

“It’s not you. You belong here.” A Latinx Conversation on Mentorship and Belonging in the Academy

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Using the form of a dialogue, the authors of this essay discuss how BIPOC scholars are made to experience disbelonging in whitestream academic programs, institutions, organizations, and the discipline. Some of the ways by which exclusion happens is through the performance of “white penitence,” the co-opting of BIPOC lived experiences, and gatekeeping in the fields that relate directly to BIPOC life. The authors share this collective testimonio to remind other BIPOC that they are seen and to advise prospective mentors and colleagues regarding their roles as accomplices in antiracist work.

In early Summer 2021, four of us came together as friends and Latinx scholars working in rhetoric and composition to have a conversation about the realities of race and racism in the discipline. We discussed some of the things that Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) must do to find workarounds to protect ourselves and each other, but we also talked about the different ways that white violence has played out in our respective experiences as students, teachers, researchers, and human beings.

Who we are:

- Christine (she/her) is a white-privileged Cuban, born in California, raised in Texas, educated in New Mexico, and teaching in New England.
- Les (they/them) is a white-privileged Xicanx from Southern California with matrilineal Yaqui descendants who has learned in Nkwejeng, where the rivers meet, and currently organizes with community in occupied Nuwe territory.
- Genevieve (she/her) is a Jewish Chicana raised and educated in New Mexico and teaching in upstate New York.
- Christina (she/they/her/them) is a Chicanx of Indigenous descent who grew up on the Mexico-Texas border and was educated and is now teaching in Texas.

What soon emerged in our conversation was a shared concern over white supremacy’s insistence on the surveillance and exploitation of BIPOC experi-

ences and how, too often, these problems inform the kinds of mentorship we receive. In other words, as we shared stories, we agreed that many people in the discipline align themselves with BIPOC to use our mistreatment as a source of authority in terms of both experience and power. On the one hand, the firsthand knowledge that we share about our lives as marginalized persons is used to claim expertise and familiarity by people who are not members of our communities; on the other hand, that supposed knowledge is then used to advance their careers at our expense, reaffirming white supremacy's claims to spatial, epistemological, and ontological control. Put simply, we become research subjects and are then told to understand ourselves through the outsider's lens or else be weeded out as scholars and as human beings.

Within academia, this dyad of surveillance and exploitation manifests as a constant desire for spectacle that highlights BIPOC trauma. We agreed that BIPOC must have spaces where we can share our painful experiences to reassure one another and bear witness to the violent realities that more privileged colleagues may not understand (see Hutchinson). However, we also agreed that there is an underlying thread of curiosity and vindication that accompanies many white people's need to expose themselves to our pain, often and deliberately, as a way of establishing their innocence, evidencing their lack of complicity in white supremacy, or demonstrating their expiation of its power. Given the evident (meaning clear but also specular) connections of this process to religious colonialism, we deem this a form of white voyeuristic exomologesis, or what we call white penitence, a public demonstration of one's antiracist beliefs that rely on BIPOC suffering and that therefore demands a constant supply of pain in order to maintain the facade of allyship. As Michel Foucault states in writing about exomologesis, penitents do not necessarily engage in self-reflection to resolve their failings but "to remember rules of action, the main laws of behavior" (238). In a religious setting, this demonstration is meant as public confirmation of the sinner's piety by authority figures; the performance of contrition becomes "a status rather than an act" (Fejes 1). We find that this resonates closely with what we have experienced and adopt Foucault's term to make a point in the academy's terms.

Many white colleagues and supposed mentors, some of them well-intentioned, have tried to make us their own personal sources of "legitimate" authority through their relationships with us. By performing the roles of savior and allies at our expense, they have often prevented us from making crucial connections with real allies who can help us to not just survive but flourish. And we should be flourishing as students and scholars because with specific experiences comes knowledge that only we can have, and we have already demonstrated how much we have to contribute in terms of mentoring and modeling community-building. Our dedication and persistence are astonish-

ing given the histories of colonization and racism faced by our ancestors and families, and it is nothing short of miraculous that we are alive and kicking to have this conversation today. This is why we call out opportunistic relationships that perpetuate systemic inequality even at the most intimate, corporeal levels.

