

“Black Women are the Mules of the World”: Black Women Professors of Practice in Teacher Education Programs

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At the intersection of labor and racial equity in teacher preparation, Black women professors of practice (PoPs) find that they carry an excessive workload without a similar measure of compensation or recognition. The unique experiences of these Black contingent faculty provide a view from the margins regarding the simultaneity (Collins, 2002) of oppressions that are hidden from mainstream perceptions within teacher preparation, particularly through a raced and gendered lens. Through an autoethnographic approach, we reveal how our negotiations for respect, visibility and impact on pre-service teachers are navigated within larger institutional structures situated within the academy. This reflexive process provides us, as research practitioners, a socially conscious pathway (Ellis et al., 2011) towards both impactful practice and means for substantive contributions to investigating the often-hidden labor of Black women professors of practice within post-secondary institutions. While exploring how we were positioned as ‘mules’ of teacher preparation at our previous institution, we amplify experiences that hitherto are alluded to in the literature, thematically reflecting our scarce numbers, low access to professional advancement and lack of job security. We conclude with recommendations both for Black women PoPs about the nature of this work, the reality of its weight, and considerations on behalf of the academy relative to pathways for professionalizing and honoring Black women professors of practice in teacher education programs.

Keywords: Black women, Professors of practice, Teacher education

Introduction

Sitting at the Teaching and Learning Department meeting, the room is chaotic and the mood is tense. One tenured associate professor of color verbalizes the obvious, “Yes, we have diversified the faculty here, but we have to be honest. The majority of the Black women in our

department are professors of practice. And they are doing the majority of the work for the teacher education department.” The room falls silent. The four Black women professors of practice (PoPs), including us two, shake our heads in agreement, thankful for our ally because she voiced what no one else in the department would say. The ally speaking up for us was extremely important because we are often overlooked, mistreated and devalued because we were PoPs and more specifically, Black women. Out of the seven PoPs, five of us earned terminal degrees and held leadership roles in K-12 school districts in various states. The educational attainment and academic excellence of Black women are not notably publicized, but there is a significant amount of data demonstrating that we are among the most educated groups in the U.S. (NCES, 2015, 2017).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, between 2015 and 2017, of the nearly 15% of associate’s degrees conferred to Black people, Black women earned 67%; and of the 12% of bachelor’s degrees, 64% were conferred upon Black women. For post-baccalaureate degrees, of the 15% conferred upon Black people, 74% were upon Black women; and for doctoral degrees, 62%. Nevertheless, while highly educated, Black faculty members are highly underrepresented in U.S. colleges and universities (Louis et al., 2016). According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2014), 6% of full-time instructional faculty members were Black compared with 76% of full-time faculty who were white¹. Although there has been a slight increase in the representation of Black faculty members within postsecondary institutions, the progression has been extremely slow: “More than a quarter-century ago, in 1981, Blacks were 4.2% of all full-time faculty in American higher education” (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education Foundation, 2008, p. 25). This slow progression continues to be a problem for Black faculty members within higher education, especially in white-dominated institutions, as those who hold positions are subject to patterns of systematic racial inequities and discrimination (Louis et al., 2016). We refer to institutions as white-dominated to highlight the ways that whiteness in personnel, ways of knowing and being, are prevalent and dominant in institutions. Furthermore, the roles and expectations of faculty of color in higher education must be interrogated, because the increase in diversity includes people of color who are not on tenure-track, also known as PoPs.

The purpose of our autoethnographic study is to examine our narratives as two Black women PoPs in a white-dominated teacher education program. We address the following research questions using our personal narratives: (1) How do we describe our experiences as Black women PoPs at a white-dominated institution? and (2) What recommendations would we offer to faculty and administrators at a white-dominated institution based on our experiences? The narratives are analyzed utilizing a critical race feminism theory lens and the findings overall illustrate that the workload of Black women PoPs are inequitable and excessive.

This article begins with an overview of key information about PoPs in the literature. Then the methodology, data collection, data analysis, and the salient themes from the narratives are

¹ Note: The authors of this article deliberately does not capitalize the word “white” to minimize the dominance of whiteness as the standard.

discussed. Finally, the article concludes by offering recommendations for further study as well as institutional change. In this article, the analogy of Black women as mules is employed to make meaning of the experiences and narratives of the Black women PoPs.

