be characterized as racist, and once labeled they may be demonized within the community, rendering the language ineffectual. For those being harmed by racism or other 'isms there appears to be no recourse, understanding, and no change. Further, if one's harm story is silenced or goes unheard, healing is delayed. There is an underlying and consistent theme for the stories shared within this essay, when a harm is identified, heard, and acknowledged, resilience emerges. Conversely, when the harm is unheard or silenced, as is the case for the most recent instance of epistemic injustice described in the final story, the harm devolves and requires something more to get to resilience.

This essay is not about racism, it is about epistemic injustice (i.e., diminished credibility as a knower) and resilience. The stories shared within this autoethnography focus on epistemic injustices that have manifested persistently throughout my life, but until recently I had no language for describing the experiences. Further, I had not realized the harmful nature of these experiences or recognized the persistent resilience battle that had been waged by others and myself for protection. I believe

sharing my stories of these recurring experiences and the persistent resilience battles will be familiar for many others, especially those whose identity is readily observed like mine—darker skin, nappy locked hair, and an urban American vernacular coupled with a curvaceously feminine body, Black woman. My stories make explicit instances of epistemic injustice and resilience in hopes of helping others to find language and actions for resilience and self-healing. This is particularly useful for those who find themselves lacking epistemic confidence or diminished intellectual courage due to persistent epistemic injustice, a state that Fricker (2007) called epistemic oppression. In other words, epistemic injustice is a harm for which there is no foreseeable remedy and until we do something different nothing will change; more simply, “continuing to do the same thing and expecting a different outcome is insanity” (Einstein, n.d.). Let us stop the insanity by bringing this injustice to light.

During my life, I have found success through resilience learned through a life that started at birth in the basement of a hospital governed by Jim Crow laws—a life persistently influenced by my identity. I have not always lived in this city, but I attribute my return to this southern space as a life come full circle driven by opportunity and fate. On occasion, I pass that hospital where I was basement born on my way to the university where I am employed as tenured faculty.

Every time I pass that hospital, I am reminded of the dark past for Blacks in America, the people who fought and died so that I could be who I choose; these thoughts strengthen me during times when I am tempted to give up, when challenges appear insurmountable. While this particular story is uniquely mine and perhaps not useful for others, I believe that my experiences are not unique, especially for women of color or other underrepresented people in many institutions in many locations who may benefit from the ways that I transformed harm into empowered opportunity through strategic decisions that afforded choices for engaging myself and others. Choosing to write this essay is one example of a strategic and intentional choice of self-healing for professional empowerment.

Situating My Stories: Theoretical Perspectives

Epistemic Injustice

The particular harm that I have experienced repeatedly and persistently during my life and the focus for this essay finally has a name, *epistemic injustice*. This term emerges from feminist philosophy and was defined by M. Fricker (1998): credibility is culturally assigned and follows social power structure norms “so that the powerful tend to be given mere credibility and/or the powerless tend to be wrongly denied credibility” (p. 170). M. Fricker (2007) in time clarified that, “. . . the root cause of epistemic injustice is structures of unequal power and the systemic prejudices they generate” (pp. 7-8). She defines two types of epistemic injustice: (a) *testimonial injustice*, when someone’s credibility as a knower is diminished by another’s perception of that person’s identity (E. Fricker, 2002); and (b) *hermeneutic*

injustice, when someone's credibility as a knower is diminished, and there is no shared social or cultural communication to make the wrong understandable for either the wronged or those who perpetuate the injustice (M. Fricker, 2006). More simply stated, epistemic injustice occurs when a person's credibility is deflated because of another's positioning.

Epistemic injustice that is persistent and systematic is referred to as epistemic oppression and constitutes the "most surreptitious and philosophically complex forms of testimonial injustice" (M. Fricker, 2007, p. 58). Further, Fricker posited that epistemic oppression requires well-intentioned bystanders who are able to not see prejudice or bias, as well as not recognize harm manifested as deflated credibility of marginalized knowers. The result is epistemic silencing or pre-emptive epistemic injustice – the harm is that the knower's credibility is again being deflated from another's positioning. The actions of the bystander becomes a secondary instance of epistemic injustice that reifies the original injustice. For clarity, consider an overly simplistic overview of identity and positioning theory.

