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Existing and Resisting: The Pedagogical Realities of Black, Critical Men and Women Faculty

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ABSTRACT

The existing discourse highlighting Black faculty experiences in the classroom are largely hidden among studies that center the experiences of Faculty of Color who teach courses about race, gender, and/or diversity, regardless of their faculty status. And, even fewer of those studies unpack how their pedagogical approaches further complicate the experiences of Black faculty, especially Black faculty without tenure. The authors, who are Black hetero women and Black queer men, used embodied text as a framework to explore their teaching experiences as faculty and critical pedagogues. Where embodied text establishes the body as a site for learning and knowledge, critical pedagogy asserts that neither the classroom nor the knowledge constructed within that space are apolitical. The study findings illuminated how Black faculty bodies were scrutinized and ultimately showed that Black hetero women and Black queer men who were critical pedagogues embodied a resistance text that when read, oftentimes created intertextual pedagogical situations that invalidated their humanity. This research expands the scholarship on embodied text and critical pedagogy by examining the teaching experiences of Black faculty who not only centered critiques of power and privilege in non-diversity courses, but whose bodies were also disruptive in White, hetero, cis-patriarchal academic spaces.

Although the body of literature that deliberately underscores the experiences of Black faculty is growing in volume and complexity (Bonner et al., 2015), the intersectional experiences of Black faculty have seldom been a focus of inquiry. Studies about Black faculty that address intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) would illuminate how Black men and women can experience oppression differently because of how they express their gender and/or sexuality. Further, the existing discourse highlighting Black faculty experiences in the classroom are largely hidden among studies that center on the experiences of Faculty of Color, regardless of their faculty status (Ford, 2011; Pittman, 2010; Stanley, 2006). And, even fewer of those studies unpack how their pedagogical approaches further

complicate the experiences of Black faculty at predominately White institutions (PWIs), especially Black faculty without tenure. Our collaborative autoethnographic (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013) study sought to fill these gaps in the literature. The authors used embodied text as a framework to explore the teaching experiences of Black hetero women and Black queer men faculty as critical pedagogues.

Where embodied text establishes the body as a site for learning and knowledge (Henderson, 1994), critical pedagogy asserts that neither the classroom or the knowledge constructed therein are apolitical (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2010). This research expands the scholarship on embodied text and critical pedagogy by interrogating the teaching experiences of Black faculty who not only center critiques of power and privilege in non-diversity courses, but whose bodies are also typically deemed as deviant in White, hetero, cis-patriarchal (WHC-P) academic spaces, such as the PWI classroom. Evans-Winters (2017) describes White, hetero cis-patriarchy as an interlocking system that condones upholds White-hetero-cisnormative-maleness in White America. WHC-P condones the threat or use of violence against Black and Brown people of all genders and sexual orientations, making them prone to the racial stress and trauma. Our study was guided by the following research question: What are the teaching experiences of Black hetero women and Black queer men faculty who are critical pedagogues? The findings from our study illuminate how Black faculty bodies are scrutinized and ultimately show that Black hetero women and Black queer men who are critical pedagogues can embody a *resistance text* that, when read, oftentimes creates intertextual pedagogical situations that invalidate their humanity. The next section includes a brief review of relevant literature. After presenting our findings, our article closes with recommendations that are intended to assist institutional leaders to support and retain Black faculty who put their bodies on the line to help their PWIs create transformative, racially just, and identity-affirming campus learning environments.

Literature review

Extant literature on Black faculty has justifiably engaged issues regarding race (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Stanley, 2006), but has not fully engaged intersectionality. Intersectionality illuminates how Black women, and other minoritized populations, encounter intersectional subordination, where interlocking forms of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism and classism) simultaneously affect their daily lives (Crenshaw, 1991). Our literature review foregrounds the ways intersectionality shapes the experiences of Black hetero women and Black queer men in society; and thereby, the academy. We close this section with a discussion of critical pedagogy to contextualize how we engage faculty work inside of the classroom.

Racist sexual politics of black femininity and black masculinity

Black women

Black feminist literature takes up intersectionality to present complex inter-pretations of Black women's lived experiences, particularly around the (mis) treatment of their bodies. Several Black women scholars, including Collins (2000) and Harris-Perry (2011) have examined how racist tropes malign Black femininity and maintain race, gender, and class oppression. These tropes or controlling images are used to shame, silence, and subordinate Black women in broader societal contexts *and* academic spaces (Patton & Haynes, 2018).

The *Mammy* trope derives from the antebellum slave period and represents Black women as faithful, caring, and obedient to White families. In servitude, Mammy is the embodiment of selflessness and unwavering love for everyone, but herself. Mammy is also represented as having dark skin and a large physique. Black women cast as Mammy are constructed as asexual by some or treated as unworthy of a sexual relationship because her physical attributes deviate from the standard of beauty often associated with White femininity. Similar to Mammy, the *Matriarch* trope is a gendered and racist stereotype used to control Black women's labor and define their gender role(s) (Collins, 1995; Harris-Perry, 2011). The "angry Black woman" stereotype is derived from the *Sapphire* trope, which represents Black women as loud, sassy, overbearing, and aggressive. This trope upholds White patriarchy because the Sapphire's "power" is perceived as overblown and absurd, thus never taken seriously (Campbell, Giannino, China, & Harris, 2008; Jewell, 1993).