Overview of the Literature

The literature on professors of practice (PoPs) is concentrated around two broad, interlocking, yet distinct themes: background information and experiences (campus life, climate, rankism, and gender). The gap in the literature is the distinct experiences of Black women PoPs (Porter, 2019; Porter et al., 2020). National research on faculty of color in white-dominated institutions is rare because they represent a small number of overall full-time faculty. Also, many scholars of color refrain from participating in such studies because their numbers are so small that they are easily identifiable (Stanley, 2006). Furthermore, these studies are often conducted by faculty of color, and many white-dominated institutions do not believe that faculty of color can be objective when researching their own community. This literature review discusses what is known about the experiences of PoPs and more specifically, the experiences of Black women PoPs. It is time that the factors contributing to the experiences of Black women PoPs are considered in order to effectively glean insights around recruiting, retaining, promoting and supporting more Black women in higher education.

Background about Professors of Practice

The American Association of University Professors indicates that “non-tenure track positions of all types now account for over 70% of all instructional staff appointments in American higher education” (AAUP, n.d.) and they play a critical role (Baldwin & Wawrzynski, 2011). The titles and characteristics of non-tenure track faculty vary. Non-tenure track faculty are sometimes known as clinical faculty, teaching faculty and/or professors of practice (PoPs). PoPs share some of the same responsibilities as clinical faculty; however, in many educational contexts, as much of the literature suggests, that the two appointments have unclear boundaries (Ramsay & Brua, 2017). PoPs may work full-time or part-time, teach one course or many, and be responsible for teaching and/or for a broad spectrum of departmental duties (Ramsay & Brua, 2017). They can be hired through a search or through other means. They can have some security such as a one to a three-year contract, or none (course to course) (Purcell, 2007). It is important to note that most non-tenure track professors are women (Purcell, 2007).

PoPs bridge theory and practice, bringing the real-world context into the university classroom. Ramsay and Brua (2017) argue that PoPs are uniquely qualified and are aggressively sought after because of their extensive experience in their career field. Turner (1967) defines PoPs as liminal figures that occupy a middle group between business or industry and academia. Sometimes PoPs are also identified as scholar-practitioners based on their engagement in research. PoPs are challenged to leverage their knowledge of their industry or professional culture in service to the new academic culture (Ramsay & Brua, 2017). Gonzalez et al. (2018) highlight that the phenomenal growth in non-tenure track faculty is both of interest and concern, as this growth is embedded in a larger historical and sociopolitical context of racism, sexism, and classism. Although PoPs are supposed to be respected for the expertise they bring

from their business or industry, that respect is not always evident or transferred to higher education.

Experiences of Professors of Practice

Academia is organized into a two-tier system that divides everyone hierarchically; tenure-track, and everyone else. This two-tier system produces social stratification and human oppression (Gonzalez et al., 2018). It is clear that there are blatant distinctions in the ways non-tenure track and tenure track faculty are treated in higher education (Boss et al., 2021). PoPs are hired to share their expertise of the career field with researchers; however, they are not always supported, acknowledged, cultivated and/or respected in higher education because they are not tenure track. Since the inception of non-tenure track faculty, they have been characterized by a lack of institutionalized support. Non-tenure track faculty experience rankism (Fuller, 2015) and are not provided the same opportunities, recognition, or networks as tenure-track faculty due to their lower status. Non-tenure track faculty often feel like they are treated as second-class citizens in American research universities (Hart, 2011; O'Meara et al., 2018; Kezar & Maxey, 2016). Examples of being treated like second class citizens include but are not limited to, the language used in contracts, terms of appointment, titles, salaries, voting rights at faculty meetings, the physical location of offices, eligibility for professional development programs including sabbaticals, lack of career mobility paths, and arbitrary rules and regulations regarding employment. Purcell (2007) argues that real security in academia is the entry into tenure track; however, there are opportunities for PoPs to be promoted to full professor, with longer contracts. This promotion process is ambiguous and complicated in different institutions.

Professors of practice (PoPs) are not viewed in high regard in higher education. Purcell (2007) illuminates that non-tenure track faculty, PoPs, are stigmatized as professional failures as a result of a "pernicious illusion: that of academic meritocracy" (p. 126). Said differently, there is a presumption that those who enjoy tenure positions, earned their place by merit. While the focus of PoPs is upon the practical applications of theory positions them as failures that could not attain a tenure track position. Purcell (2007) continues the argument that non-tenure track faculty are in limbo, meaning that they are in an in-between space, waiting for their career to begin. PoPs are not acknowledged as a legitimate professorship, but of one where they are waiting for an opportunity to land a tenure track position. Furthermore, it is a common-held belief amongst academics that one should never accept a non-tenure track position if they are ever to be taken "seriously." Not aware of these dynamics, many PoPs struggle to find their place in academia, although they know their expertise is valued in their career field.