Almost fifty years ago, Angela Davis warned us that members of oppressed groups are not just exhausted but kept exhausted deliberately so that they do not question or contest abusive conditions. Although Davis writes specifically about Black women's experiences, we take to heart her teaching that the oppressor must wear out the oppressed to ensure that they don't realize that the oppressor needs the oppressed, not the other way around. We see this in how some white mentors have enacted white penitence as a public performance, pretending to welcome us into academic discussions while being gatekeepers of our futures behind-the-scenes. How some white mentors have deliberately excluded BIPOC from discussions involving our communities because we are "too close to the issue to be objective," because we "will only be hurt by what is said," or because we "don't have the right formal, theoretical training" to engage in conversations about us. How some white mentors have pretended to mentor BIPOC students only to impose on their mentees the role of native informant. How some white mentors have asked already vulnerable students and colleagues to repeatedly share personal, negative experiences but done nothing to alter the conditions that harm BIPOC. And, how some white mentors have thereby revealed that they mean only to derive a level of authority and authenticity through proximity to the "research problem" that is our very Being. Under the guise of care, such relationships enact harm because they suggest that mentors do not have to push for change so long as they offer advice or simply warn those under their care. However, through these conversations, we also came to recognize our need to reflect on our own relative privilege to ensure that we do not replicate these harmful dynamics when we, in turn, mentor students and junior colleagues with less privilege than our own. As a group of Latinxs, we want to remind others of our shared responsibility and accountability to our Black and Indigenous relatives both inside and outside of the academy, and to marginalized communities everywhere.

What follows are transcripts from our conversation. We chose to share our words using this genre as a form of testimonio. As Cruz Medina explains, testimonio as a Latinx storytelling practice enacts a form of Critical Race Theory counterstory by deliberately situating truth as context-specific and allowing individuals to articulate the collective experiences of marginalized groups. For this reason, some of the information shared here has been generalized. As authors, we wish to maintain a sense of privacy; after all, one of the main points we are making is that the academy and its more privileged members do not have an automatic right to know everything about us. Beyond that, however,

we do this to ensure that people beyond ourselves can see themselves in what we have to say. We do not want the particular details of any situation that we have experienced to supersede our purpose here: to illustrate what too many of our colleagues experience on a daily basis. Many of them hold less racial, social, and status privilege than we do, and so, we do not take our responsibility lightly. Thus, even as we exercise some of that privilege in depicting our experiences, we hope to leave them open enough to hold space for others who may not have the same degree of privilege to also share their own stories. Vulnerable people need spaces where they can share their stories and experiences and forge crucial alliances.¹ Sharing our stories—*testimonios*—ensures that we provide needed citations and sources for our colleagues to legitimize their own experiences without white academics colonizing our stories for their own gain.

We also want to demonstrate our commitment to bringing more familial frameworks into academia, both as a subversive move and as a means to honor our communities. Ana Milena Ríbero and Sonia C. Arellano write about *comadrismo* as a feminist of color approach to mentoring, describing this approach as one based in “a feminist reciprocal relationship among women” that can establish “a trusting kinship relationship...among women with deep commitments to anti-racist work” and ensure BIPOC retention in the academy (336). While some of us writing here identify as nonbinary rather than women, we acknowledge the matristic orientation of diverse Latinx communities with its emphasis on care, compassion, and mutual support. Hence, many queer folks will call each other “comadre” regardless of gender. With this in mind, we wanted to replicate a “comadre circle,” where people can gather and vent and analyze individual experiences together to make meaning of a world (and in our case a discipline) where we rely on each other for strength. Moreover, we believe that the intimate, conversational presentation allows readers to step into our “chat” as both listeners and participants, permitting the essay to serve as a form of remote mentoring for those who must seek mentors outside their proximate circles.

Finally, we recognize the value of performing community as people from our respective cultural and scholarly backgrounds. We depict our conversation for reasons besides mere mimesis. By re-presenting our scholarly friendship circle’s space for sharing experiences and expressing solidarity, we mean to embody our response to the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab’s invitation to deploy rhetorical practices that more closely reflect our everyday praxes. In using a structure similar to that employed in “Our Story Begins Here: Constellating Cultural Rhetorics,” we, too, repurpose a traditional dialogic genre to highlight the “imaginative power in our own writing and thinking processes” and demonstrate a communally-oriented and culturally-cultivated “deliberately reflexive practice.” We also aim to welcome our different audiences into this

performance space to become part of the performance beyond the immediate text, to take up our call to enact constructive change within their own respective spheres of existence whether our readers are searching for survival tactics and reassurance or listening in hopes of becoming better accomplices.² Personally, we wanted to preserve the dynamic feel of a living, breathing dialogue because we four are colleagues and friends, and we have these kinds of conversations all the time. These conversations allow us to maintain our mental and physical wellness in the face of persistent gaslighting and abuse by providing us with support and community, two factors that often determine whether BIPOC stay in or leave the academy.