Brooks (2014) argues that the *Superwoman* trope, which depicts Black women as having superhuman qualities, exists in stark opposition to the gender norms that construct White women as fragile and meek. Under the guise of this trope, Black women are able to maintain relentless work demands, without risk of "succumbing to the psychological, physical, and emotional pain involved" (Patton & Haynes, 2018, pp. 6–7). According to Williams (2008), the 2008 presidential campaign, for then candidate Obama, used the *Black Lady* trope to repackage Mrs. Obama and silence critics who questioned: "How can Michelle Obama be First Lady, when she's no lady at all?" (p. 834). In the eyes of some Americans, Michelle Obama could not represent the United States as its First Lady because she does not embody White femininity. As the epitome of American womanhood, the First Lady represents the permanence of racism, classism, and sexism in the United States (Williams, 2008). The Black Lady trope seemingly provides Black women access to White middle-class privilege, so long as they perform their gender heteronormatively. Accordingly, a Black woman may feel pres-sured to present herself as a Black Lady in White- owned spaces to have any chance at upward social mobility (Williams, 2008).

Black queer men

Controlling images of Black manhood in society "suppress the sexuality of Black masculinity and maintain race, gender and class oppression" (Lewis, 2005, p. 138). The *Mandingo, Sambo*, and *Uncle Tom* tropes are examples of enduring stereotypes that hypersexualize and emasculate Black men (Mobley & Johnson, 2019). In addition, there are damaging and controlling images that cast Black men as hypermasculine, athletes, or entertainers (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007), and Black masculinity as criminal, heterosexual and hypersexual (Mobley & Johnson, 2019).

Because of the "naturalness with which whiteness and gayness are associated" (Chasin, 2000, p. 88), Black queer men often encounter homophobia in Black communities and racism (Sonnekus & Van Eeden, 2009) in White and [White] queer contexts (Mobley & Johnson, 2019). Alexander (2006) contends that Black male bodies are often read differently—"Read as odd. Read as strange. Read as queer" (p. 75). Black queer men are stereotyped as *flamboyant queens* and *homo thugs* and the threat or use of violence against them is legitimized because their masculinity is constructed as feminine, hypersexual, and criminally aggressive (Boykin, 2005; Johnson, 2003). Some Black queer men feel pressured to *hide in plain sight* (Boykin, 2005) to evade *homophobic surveillance* (Brockenbrough, 2012).

Means et al. (2017) reveal that Black queer men in doctoral programs frequently receive overt and covert messages that suggest obtaining faculty appointments and achieve long-term success in the academy requires conforming to hypermasculine and heteronormative conceptions of Black masculinity. Unsurprisingly, Black queer men in faculty roles may conform to racist stereotypes of Black masculinity (Alexander, 2005), sometimes even assuming a *queer antagonizing* stance to maintain their manhood in Black and White hetero-cisnormative academic (and non-academic) spaces. In the classroom, Black queer men faculty might also perform their gender and sexuality in *closeted* ways (Alexander, 2005) because being both Black and queer seems counterintuitive for some students (Green, 1996). These circumstances permit queerness amongst Black men to be deemed unthinkable and, in some cases, morally unconscionable.

Black faculty and critical pedagogy

Black scholars are beginning to write about the pedagogical experiences of Black faculty, but few intersectionally. For example, Harlow (2003) found that race negatively influenced students' perceptions of effectiveness among Black faculty, unless they were conducting a lesson on race. Patton and Catching's (2009) findings support previous research, revealing that Black faculty encounter hostility and challenges to their credibility in the classroom. Bonner et al. (2015) presented intersectional perspectives through

several counternarratives from Black faculty that highlighted how raced and gendered microaggressions framed their experiences in the academy. Means et al. (2017) and Cutts, Love, and Davis (2013) presented counternarratives highlighting their experiences navigating intersectional oppression in the academy. While intersectional explorations of Black faculty are increasing, few evaluate how being critical pedagogues shapes their experiences in the academy.

Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy represents the pedagogical aspect of struggle for liberation. This involves critical pedagogues engaging teaching as an act of resistance and an exercise in hope (Freire, 2004). Freirean hope is fueled by the love and anger of the oppressed who are sickened by the denial of their humanity (Webb, 2010). Critical pedagogues enact resistance by refusing to strip their curriculum of "its critical elements" to prepare students life as "subordinated labor" (Giroux, 2010, pp. 715–716). Critical pedagogues aim to cultivate (a) *self-reflection*: to know "thyself" through a critical understanding of the world; (b) *critical consciousness*: to learn about the structural forces that shape their lives; and (c) *developmental praxis*: to transfer power to create knowledge to the oppressed and transform the world (Giroux, 2010). Freire ultimately believed liberation could be achieved with the oppressed and the oppressor's engagement in critical reflection on lived experience and praxis (Rugut & Osman, 2013). While Black scholars, such as Lewis (2011) and Tuitt, Haynes, and Stewart (2018) are beginning to write about their experiences with critical pedagogy, we aim to expand the literature on Black faculty and critical pedagogy by engaging in an intersectional analysis of our pedagogical experiences.