The mistreatment of PoPs is confounding and contradictory as most have more experience in the career field than their tenure-track colleagues. For example, PoPs specifically in teacher education programs, have served more time in K-12 classrooms and school buildings than tenure track faculty. In some instances, some tenure track faculty have never been classroom teachers; however, they research the realities and experiences of K-12 schooling and prepare pre-service teachers to enter K-12 schools. Furthermore, in appointments, PoPs are expected to adhere to the same expectations as tenure track faculty, without recognition and an

evaluation of their work (Boss et al., 2021). Boss et al. (2021) indicates that non-tenure track faculty are paid less and sometimes only a fraction of what tenure track faculty are paid. However, their workload is most times heavier than tenure-track faculty. Purcell (2007) adds that PoPs move in the shadows, teaching large introductory courses, providing indispensable service to their department and drawing little in return. Purcell (2007) notes that non-tenure track faculty begin their careers, publishing, teaching and attending conferences--even as they choke back the fear that their career will never really begin. Non-tenure track faculty engage in research and service outside of the scope of their contracts, with little to no support or recognition at their institutions (Davis et al., 2020). Not being tenure-track does not negate the experience and expertise of former practitioners. However, this does not stop the rankism and mistreatment that PoPs experience in higher education. This mistreatment and rankism are exacerbated when race and gender are involved, more specifically, when Black women are the majority PoPs.

Experience of Black Women Professors of Practice

Researchers (O'Meara et al., 2018) argue that tenure track women, underrepresented minoritized faculty, and non-tenured faculty have to navigate gendered, racialized, and rankist academic work environments despite efforts to create more inclusive work environments for all faculty. Tenure track women underrepresented minoritized faculty and non-tenured faculty experience implicit bias, structured sexism, racism and rankism (Griffin et al., 2011; O'Meara, 2011a, 2011b). More than half of all women faculty are found in health sciences, education, and humanities (Harper et al., 2001). The new hiring of professors of color is subordinated to the entrenched structural privileges of the insiders (mostly heterosexual white men) (Perry et al., 2009). Although institutions are working to increase the amount of faculty of color, the system of racism, oppression, white supremacy and discrimination, has not been dismantled in these spaces. Their status in the academy can still be characterized as marginal (Perry et al., 2009). Professors of color struggle to penetrate the halls of the predominately white academy; a social institution that excluded the physical and intellectual presence of professors of color (Perry et al., 2009). Black women specifically are welcomed into higher education as outsiders and become even more ostracized when they are below the rank of tenure-track.

Generally, Black professors endure harsh mistreatment in white-dominated institutions. Porcher (2020) argues that Black professors' classroom experiences are both inextricably and negatively linked to their outsider status within white-dominated institutions. Contentious classroom experiences often result from inappropriate acts of student opposition framed by distorted stereotypic belief systems that are inextricably and negatively linked to the Black professor's outsider status (Perry et al., 2009; Porcher, 2020). This outsider within status is exacerbated for Black women PoPs due to gender and power (Boss et al., 2021). Black women are already mistreated because of their race and gender and treated even worse if they are not tenure-track. In general, Black professors' authority and knowledge are questioned as they are accused of promoting their own agenda. Through this autoethnographic study, our experiences as two Black women PoPs at white-dominated institutions are examined to elevate our voices and experiences and offer recommendations for further study as well as institutional change.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Feminism (CRF), a feminist perspective of Critical Race Theory (CRT), focuses on issues of power, oppression, and conflict centralized in feminist theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Originated by Bell (1980), CRT analyzes race and power and its relation to education (Bell, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The tenets of CRT align with CRF, such as the permanence of racism in our society, the importance of narratives, storytelling, and the counternarratives to disrupting normative views of whites, the reality of interest convergence (Bell, 1995), and the importance of race praxis, or action to challenge the status quo (Berry, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Taylor, 1998; Wing, 2000).

CRF expands CRT because it focuses on people who are doubly marginalized by both race and gender (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). It focuses on the “roles, experiences and narratives of women of color” in analyzing systems, structures, and institutions (Pratt-Clarke, 2010, p. 24). CRF adds to feminism by disrupting the idea that there is an essential female experience, namely that of a white, middle-class woman (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). It argues that we must understand the unique experiences of those most impacted, women of color in academia (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015). Through CRF, women of color are no longer at the margins of theoretical discussions and debates (Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012).