Thus, we present what follows in an honest, plain-spoken way, knowing our words will resonate with different groups in academia for different reasons that are nonetheless important. As the members of the Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab state at the end of their foundational work, after “our part of this performance is at its end...your responsibility has just begun.” That responsibility belongs to all of us because we must all do our part to end the violence targeting BIPOC bodies inside the academy and out in the world. But, given the painful insights that we share here, we stress that that responsibility falls especially on those with the most privilege and energy, those whose livelihoods as scholars and mentors have been built at our expense.

On Academic Surveillance and the Demand for Spectacle

Christina: I want to talk about how BIPOC are framed by many white-stream academicians as living proof of the academy’s benevolence, especially when it refuses to admit that people cannot separate who they are when they are walking down the street from who they are in the classroom or who they are in the archives. Because, as a brown person, I think a lot about conversations surrounding Black death—especially at the hands of the police—and what my students must be thinking and feeling, even as they’re supposed to just carry on and work, get through, graduate, and so on. I know it’s often hard for our friends and colleagues (who are supposed to have the language to articulate the constant trauma) to express it, so I worry a lot about my students who don’t have that training and how I can be there for them, knowing I can never know what they are experiencing even as a person of color. It’s not the same, and I don’t want to use the language of “I get it” when I can’t.

In that way, how some people talk in academia reminds me of how people talk on social media. White people will post on Facebook or Twitter about being traumatized by violence against Black and brown

people and I wonder: How? How, when there's no corporeal connection for you to this experience and you're never going to have to worry about that? Unless you're worried about your child's safety—and even there, there might be some distance—but if there's no physical connection for you, how is it traumatizing if it's not conjuring something for you at the cellular level? Caring doesn't necessarily make you a good person; it makes you human.

Genevieve: That's a big part of the problem, which is why I think we need to ensure that we hold people reading this responsible for taking action. Because there's a big difference between listening to BIPOC voices and voyeurism. I've spoken to so many people about racism, led so many workshops about racism, had so many people say "Oh, you're brave" for speaking about racism, and it's as if they get some kind of pleasure from feeling bad when they read about racism or watch those horrific videos on the news. It's this weird sense of feeling good that they have exposed themselves to situations that they will never ever actually have to encounter or deal with in their lives. They have now somehow become a better person because they now know these things exist. And the more that I do antiracist work, the more I see it everywhere, so many people wanting to live vicariously through BIPOC trauma. It's enraging.

Christina: That right there is a good place for us to maybe introduce a new term, I think, because it's not white guilt. It's an odd, masochistic tendency that still gives people power.

Genevieve: It's a weird white voyeuristic fetish that pops up all over social media, which I haven't been on much because of this. You see it everywhere. I think there's definitely a term to be coined here, because it is so prevalent.

Christine: Similarly, when you ask BIPOC to apply for something—often relying on a sad backstory as justification—and expect them to grovel, it is another form of contemporary colonialism. There is a sort of capitalist, colonialist need to see marginalized people beg.

Genevieve: It's a weird Puritanical thing where you have to expose yourself to see whether you are worthy.

Christine: Is that meant to exonerate them? As in "I feel bad for you. Therefore, I am a good person."

Genevieve: It reminds me of the penitentes—Catholic people who flagellate themselves.

Les: I think there's layers to it. It relieves white guilt and offers a sense of validation: "I've never done this, so I'm okay. I can now mark this checkbox. Did that one. Check this box. Did that one too." I have known people who literally use a checklist and BIPOC wonder if we're supposed to give them an award, as if they've now "mastered" that level—and I use the word "master" specifically.

Christina: I know there's such a thing as cultural voyeurism, but this is more like self-flagellating voyeurism. And when you get into issues of religion, the idea is to expiate one's sins so you can turn around and do it again. Foucault probably has a term for the spectacle of self-punishment for ethos purposes.