Embodied text

We utilized the concept of embodied text (Henderson, 1994) to examine our teaching experiences as Black hetero women and Black queer men faculty and critical pedagogues. Embodied text is a pedagogical strategy that challenges the traditional notions of the professor as a disembodied mind (Henderson, 1994; hooks, 2014). Embodied text invites attention to the body, how it is politicized and read by others, and its subsequent influence on teaching and learning. Embodied text emerged from Black feminist scholarship on pedagogy and asserts that Black women faculty in general, similar to Black queer men, likely encounter hostility in the classroom and the academy in general because their bodies introduce contradictions that are disruptive to WHC-P academic spaces (Henderson, 1994; Lewis, 2011). Black women faculty, according to Henderson (1994), who embrace embodied text allow their bodies to become *resource text*, positioning their autobiographies within the broader sociohistorical context of subject matter that tends to minimize

their existence and contributions. Embodying text for us moves beyond simply authenticating text, toward centering the texts of Black hetero women and Black queer men in academic curricula. Embodied performance (or *performance text*) takes many forms in the classroom, often resembling the use of personal anecdotes, narratives, and literal references to the body (e.g., shape, clothes, skin color, hair, and sexuality).

Henderson (1994) also argued that embodied text allows Black women faculty to teach from positions of *authoritative knowledge*, embodying a much-needed *counternarrative* to traditional curricular knowledge. With the text that they embody, we assert Black women and Black queer men can create rich intertextual pedagogical situations that teach students how to personalize and engage with curricula in ways that promote the deepest learning possible. However, proponents of embodied text posit that Black bodies are read by students (and others) consciously and unconsciously, regardless of the faculty members' intentions to use their bodies in this way.

While Henderson (1994) asserted that such circumstances create a tenuous paradox for Black women faculty who teach courses about "the *Other* who is also the self" (p. 434), we contend that classroom conditions are just as delicate for Black faculty like us who center critiques of power and privilege in courses that tend not to focus on diversity issues. We expanded on the scholarship on embodied text to examine the experiences of critical pedagogues who are Black hetero women and Black queer men faculty—a phenomenon that remains largely undertheorized.

Research design

Collaborative autoethnography (CAE) is a qualitative approach whereby small groups of researchers investigate their respective experiences with particular phenomena (Chang et al., 2013). Engaging this approach involved full collaboration, with each researcher-participant, working together throughout the course of the research process (Chang, 2016). CAE was an ideal methodological approach for our study for four reasons. First, through CAE researchers complicate understandings of themselves and others through a critique of their encounters with the phenomena under study (Chang et al., 2013). Second, merging the researcher and participant roles allows sociocultural observations to be made based on researcher–participants' experiences with phenomena. Third, CAE encourages collectively critiquing researcher-participants' subjectivities for shared accountability. Finally, researcher–participants are able to cultivate community during the research process. These considerations are paramount when researcher–participants are from marginalized communities (Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari, 2017; Chang et al., 2013; Cutts et al., 2013).

Participants

The four researcher–participants in this study were Black, non-tenured faculty and critical pedagogues who worked in myriad higher education contexts (see Table 1). Two of the researcher–participants, Leonard and Steve, are Black, queer, cisgender men. The remaining two researcher–participants, Chayla and Jasmine, are Black, hetero, cisgender women, one of whom is Afro-Latina. At the time of the study, all researcher–participants held either pre-tenure or clinical faculty appointments at predominantly White research universities spanning the South, Southwest, and Midwest regions of the United States; and taught courses at the graduate level in higher education, including developmental theory, college teaching, and research methods.

Positionality

In alignment with critical pedagogy, we engage our research and teaching as acts of resistance through critical reflection on lived experience (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2010). Research–participants also draw on critical or post-structural paradigms (Jones & Stewart, 2016) in their teaching and execution of qualitative research. With this research, we hope to illuminate the experiences of faculty who employ critical pedagogy from similar social positions, especially social categories constructed as inferior, irrational, and hypersexual.

Data collection and analysis

Our collaborative autoethnographic study was conducted over one academic year. While we outline our approach to data collection, analysis, and the writing of our findings separately, the iterative nature of autoethnography prevents these research phases from being separated (Chang, 2016). Our research design included data collected through (a) written reflections; (b) group processing, and (c) one year of course syllabi and student course

Table 1. Select characteristics of researcher-participants' institutional contexts.

Characteristics	Author 1	Author 2	Author 3	Author 4
Research Activity	4-year, Very High	4-year, Very High	4-year, Very High	4-year, Professional
Institutional Type	Public	Public	Public	Public
Enrollment	67,000+	21,000+	38,000+	13,000+
Graduate Instruction	Research Doctoral	Doctoral granting	Research Doctoral	Doctoral granting
Region of US	Southwest	South	South	Midwest
Land-grant	Yes	Yes	No	No

Institutional characteristics as reflected in The Carnegie Classifications of Institutions (The Trustees of Indiana University, 2019)

evaluations. Written reflections, syllabi, and course evaluations were submitted electronically and housed on a password-protected online file-sharing database. As autoethnographers working collaboratively, we employed three data-analysis strategies: self-reflection, self-observation and probing sessions (Chang, 2016).

Reflective writing was used as a mechanism to promote self-reflection. This approach to self-reflection requires examination of the often unnoticeable and triggering moments that have informed our present and past thinking (Chang, 2016). We also developed prompts to guide our reflective writing, which encouraged each researcher-participant to reflect on how they navigated Black gender and sexual politics in their faculty work, particularly inside the PWI classroom. As the guiding prompts were introduced, in the order presented below, researcher-participants were given one week to prepare a written reflection.

(1) How do you perceive your body to be read by students?
(2) How do your identities influence your pedagogy?
(3) Discuss your experiences addressing power/privilege in the classroom.
(4) Discuss student feedback (formal/informal) to your teaching. In your response, discuss times when you altered or thought about altering your teaching because of students' evaluation feedback.