Identity and Positioning Theory

Identity is a complex construct and it cannot be defined in isolation (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). Identity theory suggests our identity is collective, comprised of multiple of identities, some are observable and others are not, and the collective identity define who we are at points in time and contexts that are socially and culturally mediated. For example, a university professor enters a classroom and begins setting up materials to teach, and students are there by virtue of class schedules. Most would conclude at that time in class, the professor's identity is teacher. This follows social identity theory, positioning theory is an extension of or further articulation of this—when a person or group selects or assigns a particular identity at a given time and context (Harré & Langenhove, 1999). We position ourselves, first order positioning, and others position us, second order positioning, but always within a context that is socially and culturally mediated. Interestingly, the two identities, first and second order, do not always align even when the time and context do. Thus, if that same professor were seen in a grocery store buying food another shopper within the store is likely to position the professor as a shopper. On the other hand, if a student from class were to see the professor at the store, the student is likely to position the professor as shopping teacher, while simultaneously the professor may self-identify as Mom. Ford's (2011) study of women of color faculty and White students provides several examples of student positioning that diminish faculty credibility and refers to the occurrences as (mis)recognitions, but I would characterize them as examples of epistemic injustices.

Faculty of Color in the Academy

"Historically, faculty of color have been woefully underrepresented in higher education" (Tuit, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar, & Griffin, 2009, p. 65). The National

Center for Education Statistics (2016) shows the number of doctor's degrees¹ earned by Black women continues to rise consistently and more steadily than all categories of women measured from 1976 to 2015. Black women faculty are often the only one, Black and/or woman, in a department or college; being the only one has been referred to as solo status (Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, & Thompson, 2007).

Social psychologists introduced stereotype threat (i.e., stress related to positively represent the entirety of one's race or ethnicity), and then together with critical theorists and others over time have articulated the negative influences on performance of marginalized people impacted by stereotype threat for both learning and in the workplace (e.g., Hutchison, Smith, & Ferris, 2013; McGee & Martin, 2011; Schmader, Toni, Hall, & William, 2014; Steele, 1997; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). These findings lend insight as to why so many Black women professionals informally share stories that depict credibility deflation or sometimes they lack language capable of accurate articulation of experiences, and simply categorize the experience as disrespect. When the harm cannot be named or discussed due to lack of language, Fricker (2007) defined it hermeneutic epistemic injustice. I posit many, if not all, of these types of credibility disrespecting stories might be better characterized using the language of epistemic injustice.

As the number of diverse faculty increases, so do instances of marginalization. The social science literature offers findings related to individuals or groups of faculty performance as well as those from institutional perspectives. Credibility deflation and authority devaluing were prominent themes with respect to individualized or group faculty performance and especially for women of color faculty (e.g., Bernal & Villalpando, 2002); Elias & Loomis, 2004; Pittman, 2010; 2012). Tuitt et al. (2009) described faculty of color choosing to work at PWIs experiencing challenges from several fronts within the academy, including research, teaching, and service: a) having their research discredited by peers especially when dealing with issues of race or ethnicity; b) being unwelcomed in classrooms and their credibility diminished by students; and c) being stereotype threatened causing them to exert greater effort for success. Broader institutional findings by Samuel and Wane (2005) suggested institutions reconceptualize evaluation criteria, administrative support, and interrupt negative faculty and students reactions to create a more inviting environment for diverse faculty. While, Harper's (2012) extensive higher education literature review of more than 250 articles suggested that higher education scholars must go beyond their sterilized study of race and critically examine racism if the goal is to create institutions where people of color are no longer marginalized.

Epistemic Injustice & Resilience Through Stories

My most recent instance of epistemic injustice has been systematic and persistent for over a year and has impugned my credibility as a knower and reached the point of being epistemic oppression—testimonial injustice that is persistent and

systematic (M. Fricker, 1999, 2007). The initial harm was perpetrated by students and then intensified through secondary epistemic injustices by administrators' inability or unwillingness to take a courageous stand in support of me as a credible knower and perhaps risk financial gain (i.e., cohort tuition). The result of this epistemic oppression for me was a loss of epistemic confidence and intellectual courage (M. Fricker, 2007). However, worth noting and informed by the work of Young, Anderson, and Stewart (2015), this might also be labeled hierarchical microaggression, the administrator's withholding support for my credibility. Further, when administrators take these types of actions, they are epistemically impactful for faculty given the connection between professional identity and status within the academy (M. Fricker, 2007; Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015).