Genevieve: Absolutely! And they think that the more they punish themselves physically, the closer they are to divinity. Literally a white savior complex. And they want to perform this constantly to ensure that they can force themselves into a specific role—a white, guilty, voyeuristic, self-punishing person—and create this persona as a form of meaning-making. I always knew there was something that made me uneasy, but I couldn't explain exactly what I was experiencing with these so-called allies. And I would use the terms Les stresses—white privilege and white guilt—but it's more than that. It's hard to articulate, but I notice it more and more.

Les: It's already extreme, but take it further: when you have people in academia pretending to be BIPOC, because we have so many being outed, is that like the next level? As in "Now I can embody it because I know it." Do I go too far?

Christine: Not at all. Some of the people who traumatize us publish in fields that directly talk about and affect us and our lives, sometimes even claiming membership in our communities by highlighting very distant familial relationships or romantic relationships. Then they write about these ties and use them to position members of our communities as less connected.

Genevieve: Or they share traumatic stories about certain times in their lives that are somehow meant to demonstrate their affinity with BIPOC and multiply marginalized people, leaving us to wonder where this is coming from. As if that's how they bond, through trauma, but also as though that's all they see us as: our potential traumas. So that now, because they shared an experience with one person of color, they can now relate to all of us.

Christine: And then these are the people who position themselves as gatekeepers.

What Mentorship Is and Isn't

Christine: There is a certain type of person who uses BIPOC students as workers, as producers of content, texts, knowledge, artifacts that they will then use to maintain their rightful place. They believe it is okay as long as they're helping or mentoring us. I've seen people who use students to advance their own projects. Students are trying to build their own repertoires and trust their mentors to help them, but those "mentors" do not legitimately support them and only use them to build their programs. In my experience, such people do not see us—marginalized students—as young scholars and future colleagues. After getting us to do so much work, they turn around and refuse to support us unless we change to fit their perceptions of who we should be, even after we have worked with them for years.

In the end, you find that they don't see you as a person, just as a worker who helps them elevate their status. They claim to want to work with Latina students, for example, but then refuse to do so unless we play respectability politics, detailing how we need to change if we want to be accepted in the professoriate instead of trying to change the white supremacist professoriate itself. Change your presentation, your dress, who you are as a person—whitewash yourself so "people will respect you." So we can do all that work for them, but if we don't change for them, we get treated as a source of personal embarrassment.

Genevieve: And in the end, maybe you get a letter of recommendation—at most—but no real help.

Christine: Then there's the issue of academic theft, whether deliberate or through a lack of giving credit where it's due. I was a single mother of three and teaching at several institutions to pay my bills while trying to finish my dissertation. Once I finished, I defended and started my tenure-track job, which some people suggested was out of reach. After a few years, I started planning to turn my project into a book for tenure...only to find out that someone tenured made very similar, very specific arguments using the very same specific frameworks and terms without citing me. I've written more about my own experiences elsewhere, but the particulars of these situations shouldn't overshadow just how often this happens to so many people of color.

These kinds of people don't see us; they don't care about us as people or scholars. We are only workers here for their benefit. They serve as gatekeepers and colonizers, and they are the ones who shouldn't be here, not us. We need to call on them to step down, leave, make space for the real scholars, those doing the real work.

Les: They need to go. We need accountability and restitution.

Genevieve: Yes, they do, because the same kind of abuser will also turn around and appropriate our theoretical groundings to build their programs. As students, we are repeatedly invited to share our expertise through surveys and interviews and then not given any publication credit or acknowledgement, while the privileged researchers published about "their work" and the programs that "they" built. When this happens, it might not even cross a student's mind that they're being taken advantage of—they are just excited and honored that a well-known scholar is asking about their work. Then, years down the road, they might read that work and see how they could have—should have—received co-author credit, or at least been given credit for their theoretical and programmatic ideas. Instead, their labor and ideas become property of their supposed mentors. People who write grants and implement new programs wind up with nothing to show for it. So all we can do is not cite these people when trying to articulate our own thoughts.

When we consider the frequency of these things, we have to recognize how much of academia is really created by uncredited BIPOC doing groundbreaking work, even at the graduate student level.