There were four rounds of reflective writing in total. Narratives were read individually by researcher-participants after each round. Autoethnographers are also discouraged from imposing code categories on such fragmented data too soon, thus, we were careful to note any "recurring topics" and "notable statements" (Chang, 2016, p. 97). After written reflections were read, the researcher–participants convened virtually. During these "probing sessions" (Chang, 2016, p. 96), which were recorded and transcribed, we were able to contextualize our observation data. At that point in our analysis, we identified how our individual observations were connected to one another's lived experience and relevant literature (Chang, 2016). This analytical activity allowed us to eventually attach raw data codes to larger code categories. Consistent with CAE, we moved in and out of small and large code categories (Chang, 2016) in our analysis of course syllabi and student evaluations. The additional self-observational data that emerged from that analysis provide significant *revelatory insight* (Farquhar, 2012) into our lived experiences.

Autoethnographers extend their analysis in the writing of the narratives they present to the world. Of the four main types of autoethnographic writing styles: *imaginative — creative, confessional — emotive, descriptive- realist*, and *analytical — interpretive*; we present a combination of *descriptive-realist* and *analytical-interpretive*. According to Chang (2016), "it is common that one autoethnography blends several different writing styles" because "the boundaries between them are blurred in reality" (pp. 99 – 100). The descriptive-realist style encourages the writing of narratives that detail accounts of our lived experiences,

in a story-like fashion, and the analytic-interpretive style of writing helps to ground analytic interpretations in relevant theoretical frameworks and literature (Chang, 2016).

Limitations

While this study was a rigorous account of the authors' pedagogical experiences from their own perspectives and included their students' perceptions as offered through course evaluations, additional perspectives from students who had taken their courses or from colleagues who had observed their teaching could have provided additional depth to strengthen the overall trustworthiness of our interpretations. We also realized our limitations when applying intersectionality to our own lived experiences. Because we were socialized (and often perceived) as Black-first or Black-only, we initially struggled to articulate how we had encountered intersectional oppression. For example, sexuality did not rise to the height of significance in our analysis of the Black women researcher-participants in this study. This may also be because of the potential privilege afforded by heterosexuality, or the historic erasure Black women's sexuality (as with the Mammy trope). Our awareness about how the research process can further perpetuate intersectional subordination is still developing. We acknowledge, to that end, that our data analysis is as much ongoing as it is complete. We further acknowledge that as researcher–participants our understandings of our lived experiences will evolve as our consciousness about intersectionality increases.

Findings

Our analysis underscores that hope and struggle for liberation are fundamental elements of critical pedagogy. Hence, readers are cautioned from interpreting these findings (or our faculty experiences) as wholly positive or negative. Our findings suggest that we embody resistance text that when read by students, creates intertextual pedagogical (Henderson, 1994) situations that many times invalidate our humanity. Our findings are presented in two broad categories. First, we outline how our conceptualization of resistance text emerged through the analysis. Then, we illustrate the intertextual pedagogical situations created by embodying this resistance text inside of our classrooms.

Embodying resistance text

Becoming critical pedagogues

We were introduced to critical pedagogy in our doctoral training by Black faculty mentors. They taught us to associate student learning, teaching and research (i.e., the activities of faculty) with power, resistance, hope and

liberation. Our doctoral training also helped us to recognize prior "academic transactions" (Haynes, Allen, & Stewart, 2016, p. 381) that taught us to internalize our oppression. For example, Chayla and Leonard recalled how, during their doctoral training, they became more conscious of their tendency to perform in ways that seemingly helped White people (students and faculty) feel comfortable around them. Known as respectability politics, these Black performance strategies take many forms, often involving Black people policing their own and each other's gender or racial expression (Higginbotham, 1993; Lee & Hicken, 2016). Our analysis suggests that respectability politics prompted some of us to conform to dominant notions of acceptable or "good" Black performances, in order to be tolerated in White/majority spaces (Mobley, 2017; Patton, 2014; White, 2001). Reflecting on how his identities shaped his pedagogy, Leonard noted:

> I['ve] been (un)consciously socialized to present my identities, and more especially, the tensions inherent in that socialization ha[ve] also shaped my pedagogy. Being young, Black, poor, gay in old, rich, White, and hetero spaces induced subtle and incessant self-reflection. I spent most of my life silently consumed with my presentation and others' perceptions.

The ways that our Black bodies were read in WHC-P academic spaces as doctoral students seemingly foreshadowed how we would experience the classroom as faculty. Classroom interactions we had with some White students and faculty made us feel illegitimate and unworthy as doctoral students (Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). In anticipation of similar experiences, we made conscious decisions to perform our intersecting identities authentically (i.e., Black, queer, hetero, woman, man)—to not edit ourselves or conform in order to make our students or faculty colleagues feel comfortable (Means et al., 2017; Stewart, 2015).

Our personal decisions to embrace and perform our race, gender and sexuality was only in part an actual choice, because Black peoples' bodies are often read by students and faculty colleagues in stereotypical ways (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010). We each observed that upon entering majority-White academic spaces, the anti-Black and sexually demonizing societal texts that surrounded our Black bodies entered with us. With this in mind, our analysis also revealed that the personal decisions we made to bring our lived experiences into the classroom were our attempts to, as Audre Lorde (1984/2007) advised, define ourselves, for ourselves. Refusing to edit ourselves was one way we preserved our well-being. Our analysis revealed that our decisions to define ourselves were, in actuality, attempts to resist the racist, sexist, and sexually demonizing constructions of our Black faculty bodies. We also noticed variation in how our Black faculty bodies were read by students. We attributed most of the variance to how our bodies were read in different regions of the United States, rather than to our faculty status or unique identity expression.