As a Black woman teaching graduate level mathematics courses to primarily White women, I was accustomed to students not automatically affording me credibility as a mathematics knower at first glance due to my observable identity given extant stereotypes about the incompatibility of Black women knowing or doing mathematics (Allen & Friedman, 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, I was a gifted mathematics doer starting early on in my life and I was rarely if ever afforded a priori mathematics knower identity; not now and not then.

During third grade, my mother met with my teacher to understand why she failed to call on me to answer questions during mathematics class. The teacher indicated that she lacked sufficient time to answer "all of my questions," as my hand was always raised. My mother suggested that she call on me because I likely raised my hand to provide answers to asked questions. Much to my teacher's chagrin, she admitted she had never considered this perspective.

This experience represents my first memory with harm due to epistemic injustice. In third grade, my response was crying and disliking school. I told my mother, which prompted her to talk to the teacher. Parental advocacy is required for mathematically able children who are marginalized or minoritized in school environments in order to facilitate their children's opportunities for brilliance (Leonard & Martin, 2013). In this vignette, I share my first lesson of resilience that was taught implicitly by my mother. While I claim this story as an example of childhood epistemic injustice or oppression, even though the associated harms described by Fricker (2007) failed to manifest, even though this was an experiential norm for me during my pre-college schooling. Perhaps as a child, the harm was unnoticed; I was naïve enough to not allow my intellectual courage to be dampened or epistemic confidence to be challenged. Worth noting, after my mother met with the teacher, she instructed me to continue raising my hand in class when I had answers or questions and to let her know if the teacher failed to call on me such that I felt unfairly treated again. I recall this instruction from my mother to be very empowering, epistemically and otherwise. From my limited perspective as a third-grader, I believed that my mother was very powerful, she had "told" that teacher, and the teacher had to change. I

do not actually recall if she changed or if the problem was fixed in that class, but I suspect something changed for two reasons: a) my mother has always been a very direct and convincing woman; and b) to this day, I continue to struggle to not offer my ideas within most settings.

I attest that I never liked school at any level because I was often the only Black girl, solo status (Sekaquaptewa et al., 2007) and my *knowing* never seemed to be a given within the predominantly White institutions (PWIs) where I attended. There were two exceptions to my school loathing, the first was when I attended schools where the student body was predominantly Black from ages 16-20 years. The second exception to my school loathing occurred when I chose to go back for my initial graduate degree, which was a very intense one year program, where there was precious little time for anything beyond study and student teaching.

I created the opportunity to attend predominately Black schools after 10th grade, I was 15 years old and made a case for change:

Epistemic *justice* experience: In the 9th grade I convinced my mother to allow me to attend a school in the city, it was a school with a predominantly Black student body on the edge of the city and was considered a “good” high school, and my cousin attended the same school. I attended that school for my sophomore year full-time, but because I excelled in mathematics, in my junior year I attended high school part-time and then went to a local HBCU to take mathematics and earn credits for high school and college. For my senior year, I only attended college, but earned dual credit, awesome!

During this five-year period, my race was the majority race in the institution, but in mathematics class at the historically Black college or university (HBCU) my gender was often underrepresented, but I excelled in this space anyway. My *knowing* was never questioned by teachers or peers, my mathematics intellect was readily and proudly accepted, and my teachers and peers regularly acknowledged me as a gifted mathematics knower publically. Several of my teachers were Black for the first time in my life. I met the first Black woman faculty at an institution of higher education who was a Ph.D. credentialed mathematician and I looked up to her, but I do not recall ever telling her; knowing the things I know now, I deeply regret not telling her of my admiration. As a mathematics knower during that time I was epistemically confident and courageous, graduated from high school and the HBCU with high honors, and the reasons for my success are well documented in the literature (e.g., Berry III, Ellis, & Hughes, 2014; Leonard & Martin, 2013; Walker, 2006) and the things highlighted here articulate several of the reasons.

While at the HBCU and because faculty and administrators were aware of my mathematics intellect, I was one of several students targeted to pursue engineering studies when a state PWI came to our HBCU in search of minoritized students who might succeed in their engineering program. This occurred in the early 1980's when affirmative action (i.e., legislated mandates to diversify private industry and institutions) was in full effect. The offer to pursue an engineering degree was af-

forded to a privileged few top mathematics and science students at the HBCU, and included a full academic scholarship and paid internships when school was not in session in return for good grades. Not a bad deal.