Christine: And then those projects prove unsustainable without us, even at minority-serving institutions. So they move on to other things, other projects, and let down BIPOC students at places where they should be receiving instruction that benefits and centers them. Not to mention they receive sabbaticals and awards while we are over here struggling. So where is the restitution? I get very angry, but then I think about how widespread these behaviors are and say: I just want them to stop, and we have to call them out because they won't stop otherwise.

Christina: What really pisses me off is that there are so few of us—so few Black, brown, Indigenous, and Asian people in the academy—that when we want to write about communal practices or figures from our respective backgrounds, we wind up having to go through these abusive people to get where we're going. We can entertain analysis of our chosen subjects from intellectual, emotional, cultural, and bodily perspectives, using what, in *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, Royster and

Kirsch call strategic contemplation. I know what I know because I must live my life as a person of my identity, so I can use that and what I know from my tíos y tías, grandparents, parents, ancestors to imagine what it was like for this person. Why, then, is it considered niche when we want to write about people from our own backgrounds, but when a white scholar with tenure comes in and writes about that same person, it's now exciting and necessary research? Why is the response then that this is so cool, that this must be someone we should be looking at more widely? And, suddenly, they're the ones who get to decide what topics should be important to us in studies about our lives. So when we go to school, they have decided for us what we should learn and how we should learn it.

That is not to say that only certain people should write about certain topics or people. Although I do believe there are specific topics that people outside of the community should keep their hands off of because they do not have the necessary corporeal investment—and therefore the right—to speak on them. But why—when white supremacy, Eurocentricity, white dominant culture is global—why do they feel the need to talk about people from our communities if that is not what they do anyway? And if they write, why are they not using the resultant knowledge to help us achieve liberation? Practicing that kind of accountability is a form of mentorship that we all need, but if we are simply being taught how to see ourselves and our cultures through white lenses, where is the mentorship in that?

Christine: And what's telling is that they don't use our cultural frameworks to engage in analysis or pedagogy. They bring in only European theorists, when people from our own communities have already theorized our own rhetorical practices using our own epistemologies. They don't know what they're doing, but they get away with it because of cultural capital, theirs and that of the theorists they use.

Genevieve: So in the end, what does it even mean to us or for us? Nothing.

Christina: I mean, I admit that I like theory and some of the French philosophers and think they can be useful in addressing certain general ideas due to Eurocentricity's ubiquity. But if someone's going to talk about people of color in terms of Eurowestern theories, what they're really doing is showing how they interpret this person operating through the researcher's own white perspective, how they see that person as fitting into this box that they themselves have put this person into, and how they're trying to prove that this person belongs there. That is violence.

Les: That is whitewashing, a deliberate erasure of the ontologies and epistemologies to which the person/people being researched may subscribe. And the researcher erases that because they are totally unaware of the cultural references they need to know. They cannot see the full picture, and then they are going further and whitewashing it for white academia.

Christina: And completely ignoring the intercultural context. You can discuss how you see things working in a person's rhetorics from your perspective as a white scholar, but you have to acknowledge that the "sole truth" is not yours because identities are not static and intersectionality matters, and you're not always seeing every dimension of a person. Which is why, if you're going to do work on our communities, you cannot just write/white all over it and then dare to say, "This is how you should study it, your own people, your own culture." That is intellectual and spiritual colonization.

Christine: They are legitimized through their connections to us, so then up-and-coming scholars who don't know what's going on think that what these people are saying is correct. It's a vicious, multilayered cycle that shows why such people need to leave. Because they cannot fix this. It has to be the people who have been pushed out, the non-native speakers, the speakers of less prestigious dialects, and so many others who have been told they are wrong. Language and cultural equity teachers need to be the people teaching us how to change it all.

Latinx students need to see Latinx teachers teaching Latinx rhetorics. Indigenous students need to be taught by Indigenous people. Black teachers should be allowed to teach about Black linguistic justice. I have white privilege as a Latinx person, and I recognize that, so I know I have to use that to open up space for others by letting people teach about their own communities whenever possible. I don't have to teach certain classes just because I want to. Do I love Indigenous rhetorics and would I love to teach that? Yes, but I am not Indigenous. So I can assign readings in my courses, but I am also staying in my lane. The time is now. We can all open up space for Black people, and we can all open up space for trans and queer people. So there are ways for all of us to practice making room.