Preparing for the classroom

We are critical pedagogues who resist educational traditions designed to conform us and our students to the logic of oppression (Freire, 1970). Our pedagogical decisions took different forms and mostly involved: (a) formally discussing our method of instruction at the onset of class, (b) explaining our positionalities and inviting students to do the same throughout the course, (c) discouraging hypothetical examples in order to limit tokenizing someone's lived experience and to help everyone (us included) hold themselves accountable for the emotional impact of their statements, and (d) modeling for students how our perspectives of the course material were shaped by lived experience with our subordinate and privileged identities. Pedagogical decisions like these that create equitable and identity-affirming learning environments (Tuitt, Haynes, & Stewart, 2016) are encouraged in critical pedagogy. Nevertheless, we discovered, through analysis, that we did not anticipate the toll of teaching through the resistance text we embodied (i.e., racist and sexually demonizing constructions of Black womanhood and Black manhood, coupled with our positionalities as critical pedagogues). Patterns within our data suggested that the sociopolitical context shaping our institutions' climates potentially created hostile campus conditions for us and other minoritized students and faculty.

In the era of #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and the Pulse Nightclub and Charlottesville attacks, gun and sexual violence targeting Black men, women, and gender non-conforming Black people in particular, made us feel hypervisible and anxious in WHC-P academic spaces. Our analysis further suggested that our anticipation of having our Black faculty bodies scrutinized and becoming "lightning rods" (Flaherty, 2017) was heightened because our pedagogy centered critiques of intersectional oppression. For example, soon after the Charlottesville attack, Chayla received an e-mail that reminded instructional faculty that licensed students are permitted to carry concealed handguns in academic buildings and classrooms at her institution. The correspondence reminded faculty to not communicate to students that they are prohibiting or discouraging them from lawful concealed carry in the classroom or place words to that effect in their syllabus or other communications. Shortly thereafter, she sought out the other researcher–participants within this study for guidance and acknowledged the following:

> I am contemplating whether I should censor myself—to help me stay below the radar (as if anything could). To say that this predicament is worrisome would be a bit of an understatement. The start of this school year has been more anxiety-inducing for me more than any other point of my faculty career. I have been in deep thought and prayer about it for weeks.

The racial stress (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006) Chayla described is a form of racial trauma that Black people pervasively re-live simply from

witnessing everyday acts of systemic racism (Arnold, Crawford, & Khalifa, 2016). Our analysis further revealed that Black hetero women faculty may contemplate whether it is in their best interests to censor themselves and perform their gender in stereotypical ways, rendering their gender and sexuality as controlled and controllable (such as Black Lady or Mammy) so that they feel safer in their classrooms. Black women faculty's perceptions of personal safety are likely shaped by a long-history of White male hetero-patriarchal violence (Evans-Winters, 2017) that has justified the threat of physical and sexual abuse of Black women's bodies in and outside of the academy. Thus, these circumstances can create intertextual pedagogical situations that are stress-inducing and cause Black women faculty like Chayla and Jasmine to feel extremely vulnerable in their classrooms.

Coping with fatigue and conflicting emotions

Our analysis revealed that our commitment to critical pedagogy was frequently met with resistance. Some students opposed our decisions to center critiques of power and privilege in our curriculum because they did not perceive our courses to be about "diversity." Our response to this type of resistance in most cases was to over-prepare for classes. Jasmine viewed over-preparation as a way of "putting on armor" to guard against students' potential scrutiny. She further expressed:

> I felt that because of my identity as a young, Black, petite woman and mother that I had to know all the answers. If they caught me slippin', the reactions and consequences would be far worse for me than for their White male professor[s] who were not as prepared.

Jasmine's perception that her identities were somewhat of an affront to students —thus contributing to how she was sometimes treated by them—was not manufactured. Jasmine recalled a specific interaction, where she received an e-mail from a White woman student seeking feedback on an assignment before submission, who also perceived Jasmine to be particularly young. Jasmine responded saying she "did not have the capacity to review an assignment 24 hours prior to the deadline," to which the student replied, "That's the craziest thing I've ever heard." The student then forwarded the e-mail thread to Jasmine's faculty colleague—a White woman who was not involved in the course—and asked her whether Jasmine's response was valid. This students' effort to "fact-check" Jasmine's pedagogical decisions was not an isolated event. Through analysis, we discovered we each had similar experiences with students attempting to undermine our authority, often questioning decisions concerning grading, late work, course design, and classroom etiquette. This incident prompted us to question whether the anticipated protections of tenure would afford Black women faculty like Jasmine the academic freedom to manage their classrooms without the need for "White acceptance" (Feagin, Vera, & Imani,

2014; McGee & Stovall, 2015). The resistance text that Jasmine embodied appeared to cast her as angry and incompetent. Controlling images of Black womanhood—particularly the Sapphire" and Jezebel—construct Black women faculty as sassy in the face of "White fragility" (DiAngelo, 2011). Therefore, Jasmine's policy for instructor feedback was taken offensively, likely by the student as "back talk" (hooks, 1981).