CRF uses narrative and storytelling as a means to understand the lives of women of color (Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012). Counter-narratives challenges majoritarian stories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) and rewrites assumptions regarding marginalized groups (Teasdell et al., 2021). Autobiographical writing essentially legitimizes the personal experiences and perspectives of those who are often excluded from the dominant discourse (Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012). It also seeks to expose and subvert the dominant discourse, building on a sense of community among those at the margins of society by providing a space to share their sense of reality and experiences (Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012). For Black women, writing about our collective histories and experiences is a means of survival and liberation (Rodriguez & Boahene, 2012). CRF undergirds this study, because it adds a distinctly feminist lens, as an effort to explore and study the intersections of power, race, class, and gender oppression in higher education, while largely centering our experiences as Black women PoPs.

Methodology

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing that “makes the researcher’s own experiences a topic of investigation in their own right” (Ellis & Bochner, 2003, p. 733). It “seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) to understand a cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 1). Autoethnography displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (Patton, 2002). It centers the writer(s) and allows them to become the subjects of the study (Bhattacharya, 2017). As former members of the PoP culture we reflect upon (Adams et al., 2017), and analyze our personal experiences and narratives within this role.

Autoethnography provides the opportunity for the readers to feel and experience our truth and become coparticipants engaging in storylines morally, emotionally, aesthetically and

intellectually (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). This method as both a process and a product (Ellis et al., 2011) helps us frame our experiences on our own terms and within our own personal frames of meaning, with the goal of generating possible resolutions towards our sense of subjugation as Black women faculty PoPs within teacher education. We reflected on two questions: (1) How do we describe our experiences as Black women PoPs at a white-dominated institution? and (2) What recommendations would we offer to faculty and administrators at a white-dominated institution based on our experiences?

Autoethnography allows for contextualization, in that it afforded us a reflexive (Adams et al., 2017) opportunity to relate our life stories, thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs as they pertained to our experiences as Black women PoPs at a white-dominated institution in a teacher education program. Autoethnography allows us to use our own experiences to garner insights into the larger culture or subculture in which we are part of (Patton, 2002). In addition, it allows an opportunity for us to share personal accounts of our experiences with the majority culture and to express how, in many cases, we have been made to feel like “mules” in teacher education.

Positionality

Dr. Kisha Porcher. I identify as a Black woman. I am the third of seven children. I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio in a low-income community, filled with love, Black culture, support, Black joy, play, and challenges. I am a first generation graduate of high school through post secondary school. Although a first generation graduate, I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors, elders, family and community who were not given equitable opportunities and the ones who refused to assimilate. I am the wife of an amazing partner, and mom of an amazing son. I am currently a tenure track professor at a white-dominated institution, in an English Education program. Prior to this appointment, I was a professor of professional practice at a white-dominated institution for three years. I was a faculty member in the teacher education program; more specifically in the English Education program. Prior to becoming a professor, I was an educational consultant for New York City public schools. I also have a background as a former high school English Language Arts educator and International Baccalaureate coordinator.

Tasha Austin. I identify as a Black woman. As the middle of five children and daughter of parents who earned either a high school diploma or the equivalent, I have found ways to navigate schools at all levels without much of a pattern to follow. I am endowed with the brilliance and ways of knowing both from my parents and my community which includes my siblings, othermothers, friends, ancestors and an array of fictive kin. I was an instructor of professional practice at a white-dominated institution. I am currently a lecturer of Language Education and doctoral candidate with a focus on countering anti-Black racism in language education, as I am proponent of linguistic equity across disciplines. In the dual role of faculty member and doctoral candidate, my expertise reflects a professional repertoire built upon nearly a decade of K-12 Spanish teaching, educational consulting across all disciplines throughout the tri-state area and the successful preparation of teacher educators.

Study Context

Within three years, seven Black women were hired in the teacher education department, along with revamping the curriculum to focus on equity and social justice. This aligns with the trends of some universities. Bertrand & Porcher (2020) argue that institutions of higher education have integrated the voices, knowledge and lived experiences of various underrepresented cultures and excluded groups into their formal academic curriculum due to the movement for multicultural or diversity centered education. They argue that the purpose of this shift is due to interest convergence. On the surface, the hiring of seven Black women appears to be an effort to increase diversity at the university, specifically in the teacher education program. Before the arrival of these Black women, there was one Black woman in the teacher education program. Out of the seven newly hired Black women, one of the women is a tenure-track professor. The rest of the women are professors of practice. This demonstrates that full-time non-tenure track positions are disproportionately filled by women, prompting questions and concerns (Harper et al., 2001). To add to this, more than half of the PoPs are Black women.