I entered a dual degree program while at the HBCU. The deal was struck to increase minority enrollment at a regional PWI and in return I could earn two STEM undergraduate degrees in five years, again awesome! The down side for me was that I had forgotten that I did not like school and forgotten what it felt like when my credibility as a knower was not a given, but I was quickly reminded upon my arrival at the large PWI research university that was technically located in the southern United States. I found others like myself in the Black Engineers Society (BES) and together we found strength and support and most of us made it to graduation.

While I remained the only one in most classes while earning my STEM credentials, my membership in the BES sustained me and provided much needed solace during hard times.

There was one very unpleasant epistemic injustice experience during my time as an undergraduate student at the PWI that exemplifies the challenge faced by many during this time related to affirmative action and racial tension. I believe I was targeted because of identity prejudice and power inequity, often underlying impetus of epistemic injustice (M. Fricker, 2007). I had out performed my peers, who were primarily White males in an astronomy course.

My professor accused me of cheating in a very public way. At the time, while I was outraged by the accusation, I had no tools to fight. I felt very frustrated. I called home for support. My mother took immediate action. . . . I watched as she helped this tenured department chair in the college of sciences to understand in her very direct and convincing way how a grave injustice had been perpetrated against me (i.e., her beloved daughter who was a routinely high achiever, and of demonstrated high integrity) by a professor in his department (i.e., who she believed held racial bias). She then made it clear that she was not ignorant of the internal workings of universities, described her intent to pursue the matter through to the university president who supported affirmative action, and then through legal actions if her daughter was not exonerated from this false and unjustified claim. The chair was convinced and shortly thereafter, the professor made a public apology to me.

My contemporary interpretation of this situation is that this administrator was committed to diversity and my success, and his commitment when tested went beyond the written policy or surface implementation of affirmative action. He took a stance that interrupted potential harm to me by standing with the solo status young Black woman in opposition to a privileged faculty member whose perspective was stereotypical for that time and within that environment. To this day, I do not know if there were repercussions for that professor as a result of the administrator's decision, but I never encountered him again during my final year. I graduated and BES recognized me for earning one of the highest GPA's among graduates that year.

Reflecting on this event now, I can clearly name the harm as epistemic injustice, specifically an instance of hermeneutical injustice (M. Fricker, 2006, 2007) because at the time I lacked language for explicitly describing the experience that sought to diminish my credibility. Additionally, worth noting, had the administrator found me guilty of cheating I would have been expelled from school, lost my full academic scholarship, and likely not graduated. Unlike my third-grade experience, as an undergraduate college student, I recognized that harm was intended and I immediately stood to face it boldly. My mother's explicit and sustained resiliency training in my life was a part of me and in full effect. This was the last time I called my mother to advocate on my behalf in the face of epistemic injustice. In this instance, I stood beside my mother defiant and fight ready. I was resilient in this experience, and as I recall it never occurred to me to quit.

During my undergraduate education, I always worked. My first job was tutoring undergraduate mathematics students at the HBCU's tutoring center. An element of the four-year academic scholarship was a paid internship at an aerospace and defense development company. During breaks and summers when I was at home and not in school, I worked by rotating through departments engaging in and learning different aspects of engineering development projects underway at the company. For the last two years of my undergraduate education when I lived away from home attending the PWI, I was hired at a fortune 100 company to write white papers (e.g., mini research papers) about STEM technologies. As a high-achieving STEM student and Black woman graduating from a well-respected university, I was heavily recruited, not only because I was Black and female during the affirmative action era, but because I had a variety of work experiences, which evidenced a high level of competence as compared to my peers of all races, ethnicities, and genders.

My undergraduate experiences at the PWI led me to vow to never return to school again backed by the full commitment of a 21-year-old. . . . I turned down several offers for free graduate school with commitments for executive leadership positions upon graduation, including one company who wanted me to study nuclear engineering and then run a nuclear power plant. I joined a fortune 100 corporation as an electrical engineer. After more than a decade and a half as a STEM professional in private industry my experiences had toughened my resolve, I adopted my mother's direct and convincing voice, and I no longer ran home crying in the face of epistemic injustice and its harm; and there were many as I was a solo status employee and was influenced by stereotype threat within the engineering field that continues to be male dominated.