Our analysis also suggested that the significant amount of time we spent preparing for class was a coping mechanism to justify the pedagogical decisions we anticipated some might question given our non-tenured faculty status. Patterns within our data also illustrated our perception that our course learning outcomes, activities, and assessments needed to be well-aligned to provide students with the scaffolding they needed to thoughtfully engage in critiques of power and privilege. This aspect of critical pedagogy seemingly required us to be mindful of the sociopolitical context of our immediate surroundings. Leonard recounted navigating his classroom in a conservative culture in the Deep South:

> Since moving to the South, I find myself being more deliberate and planned in how I build toward conversations about power and privilege. In some ways, this has challenged me to be a better teacher. It is also exhausting.

Aligning our course learning outcomes, activities, and assessments appeared to be our way of setting the conditions to achieve the objectives of critical pedagogy. Still, for those of us who taught in the South, making the objectives of critical pedagogy a priority induced a keen awareness of our geo-cultural identities. The resistance text we embodied made us more sensitive to how some students (and faculty colleagues) might interpret our pedagogical decisions that encouraged critique of societal and educational norms that reinforce heteronormativity and White, male, and cisgender privileges. Leonard described his experiences teaching:

> I have had to be especially aware of how I challenge [students] in the classroom and how this can be interpreted as condescension. This is especially salient when discussing political, cultural, and justice-oriented topics and perspectives. Students sometimes interpreted my perspectives as liberal, which tended to create a barrier between me and them because they felt I was asserting a moral high ground.

In many cases we felt affirmation when our students (and faculty colleagues) used formal and informal feedback to report that we taught them how to critically challenge canonical knowledge, often used to silence and oppress minoritized populations.

Our analysis further revealed that we were unilaterally committed to teaching through the resistance text we embodied, even though this often left us depleted. Steve described the responsibility we espoused as critical pedagogues:

> I am being intentional when choosing Baldwin, Lorde, Freire, and Anzaldua quotes to set the tone in my syllabi. I intentionally center the voices of oppressed people and invite guest speakers to class who may be trans*, Black, gay, Latina, Asian American, or lesbian. The sober reality is that the only manner in which my identities impede my pedagogy is when students disregard or challenge me because of their discomfort with my identities. Is this hard work? Yes. Does it leave me tired and exhausted? Absolutely. [But] to avoid placing my students in direct contact with the face of the "Other" would be absolutely negligent of me.

Steve described a particularly telling aspect of our teaching experiences. We appeared to understand that, for us and our students, critical pedagogical work was often times uncomfortable. At the same time, we maintained that not authentically embracing our lived experiences in the classroom would be a disservice to ourselves and our students. Our decision to "push through," embracing the resistance text we embodied, was not without consequence, as evidenced in racial battle fatigue literature (Smith et al., 2006). Patterns within our data suggest that teaching through the resistance text we embodied often placed our commitment to critical pedagogy in direct conflict with our ability to maintain our humanity.

Intertextual pedagogical situations: the read and the reading

Course readings/syllabi

Our analysis revealed that the resistance text we embodied, sometimes led to our Black faculty bodies being read by students before courses began. For instance, when a guest speaker in Chayla's course asked students, "How are you experiencing Chayla's course thus far," a White woman student replied:

> I haven't shared this with the professor, but when I received her syllabus via email before the class started, I thought to myself, "She hates White people." But, after my participation in the course, I have learned that she doesn't hate White people at all. She loves everyone.

The student was referencing a welcome note that Chayla sent to those enrolled in her course, providing them with primer readings, a list of required books, and the syllabus. While what this student knew about Chayla prior to meeting her remains unknown, it appears that the student initially expected her to be prejudiced because of the pedagogical choices she made regarding course design. Perhaps less noticeable is how the student's seemingly benign comment ("She loves everyone") aligned with the racist and gendered tropes mentioned above, in essence casting Chayla as Mammy. While this intertextual pedagogical situation led to a teachable moment for the student, it also contributed to the invalidation of Chayla's humanity. Students, unaware of how their expectations of Black women faculty are shaped by racialized and gendered views, sometimes assume that Black

women faculty will exercise a "standard of care" in the classroom that prioritizes students' well-being over their own.

Expectations/course policies

Our analysis also revealed that the controlling images of Black womanhood that invalidated Black women faculty's humanity, were sometimes imposed on them by Students of Color. Anticipating how her Black faculty body might be read, Jasmine shared how she began her early classroom interactions with students:

> I address classroom etiquette/expectations: 'You can address me by Dr. [redacted] or professor. I will not respond to emails after 5:00 p.m. or on the weekends. I will hold you accountable for reading the course material. You will be expected to contribute actively to class discussions. I do not give grades, rather, you earn your grade,' and the list goes on.

How students read Jasmine's identity as a mother, coupled with her curly hair, light-brown skin, and youthful appearance, taught her that "coming off" any other way than "stern and having high expectations" invited threats to her credibility. Jasmine discovered in classroom interactions with select Black students that they expected her to "give them a break" and "not be so hard on them" because of their shared racial identity. Jasmine said:

> I quickly made it clear to them … . If I was going to change my standards for Black students, in particular, it would be to push them to reach a higher standard because, should they decide to continue on to get a Ph.D., it will not get any easier.