Just Some of the Reasons Why Mentorship Matters

Les: I want to point out that there are so many similarities among our experiences even within different scenarios because inequity is so systemic

and shows up in many different ways. Theft. Gatekeeping. Harassment. Gaslighting. Bullying. These things are so common that sometimes we don't even recognize them for what they are until someone else points them out. We're recruited by departments that supposedly want us, whether as students or faculty, because our work is focused on racism and colonialism, about which they purport to care. The people meant to mentor us teach our work and seem supportive, but the microaggressions and tokenizing start once we enter institutional spaces. No matter our professional backgrounds or training, we are told we can't teach "mainstream" courses because we "only do cultural stuff," so white colleagues with less experience are given priority in choosing courses. They might remove us from the schedule, or we learn that people are told they shouldn't work with us. There's a layering of moves to put us in our place and deny us access to resources to the point where we cannot work with these "mentors" any longer. Or they say they can't work with us because we are unprepared to do the work. It's like that book, *Presumed Incompetent*. I bought both volumes because I knew something was happening.

Christine: It's a combination of mediocrity and a refusal to yield, to move over even when they know they don't belong. I think it shows they're scared to make room for us.

Les: When things change, you start to see more BIPOC students signing up for our programs or signing up to work with us, because they finally see people who look like them and who care about the same things affecting us. But then, when we are sabotaged, the students are the ones asking how they're supposed to learn, how they can study with us if we're not even scheduled to teach certain courses. Then we have to do independent studies on our own time so we can mentor the students, only to get in trouble for having too many. People with far less teaching experience and much shorter publication histories try to say that we aren't enough, all while throwing around terms like feminism and social justice. Despite my extensive activism, I would never call myself a social justice expert—I mean, what even is that? But bullies will use these terms and start courses and programs around these ideas while harming us and the students we mentor. They strain the relationships we build with our students, especially BIPOC students, or tell us we can no longer work with them because we are needed to handle other things within the department.

Christine: So, basically, if we want to keep working with our mentees, because we love them as fellow members of BIPOC communities who

need our assistance, we have to do it on our own time. So we are once again made to do more unpaid labor.

Christina: Can we talk about how social justice as a term is co-opted to harm BIPOC? We're always told that it's a dirty word because we have to think about what it means to us all the time: social justice, meaning seeking justice at the social level and not necessarily even focusing on calling out people individually. At the structural level, we are trying to enact policies that will make things more equitable for us. Yet they get personally triggered, just as with the process of white penitence. Just like some white people will listen to our stories so that they can feel bad and reaffirm their humanity, some people want to use the term social justice because they feel so left out of these conversations. Maybe it's because they've never had to strive for justice so vehemently, maybe because they know that they are the ones enacting the injustice. Either way, they try to sanitize the term in service to whiteness.

For example, when I started one position, I worked with someone who stated that they did social justice work. And so, we were both mentored by an amazing white woman scholar who is a social justice educator. Because this scholar is often in demand for workshops and speaking engagements, she uses these opportunities to make room for the voices of women of color, queer folks, and disabled folks to be heard—and she makes sure these folks get paid. However, my fellow mentee examined topics from a highly privileged perspective and became hostile during discussions about race or decolonization. After several caustic interactions, I realized that it wasn't that they didn't know better but that they didn't want to know. They preferred to run with a misconstrual of texts they hated because it affirmed what they already believed. After that, our once-mutual mentor stopped working with them because my mentor refused to be complicit in giving them an activist cover. My mentor then invited me to be on a panel about intersectionality in research and teaching, to which she invited campus administrators and where we reminded those present that people who live marginalization are often expected to do the labor of instructing others while receiving little to no credit for it.

Yet, when I reflect on those interactions with my former colleague, I can't help but think about Cheryl Harris' "Whiteness as Property": the only way this person could maintain their power was to refuse to concede any epistemological room by admitting that a Chicanx person might know something they didn't. And so, I feel like this is why privileged scholars think they must talk about the things affecting us before

we do or else call these things irrelevant. If a Black disabled scholar wants to write from their perspective, then their research supposedly has a limited purview because their insights supposedly don't apply to "everybody," but if a white scholar writes something that doesn't account for Black or disabled lives, it will still be considered groundbreaking. Thus, they don't even have to pretend to care because academia is made for them.