My resilience blossomed during my years in the private sector as I navigated epistemic injustice and oppression in multiple forms as a solo status employee, while working my way up the corporate ladder toward the glass ceiling, which is typically lowered for Black women in most corporations. The myriad challenges are well documented in the literature (e.g., Johnson & Richeson, 2009; Roberson, Deitch, Brief, & Block, 2003; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2003; Sekaquaptewa et al., 2007).

I left private industry to make a difference in the world for other Black children like me. During the tumultuous 1990's of private industry consolidations and employee downsizings, I decided to pursue graduate school and teacher licensure.

Upon arrival for graduate studies I continued to find myself in solo or near solo status graduate courses, my knowing was not a given, but it seemed to be accepted by many if not all of the professors I encountered during my Master's program at the progressive and very large Midwestern research university. After almost 10 years, I returned for doctoral studies and I found similar acceptance from faculty, but there were differences in opportunities afforded between solo status me and my peers, but that is another story for another time. I was hired and earned tenure at the site where the most recent epistemic injustice occurred.

I was finally assigned to teach a student cohort that I had recruited for a master's level mathematics course. This graduate cohort was comprised of almost 20 women, one Black the rest White. Cohorts take classes as a group and they were at the end of the second year of a three year Master's program. The women had established a community prior to me teaching them. . . . Some students were not pleased with the grades they had earned, even though the assigned grades were reflective of their mathematics performance and other specialist's knowledge, and overall their grades were very good based on criteria for maintaining good standing in graduate level courses, as well as for elementary teachers taking a master's level mathematics course. The cohort students voiced their dissatisfaction through negative comments directed at my character in course evaluations, several students pursued actions to have grades changed, and the cohort, excluding two women (i.e., the Black woman and another woman), formally petitioned the administration to participate in deflating my credibility.

Epistemic injustice was perpetrated through discourses and language used by these students to describe me in course evaluations and in formal written communications with university administrators and representatives in the state's department of education. The initial harm was initiated and perpetrated by students; however, this harm was intensified, I would like to think unwittingly, by the response from my administration. The administrative response to this epistemic injustice was multifaceted and included: epistemic silencing and pre-emptive epistemic injustice. Unlike the administrator from my undergraduate experience of epistemic injustice, these administrators lacked courage to stand up for me as a knower. I requested and expected administrators to show courage by interrupting students' epistemic injustices. Alternatively, the decisions made exacerbated the initial harm thereby rendering the epistemic injustices persistent and systematic—epistemic oppression. I state this as a point of fact from my intellectually informed and thus privileged perspective and not as an indictment on administrators from my university. I sincerely believe these administrators lack the intellectual, social, or cultural capital required to understand my predicament which is made more complex because my epistemic oppression was situated at the intersection of the sociocultural contexts of solo status and stereotype threat.

I have come to recognize, through studying epistemic injustice from feminist philosophy theory and solo status combined with stereotype threat from social psychology, that a PWI that envisions attracting and retaining diverse faculty requires commitment beyond writing a vision statement, goals, and publishing words on the institution's website. This is doubly true for a university situated in the state that was once the capital of the confederacy in the United States and during the period after the first Black president left office and the 45th presidency and his cabinet took office. The current climate emitted from governmental leadership is steeped in messages that some claim reflects positions of misogyny, racism, anti-Semitism, and other negative-isms. Even so, I stand firm and resilient in the face of this harm.

After earning tenure, in the midst of experiencing the most recent and traumatic epistemic oppression, I immediately applied for and was granted research leave. In part, the initial impetus for requesting leave was time away for self-healing. Prior to making application for leave, I contacted an informal mentor (i.e., a long-established and successful Black woman and full professor at a southern research university) to seek guidance. She invited me to come to her university to share my new line of research (i.e., the focus of this essay) with faculty and doctoral students. At the time, I took a leap of faith and simply followed her trusted advice; I lacked intellectual confidence and courage and struggled to believe that I had anything worthy of sharing with anyone, especially with scholars or students at this particular research institution. I not only took the sage advice from this mentor, during the application process, I doubled down on it and contacted other senior mentors in my field and a potential new collaborator in hopes of securing invitations for other scholarly activities and secured two more university visits. I recently returned from my visit with my informal mentor, faculty, and students; I found the scholarly interchange and discourse epistemically restorative and revitalizing. Thus far, my research leave has been rejuvenating and has enabled me to kick off two new very focused lines of research – one is restorative and the other has potential for building a new long term collaboration and perhaps major funding over time. Awesome!!!