Notwithstanding this interaction, having large groups of racially and ethnically minoritized students in our classrooms was uncommon, if we had any at all. This intertextual pedagogical situation provided additional insight into how students' racialized and gendered expectations shaped their interactions with Black women faculty, in this case casting Jasmine as Matriarch; and how Black students sometimes expect—perhaps unconsciously—Black women faculty to fiercely protect them (as she would her Black family), no matter the personal costs.

Challenging students' viewpoints

Black queer men, similar to Black women, experienced gendered racism, but our analysis suggested that this happened in ways that (re)constructed their Black manhood as sexually deviant. WHC-P academic spaces permit students and faculty colleagues to contribute to the homophobic surveillance of Black queer men, which led some to conceal their queerness in order to be taken seriously in the classroom or to covertly challenge homophobia (Brockenbrough, 2012). Black queer individuals often have to grapple with the how their bodies are read and the heteronormative expectations that are placed upon them, especially in educational settings (Mobley & Johnson,

2019). The struggle that Leonard referenced reflected a pressure to perform his sexuality and gender in ways consistent with racist and heteronormative stereotypes of Black masculinity. He expressed:

> As my identity as a critical pedagogue continues to emerge, I think more consciously about how and to what end my social identities show up in my teaching. Most recently, I've been reflecting on the ways those particular identities have been barriers to my teaching. I struggle with navigating my sexual orientation/identities in the classroom.

Leonard elaborated, describing how students often misread the bodies of Black queer men faculty, thus further closeting them because they did not perform their identities in alignment with racist, queer stereotypes. Leonard continued,

> I identify as a Black queer man, but gay is usually what people understand or care most about. I'm not always read as queer or gay by others, however. This offers me a great deal of privilege in heteronormative social spaces, and sometimes access to the thoughts of closet homophobes.

When the bodies of the two Black queer men faculty within this study were misread in intertextual pedagogical situations, they perceived that student and faculty homophobia contributed to them feeling silenced and suppressed in White hetero cis-normative academic spaces.

We also noticed that these instances had a compounding effect for Black queer men faculty. For Leonard, encountering homophobia from Black students stemmed from having his Black faculty body read as hypermasculine, hypersexual, and heterosexual. Leonard wrote about an interaction he had with a Black woman student after class one day. The student visited Leonard's office, according to him, "wanting to process the class discussion about trans* student inclusion in Greek-letter organizations." During the conversation, Leonard challenged the student to reconsider their transphobic and homophobic perspectives, which culminated with the student asking him, "How would you feel if a sissy joined *your* fraternity?"

Leonard recalled feeling disappointment and wondering what about his identity performance made this student feel comfortable enough to express these problematic ideas to him. Her question seemed to reflect an assumption that he, as a member of a Black fraternity, was presumably heterosexual and thus subscribed to anti-queer sentiments. Intertextual pedagogical situations like these illustrate how Black queer men faculty can be forced to either engage respectability politics or endure extreme isolation in the academy and —sometimes—within the Black community. Further, intertextual pedagogical situations like these illuminate how Black queer men can experience *intersectional erasure* (Crenshaw, 1991) in academic and public discourses because they are located in two subordinate groups—Black and queer— which frequently, according to Crenshaw (1991), pursue competing political agendas.

Students expressing hostility on teaching evaluations

Our analysis further suggested that Black queer men faculty experienced homophobic surveillance in their classrooms. Some students (and faculty colleagues) scrutinized the speech patterns and attire of Black men faculty they suspected were gay, as well as their pedagogical decisions, which our analysis suggest were extensions of the body (hooks, 1993; Samek & Donofrio, 2013). Steve's experiences highlight how the classroom could be experienced by Black men faculty read as queer. He taught a "review of research" course and, after discussion with his department chair, was encouraged to design the course in accordance with his research interests. Excited by this idea, Steve taught through the resistance text he embodied and designed a course intended to help students become critical consumers of the scholarship that informs the field of higher education. He recounted:

> Each week, the research of Scholars of Color and White scholars who studied issues of diversity, power, privilege, and racism in higher education were featured, but the contents of the articles were rarely discussed. Instead, we focused on research design, methodology, and theory. However, if an article featured critical race theory, then of course I had to provide context about what that theory is about. I did the same with Bourdieu and his conceptualization of cultural and social capital.

In reading his end-of-term teaching evaluations, Steve was surprised to learn that students seemed to have visceral reactions to his course. Students accused him of "teaching a diversity course." Steve recalled feeling like some students were penalizing him for introducing them to literature and concepts that challenged Whiteness. He wrote:

> White supremacy is a peculiar thing. It rears its ugly head in the most interesting manners. These students complimented me the entire semester and appeared engaged but waited until evaluation time to discuss their disdain for me and my class due to my having them confront and challenge racism, power, and privilege in the research process.

Students characterized Steve as "ego-driven," as noted in their anonymous student evaluation, suggesting that students viewed the resistance text he embodied as an inflated ego. Some of Steve's students used their course evaluations to describe what they experienced as a contentious "power dynamic" in his classroom. Brockenbrough (2012) posited that Black queer men faculty like Steve who do not conceal their queerness encounter hostility in their classrooms, often manifesting in power struggles with students. Student hostility can appear as "casual disrespect," such as resistance, silence, and constant questioning of a professor's authority (Downey & Pribesh, 2004; Gast, 2018). Steve's experience underscores how student hostility can escalate and create intertextual pedagogical situations that invite or condone the use of violence against Black queer men faculty bodies. Teaching evaluations are frequently criticized for protecting the anonymity of students whose

feedback consisted of biased and personal attacks on racially minoritized men and women faculty (Huston, 2006; Miller & Chamberlin, 2000). In this way, teaching evaluations can be used both to threaten the job security of non-tenured Black queer men faculty as well as to make them feel unsafe in White, hetero cisnormative academic spaces.

