

Making Our Stories Count

Racial, Gendered, and Sexualized Antagonisms in the Academy

... it is not enough to simply tell our story. Telling a personal story in and of itself is not profound; it's what we make of that story.

— BELL HOOKS¹

In their recent article “#CommunicationSoWhite” in the *Journal of Communication*, authors Paula Chakravartty, Rachel Kuo, Victoria Grubbs, and Charlton McIlwain move to decenter white masculinity as the normative core of scholarly inquiry by coding and analyzing the racial composition of editorial boards, primary authorship, and citation practices in communication journals published by the National Communication Association and International Communication Association for the years 1990–2016.² Their frustrating and unsurprising findings are that non-white scholars are “significantly underrepresented as published authors and under-cited as producers of value in the field of communication,”³ resulting in citational segregation and disparity and pervasive white masculinity in communication studies and in academia writ large.

These statistics and others documenting the political nature of citationality⁴ lay bare the workings of academic knowledge production that reproduces and “reinforces Whiteness as its undisputed, unexamined frame,” one that is “incapable of asking what we might learn from the experiences of those who have been, for decades if not centuries, dispossessed of their lands, policed, bombed, detained, indebted and rendered illegal.”⁵ These statistics are, as bell hooks points out, part of a larger and longer trend of depoliticizing race and gender discriminations by eliding or silencing the theoretical frameworks and practices necessary for ridding ourselves of racism, sexism, and other damaging and violent exclusions. She writes:

Among those of us who have spent our lifetimes critically thinking and writing about ways to transform both our individual lives and our society so that systems of domination can be challenged and changed, there is a

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growing mood of frustration and despair. We feel we are constantly deconstructing and laying the groundwork for alternatives without making the interventions in how folks live daily that are needed if our society is to be utterly changed.⁶

For those of us living and working in the academy, this frustration and despair hits home. Our work to critique domination, silencing, exclusion, and visibility politics does not, at the end of the day, extend to practical interventions into the daily lives of the people we know, care, and write about and for, including ourselves. It does not create knowledge production processes that attend to power structures embedded in our scholarship or the racial (and gendered) antagonisms built into our writing, publication, and citational practices and representations. In a word, this work does not *count*—in the same ways or with the same effects—as the work of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.⁷ Instead, as the authors in this issue of *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research (DCQR)* demonstrate with ringing clarity, life inside and outside the academy continues to be a struggle.

It is a struggle
against invisibility,
a struggle against erasure
and the struggled regulation of perceived temperament.

It is a struggle because alongside the frustration and despair, the authors lay bare the out/rage of being
silenced, subsumed, corrected, marked *badly*,
The damage of being dismissed as too
critical, quiet, confrontational, insecure, bitchy, emotional, butch, nervous,
queer, angry

It is a struggle because even though the system, the norms, and the rules of the academy place weren't made for you,⁸ you must play by them
must use civility as a shield
must model minority,
must make ordinary not good enough⁹
must wake up
must say something, even when there's too much to say.

Each of the essays in this issue struggles to say something—directly, critically, and contentiously—about the interlocking systems of white supremacy, capitalist

dominance, and patriarchy that thrive within academia. Michele Hammers Bryant Keith Alexander open the collection with “Diversity Thugs,” an exploration of what it means to be and go public—productively performing citizen identities in local, national, and global communities. Their collaboration settles on the construct of “diversity thug” as an affective, intersectional, and autoethnographic theorization of the intersecting tensions of publics, difference, and citizenship.

Yea-Wen Chen’s “Why Don’t You Speak (Up), Asian/Immigrant/Woman?” uses the disruptive move of giving up tenure as a catalyst for (re)thinking silence and voice in/with the context of the institutionalized racism in the academy. Chen juxtaposes her experiences “weathering the quiet and invisible storms of whiteness,” being pressured to behave as a “model minority,” and (re)claiming resistive Taiwanese oral history traditions. She uses these intersecting narratives to tell an interactive and racialized story of speaking (up) in US academia.

Shinsuke Eguchi and Mary Jane Collier also address silence, visibility, and the violence of model minority discourses in “Critical Intercultural Mentoring and Allying.” Through the context of faculty mentoring/allying relationships, the authors share their continuing struggle to complicate mentoring/allying as critical intercultural communication praxis, offering their experiences as complex, contextual, and fluid constitutions of difference in the academy.