In the preceding vignette, I mentioned lacking intellectual confidence and courage, which is a particular type of harm that stems from epistemic oppression (M. Fricker, 2007). In addition to this intellectual debilitation, I also experienced anxiety and other physiological indications, such as increased heart rate whenever the situation or artifacts thereof confronted me via email or meetings. Looking back, what was happening is that I was metaphorically drowning because administrators were either unable or unwilling to hear or acknowledging my voiced harm. Had I not had the wherewithal to reach out to mentors outside my institution and for them to reach back to me and throw a metaphoric life preserver, I suspect this epistemic oppression may have become academically fatal.

My epistemic therapy was studying the cause of the real harm I experienced and the intellectual life saver was the visit to my mentor's university. She created

an opportunity to share my early perspectives about a conceptual framework that articulates a relationship among epistemic injustice, solo status, and stereotype threat that I posited as useful for studying intersectionality in the academy and other spaces where people are minoritized or underrepresented. The two together, epistemic therapy and life saver proved to be both intellectually restorative and revitalizing.

The restoration was so dramatic that I courageously decided during the visit with my mentor to write this autoethnography, my first, and was encouraged by my mentor as well as an experienced autoethnographer to do so with their support. But independent of whether my manuscript is selected for publication I recognized that one way to push back against epistemic oppression is to find space outside of the oppressive environment to find solace through active engagement in pursuit of intellectually stimulating and taxing activities. I believe that time is of the essence and intellectual action must be taken as soon as possible to mitigate the harm once you realize you are experiencing epistemic oppression, persistent and systematic epistemic injustice (i.e., others position you in ways that diminish you as a knower), at least that was true for me.

Conclusion and Future Study

I wrote this essay of personal stories to spread intellectual capital about the hidden challenges faced by some diverse faculty seeking permanency without harm at PWIs. Many PWIs establish goals for and appear intent on attracting and retaining diverse faculty but have not prepared for the obstacles seen and unseen that stymie the efforts. My history in resilience shaped the ways I responded to epistemic injustices and my approaches are similar to recommendations documented in the literature. Several researchers identified explicit resistance and hostility perpetrated by majority students toward minoritized faculty in ways that diminished them as credible knowers (e.g., Ford, 2011; Samuel & Wane, 2005). Other research diminished the value of minoritized faculty's research and scholarly pursuits situated in community (Zambrana, et al., 2015). Further, faculty and student complaints or actions related to these ways of diminishing credibility can manifest in the academy as harms to minoritized faculty who then must succeed within environments that some have characterized as unwelcoming or even hostile (Ford, 2011; Tuitt, et al., 2009). Some recommended support networks comprised of majority and minoritized faculty working collaboratively and with understanding of minoritized faculty challenges (e.g., Samuel & Wane, 2005; Zambrana, et al., 2015). Zambrana and colleagues (2015) recommended tailored mentoring designed to increase social capital within the academy. These recommendations constitute a starting point for action that can be led by the minoritized faculty outside her institution, if needed, and they align with remedies I sought for survival based on my history and experiences. However, this is clearly not a comprehensive remedy for PWIs seeking to attract and retain diverse faculty, which is well beyond the scope of me and my stories that shaped

this essay. However, it is clear that much more is required of institutions intent on diversifying faculty at PWIs.

There are many complex questions that need to be asked and interrogated if PWIs want to attract and retain diverse faculty, a feat that cannot succeed without tackling the messiness of race and racism (Harper, 2012; Patton, 2016). For example: How can majority faculty and administrators be trained so they can understand solo status and stereotype threat in the workplace beyond surface definitions? How might epistemic injustices be captured, shared, and recognized as a real thing that causes psychological and emotional harm (i.e., diminished intellectual confidence and courage), especially for solo status faculty who may be working though challenges imposed by both stereotype threat and epistemic injustice(s)? What role, if any, do microaggressions play within epistemic injustices experienced by minoritized faculty at PWIs? How might administrators be supported to more readily recognize and then be incited to interrupt epistemic injustices or oppression, even if doing so is perceived as individually risky? These are vitally important questions that matter to those institutions and their stakeholders who dare to pursue the lofty goal of attracting and retaining diverse faculty.

Note

¹ Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level, as well as such degrees as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees that were formerly classified as first-professional degrees.

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