Conclusion and implications

Our collaborative autoethnographic study examined how we engaged critical pedagogy from our social locations as Black hetero women and Black queer men. This was in response to the undertheorized nature of our lived and pedagogical experiences in the literature on Black faculty. Our findings suggest that Black women and Black queer men who are also critical pedagogues, embody a resistance text that when read by students, may create intertextual pedagogical situations that make it difficult for them to maintain their humanity. The study findings also suggest that we were hypervisible in White, hetero cis-patriarchal academic spaces because of the resistance texts (i.e., Black womanhood, Black manhood, and queerness, coupled with being critical pedagogues) we embodied, requiring that we continually resist the racist, sexist, and sexually demonizing texts being imposed on our Black faculty bodies. Our analysis ultimately revealed that teaching through the resistance text we embodied placed our humanity in conflict with our commitment to critical pedagogy. We found this to be especially compelling because critical pedagogy is primarily concerned with the human condition. Still, our findings suggest that Black women and Black queer men faculty remained engaged in critical pedagogy because of their hope and desire to create lasting societal conditions, where all people can live in the fullness of their humanity (Freire, 1970).

At the same time, we maintain that the academic terrain is precarious for Black women and Black queer men faculty, especially for those without tenure, who place their bodies on the line in White, hetero cis-patriarchal academic spaces. We are careful, however, not to essentialize faculty with social locations similar to ours. Nor do we mean to imply that our pedagogical decisions are without flaw. To the contrary, we offer our varied experiences to illuminate the unique complexities that critical pedagogues from multiple marginalized identities navigate to fulfil their teaching commitments.

Finally, we assert that these findings shed significant light on what institutional leaders (e.g., department heads, deans, provosts and campus presidents) can do to better support Black women, Black queer men, and other minoritized faculty, whose expertise they rely upon the most to create transformative, racially just, and identity-affirming campus learning environments (Park & Denson, 2009). We offer the following as recommendations to assist them in supporting and retaining faculty like us, who teach through the resistance text they embody:

- Address isolation: White academic spaces can induce isolation for Black faculty of all genders and sexuality, who are typically underrepresented within the department's faculty. As was the case with our study, Black hetero cisgender women and Black queer cisgender men faculty who are experiencing *onlyness* (Harper et al., 2011) may feel compelled to create communities and safe spaces for themselves with faculty colleagues who are in different locales. Institution leaders must establish institutional mechanisms to also combat this issue. Cluster hiring and partner placement programs are two powerful strategies that higher education institutions can and should employ. We also recommend that institutional leaders make funding easily accessible to minoritized faculty, so they can host think-tanks or writing retreats and breathe the same air with scholars with shared research interests and lived experiences.
- Address hypervisibility: Our findings suggest that teaching through the resistance text that we embodied contributed to our hypervisibility. This begs the question, if other faculty, particularly White faculty, also used critical pedagogy to teach through the text they embodied, would we remain hypervisible or would this type of teaching become the norm? Institutional leaders should encourage faculty to make critical pedagogy their standard for teaching excellence. Institutional leaders should provide training to White faculty who are uncomfortable and unfamiliar with embodied text and interrogating investments in WHC-P (Lipsitz, 2018) in the classrooms.
- Reward teaching: Our findings reveal teaching through the resistance text we embodied required that we invest significant amounts of time in teaching. Critical pedagogues appear more adept at centering critiques of power/privilege in non-diversity courses. These efforts are not always best captured in student feedback through course evaluations. Research on student evaluations has illustrated that they are antiquated measures of teacher effectiveness, with mostly negative consequences for Black faculty, (Messner, 2000; Mitchell, 2018; Zebrowitz & Montepare, 2008). Faculty who demonstrate the quality of their teaching through informal student feedback, peer teaching evaluations, clearly outlined course outcomes, and teaching activities/assessments, should be rewarded for their teaching in substantive ways. Additionally, with institutional leaders encouraging all faculty to employ critical pedagogy, perhaps Black women and Black queer men faculty would be less susceptible to the negative student evaluation feedback that can jeopardize tenure and promotion.
- Addressing racism is not enough: Faculty of Color experience multiple forms of intersectional oppression. For instance, the Black faculty in this study grappled with racism, racialized sexism, and queer antagonism. Institutional leaders cannot assume axial approaches to address racism will meet the needs of all Black faculty, nor all Faculty of Color.

Institutional leaders must implement intersectional interventions to address the various forms of oppression that threaten the well-being of Black women and Black queer men faculty (and students), before those threats become *institutionally sanctioned violence* (Patton & Njoku, 2019).

Our study findings are significant insofar as they exposed the intricate ways that the bodies of Black faculty were read in White, hetero cisnormative academic spaces. Harris and Nicolazzo (2017) asserted that research with scholarly significance ought to challenge the "hegemony of identities as monolithic, consistent and/or coherent" (p. 13). To that end, we contend that future research about Black faculty must disrupt monolithic notions of who is and what it means to be Black. Future researchers of Black faculty must be committed to anti-essentializing the Black experience because none of us "live single-issue lives" (Lorde, 1984/2007, p. 138).

Disclosure statement

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