Craig Wood’s “Waking Up to Memmi” closes the collection. Wood takes up the Scottish notion of a *dwam* (or dream-like state of semiconsciousness) as a reflection on how colonial narratives continue to assert racialized power relations in both Australian school curricula and pedagogies. Drawing on Albert Memmi’s notion of the “colonizer who refuses,” Wood seeks to demonstrate the critical awakening of a white schoolteacher.

Each of the essays in this issue tackles head on the racial, gendered, and sexualized antagonisms that permeate academic life. Through personal storytelling, each of the authors shows us how these antagonisms cannot be voiced or changed without a direct, critical, and contentious conversation because the normalizing discourses of “politeness” and “respect” are levers used to silence, dismiss, and hide inequities and domination. Hammers and Alexander’s “diversity thug” is a response to the silencing of dissent and the racism, sexism, and heteronormativity masquerading as academic civility and canonical citational practices. Drawing on Tupak Shakur’s definition of thug as “someone who is going through struggles, has gone through struggles and continues to live day by day with nothing for them,”¹⁰ a diversity thug is a person who

persistently uses voice and *identity-presence*, the raced/classed/sexed/gendered/intersectional Other; with an insistence on recognition and protest, not just the individuality of being seen and heard. . . . thuggishly struggling to find our voice in place and space—in this “ivory tower,” . . . thuggishly struggling regardless of how we are perceived. . . . always striving . . . towards the potentiality of our own horizons.

Attending to structures of power embedded within academic knowledge production requires that we are all more attentive to our own racialized and gendered editorial, publication, and citational practices, and for me, this means taking stock of how we have fared on this score since the inception of *DCQR* in 2013. What “collective body of work” have we created in that time? What have we made visually and materially *valuable*, not only terms of knowledge production around critical qualitative scholarship, but also in the social/emotional/professional/economic/political lives of the authors published and reviewers and editors working within the pages of *DCQR*? As Chakravarty, Kuo, Grubbs, and McIlwain note in their study, race and ethnicity and gender data (not to mention data on sexualities, class, ability, etc.) is not uniformly or reliably gathered in any institutional or publicly accessible way, and that includes in the manuscript submission and reviewer processes on *DCQR*’s ScholarOne site. And whereas Chakravarty, Kuo, Grubbs, and McIlwain used surname identifications (matched against data derived from the US census), along with visual and other identification practices, this survey is much more informally researched, relying on authors’ self-identifications, research, and personal relationships and knowledge.¹¹ In our accounting, we found that for the editorial work and articles published in *DCQR* since 2013:

- 29 % of the editorial board are persons of color
- 62 % of reviewers are persons of color
- 42 % of authors or co-authors are persons of color

In addition,

- 20 % of the editorial board and 38 % of the reviewers are persons identifying as LGBTI or Q
- 15 % of authors or co-authors are persons identifying as LGBTI or Q
- 60 % of the editorial board and 80 % of the reviewers are women
- 84 % of authors or co-authors are women

How often and in what contexts these articles and authors have been cited is more difficult to track. However, among the most read articles listed on

University of California Press's website for *DCQR*, 50% are authored by persons of color, 24% are authored by persons identifying as LGBTI or Q, and 83% are authored by persons identifying as women. Among the 22 issues published since 2013, the most read issue is a special issue on Black Feminist Thought, edited by Rachel Alicia Griffin and including articles by Katelyn Hale Wood; Marquis Bey; Ashley Patterson, Valerie Kinloch, Tanja Burkhard, Ryann Randall, and Arianna Howard; Joëlle M. Cruz, Oghenetaja Okoh, Amoaba Gooden, Kamesha Spates, Chinasa A. Elue, and Nicole Rousseau; AnaLouise Keating; Kristin Waters; Nadine Naber; Karla D. Scott; and Patricia Hill Collins.¹²