What We Want People to Know and Do

Genevieve: Regarding what we have discussed, people need to figure out how those things are happening within their own departments and within their fields on a broader level. So being able to identify it, call it out, and correct the behavior and have some clear, actual ways to mitigate harm that happens because of these kinds of experiences that BIPOC are made to have in academia. I think that's huge. Not saying something like, "Well *I've* never done that before. Thank goodness that's not what I do!" It's important to acknowledge tools for taking action, to say "Even if it's not my specific experience, I can recognize this now, and I can figure out how to prevent it or interrupt it in some way." That is a major thing for me.

Christine: I would like other BIPOC in academia to learn from what we've gone through and understand that what we have to say resonates with their experiences because it's not them. All of this is systemic; it's linked. That's why we are all in completely different places and yet experiencing similar things, because it's systemic racism. It's not you. You're good. You belong here. Don't think that what you're feeling and being put through is a reflection on you as a scholar. It's not.

Les: I want to echo that, especially for grad students. Even if you're at some so-called "woke" program, it's still there, quite apparent. Even faculty members supposedly trained in antiracist mentorship and teaching aren't always the best at identifying how racism gets enacted in their programs. I say that reflecting on my own graduate experience. But also, this calls on me as a graduate instructor to be accountable for ways in which I may perpetuate white supremacy. Regarding the actionable items Genevieve mentions, policy changes and structural changes matter. It's not just "I teach these texts or use these techniques in my class," but also "This is how I treat my colleagues" and every single functioning aspect of the university at every level. And also in the community, because everyone here belongs to different communities but no one is

working separate from social communities. For example, we are a public university and citizens of the state attack certain programs for teaching about racism. So we are faced with these things everywhere we go.

But my biggest critique is when people get comfortable because they think, “Well I’ve done all the readings and do all these things in my classes, so I’m good.” Individualizing that is not helpful because it is systemic. We have to stop being comfortable at all times. If you’re comfortable, that’s a sign that you’re probably doing something wrong. We need to keep doing the work and being comfortable is stopping how we should do it, and that goes for all of us—myself included.

Christina: That’s a really great point. We often feel so uncomfortable in the academy because we’re told that we don’t fit in or that we have to do all this extra labor. So my question is: What does actively practicing discomfort look like? And how do we make it less traumatizing when we’re already traumatized? How do you know how far to push yourself and knowing when to say, “Okay, I’ve given a lot for now”? I was mulling this over this year while going through the tenure process, wanting to do so much and getting to where I just could not do anything more. I went into stasis because it was so heartbreaking to constantly see nothing getting done, especially by people who do have more energy and more privilege.

Connecting it to what Christine is saying, it’s important to have other BIPOC know they’re not alone, as a form of remote mentoring—even if we never meet. But also it’s important to point out the difference between BIPOC understanding the “it’s not you” point and privileged people seeking to understand what we go through. Because some well-meaning white colleagues will say, “I understand where you’re coming from,” but no, no one can unless they live it. Some of them will read all the literature and watch all the videos in the news and think that as long as they do that, they’ve accomplished something. That is voyeuristic, as Genevieve has pointed out, and only feeds white supremacy. Why do we have to put ourselves out there for folks who don’t live these things? It should be enough that we tell you. But if you are going to interpolate yourself into this space of pain, you are responsible for doing something with this knowledge.

Les: Adding to the point about discomfort, for folks who are experiencing racism, I want to remind us that it takes a lot to process this trauma but that there’s a big difference between discomfort and feeling unsafe and unsupported. Discomfort is best understood as being uncomfor-

able when we exercise our own privilege and power in pushing back, because we all have some privilege and power as members of the academy, even if we do experience racism. Feeling unsafe and unsupported and scared and traumatized are different kinds of affect. But it's hard to parse through that when you're experiencing all those things.

Christine: And, touching on what Les is saying, it's about knowing the difference between discomfort and trauma, and being very careful about which term we are using. Feeling unsafe and unsupported isn't uncomfortable; it is traumatizing, with emotional and material impact.

Notes

1. For example, in *Solidarity, Safety, and Online Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Social Media Sharing Practices of Indigenous and Chicana Women*, Les explains how racially-marginalized women and non-binary people share their stories about experiencing racism in academia as a way to build solidarity across racial lines and heal from the trauma racism creates.
2. As Neisha-Anne Green explains, “[a]llies are satisfied to quietly help and support. Accomplices support and help through word and deed. Accomplices actively demonstrate allyship” (29).

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