There are other statistics that should be represented here, including those among editorial board members, reviewers, and authors who identify as neuro-atypical or differently abled, as working class, as practicing non-Christian faith or religion, as living in the southern hemisphere, etc. In that sense, we must increase our “conscientious engagement”¹³ with work made at the intersections of race, gender and sexuality, class, ability, and spirituality-focused scholarship. In doing so, we must highlight how power is materialized in knowledge production, “make impossible” normative ideas of neutrality in scholarship (as well as in media and technologies), and push to “decolonize our explanatory practices.”¹⁴

One of the things we *can* see in the pages of the work published in *DCQR* is the ways in which authors use the personal to make impossible normative ideas of neutrality and in some—perhaps many—instances to decolonize explanatory practices in the necessary struggle to do that work ethically, critically, and politically. Writing at the “pained intersections of the academic, personal, and political,” as Hammers and Alexander remind us, shows us how personal stories can be “used outside the academy to make a difference in political life.” Such work knows and tells well why the personal story is not enough; it’s what we make of that story that counts. ■

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NOTES

1. bell hooks, *Writing Beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2013), 128.
2. Paula Chakravartty et al., “#CommunicationSoWhite,” *Journal of Communication* 68, no. 2 (2018): 254–66.
3. *Ibid.*, 261.

4. See Victor Ray “The Racial Politics of Citation,” *Inside Higher Ed*, 27 April 2018, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2018/04/27/racial-exclusions-scholarly-citations-opinion>; Richard Delgado, “The Imperial Scholar: Reflections on a Review of Civil Rights Literature,” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 132, no. 3 (1984): 561–78; Bryan W. Van Norden, *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Lee D. Baker, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896–1954* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Earl Wright II, *The First American School of Sociology: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory* (London: Routledge, 2016).

5. Chakravartty et al., “#CommunicationSoWhite,” 262. See also Bernadette Marie Calafell, “Monstrous Femininity: Constructions of Women of Color in the Academy,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 36, no. 2 (2012): 111–30; Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is not a Metaphor,” *Decolonialization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40; Devika Chawla, “Between Solids: Monologues in Brown: A Mystery Performance,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 1 (2011): 47–58.

6. hooks, *Writing Beyond Race*, 7.

7. *Ibid.*, 5.

8. Bernadette Marie Calafell, “Mentoring and Love: An Open Letter,” *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 7, no. 4 (2007): 427.

9. *Ibid.*, 428.

10. Urban Dictionary, s.v., “thug,” <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=thug>.

11. To address this difficulty, we aim to collect anonymous demographic information supplied by authors when they submit their work to *DCQR* so that we may responsibly balance the need to better track disparities in citation, publication, and other “outputs” with identity, privacy, and surveillance concerns. We are exploring options for best doing this.

12. Rachel Alicia Griffin, “Cultivating Promise and Possibility: Black Feminist Thought as an Innovative, Interdisciplinary, and International Framework,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 1–9; Kaetlyn Hale Wood, “Cracking Up Time: Black Feminist Comedic Performance and Queer Temporalities in the Standup of Wanda Sykes,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 10–32; Marquis Bey, “The Shape of Angels’ Teeth: Toward a Blacktransfeminist Thought through the Mattering of Black(Trans)Lives,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 33–54; Ashley Patterson et al., “Black Feminist Thought as Methodology: Examining Intergenerational Lived Experiences of Black Women,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 55–76; Joëlle M. Cruz et al., “The Ekwe Collective: A Black Feminist Praxis,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 77–100; AnaLouise Keating, “Spiritual Activism, Visionary Pragmatism, and Threshold Theorizing: An Anzaldúan Meditation with Black Feminist Thought,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 101–107; Kristin Waters, “A Journey from Willful Ignorance to Liberal Guilt to Black Feminist Thought,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 108–15; Nadine Naber, “Arab and Black Feminisms:

Joint Struggle and Transnational Anti-Imperialist Activism,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 116–25; Karla D. Scott, “Black Feminist Reflections on Activism: Repurposing Strength for Self-Care, Sustainability, and Survival,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 126–32; Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminist Thought as Oppositional Knowledge,” *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research* 5, no. 3 (2016): 133–44.

13. Carrie Mott and Daniel Cockayne, “Citation Matters: Mobilizing the Politics of Citation toward a Practice of ‘Conscientious Engagement,’” *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 24, no. 7 (2017): 954–73.

14. Chakravartty et al., “#CommunicationSoWhite,” 261.