More specifically, we were both PoPs in the urban social justice teacher education program, in the Teaching and Learning department. The program's primary goal is to develop a generation of teachers with the skills and dispositions to teach all students while learning from them and their communities (Porcher et al., 2020). Teachers prepared in the teacher education programs learn to critically analyze the social politics of urban, rural and suburban schools and use this analysis to inform their teaching practice toward the empowerment of children and youth (Porcher et al., 2020). As PoPs, we were responsible for teaching one course a semester, observing and completing clinical evaluations for preservice teachers, serving on committees, interfacing and building relationships with partnership districts, and completing a special project.

Data Collection & Analysis

We wrote individual narratives about our experiences as Black women PoPs in a white-dominated teacher education program. We wrote narratives around the three major aspects of our role as PoPs: teaching, clinical experience and service. For the sake of the article, we chose six narratives total; three per person and one per area of the PoP responsibility. We exchanged narratives, to engage in cross-analyses. Our coding process had two cycles. The first cycle was initial coding (Saldaña, 2015). We each individually read through all the narratives to become familiar with the data and identify initial codes for similarities and differences across our narratives. The second round of coding focused on pattern coding. The codes that were generated from our individual reviews were then collapsed into categories, grouping the initial summaries into broader themes that aligned with Hurston's (1937) literary analogy of Black women as mules. Regarding issues of validity, reliability and generalizability, the process of autoethnography directly addresses these in a traditional qualitative sense (Teasdel et al., 2021). Autoethnography is concerned with authenticity, which is established by measuring the data against the goals of the research, which was accomplished during our review and writing process (Le Roux, 2016).

Findings: Black Women: The Mules of the Work

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Zora Neale Hurston (1937) states that “Black women are the mules of the world.” Black women carry the load that white men, white women, and Black men refuse to carry; they do the work that no one wants to do, without praise or thanks. Based on our experiences and expectations as Black women PoPs, we found through the analysis of our narratives, that we are the mules of the work of teacher education. Using a CRF lens, the narratives revealed that the experiences of Black women PoPs were clustered around the job expectations: courses, clinical experience, and committees and meetings. Below are excerpts from our narratives that illustrate our workload in relation to the metaphor of a mule.

We highlight the major aspects of our role as PoPs is highlighted with the following themes:

- Courses:
 - Remnants: Drought Tolerance
 - Safety: Strong & Hardy
- Clinical Experience:
 - Devalued: Navigating Rocky Terrain
 - Dismissed: Braying Amiss
- Committee Meetings:
 - Unseen: Neither Donkey nor Mare
 - Blamed: Placid & Useful

Courses

Through the lens of Black women as mules, two themes were revealed through the narratives focused on courses we taught. The first theme is **remnants: drought tolerance** and the second theme is **safety: strong and hardy**. We were expected to teach courses each semester. When we began our career as PoPs at the university, we were assigned any course that was available. Our expertise ranged from but was not limited to Elementary Education, Literacy Development, Middle School and High School English, Urban Education and Language Education. During our interviews, we were told that we would teach courses in our areas of expertise; however, this was not the case after we started. We were given the remnants of courses that no one wanted to teach. This was the case for Dr. Kisha Porcher.

Remnants: Drought tolerance. Mules are ideal for labor as they weather long stints with minimal sustenance.

I (Dr. Kisha Porcher) was encouraged to ask program coordinators if I could teach in their programs. I was told that I could not teach in one of the programs in the teacher education program. Other Black women PoPs were allowed to teach in the program because they were a former faculty member's student or they worked with the faculty member in the district at one point. It was my first semester and I didn't want to ruffle any feathers, although I knew that I consulted for three years in a large district, increasing test scores for more than 26 schools. I couldn't understand why my expertise was not taken into consideration, nor why I would have to "ask" anyone to teach in their program. I was given intro-level courses to teach, which no one

wanted to teach because there was a clinical component that required preservice teachers to visit schools to observe.

This demonstrates the work of a mule, teaching what no one else wants to teach and being given the remnants. After two years, I was able to fight for the opportunity to teach courses that aligned with my expertise. Along with teaching courses that focused on our expertise, we were also pushed to teach courses that focus on systemic equity issues that we did not create; as the few Black women in the department teaching about all of the ‘-isms.’ Examples of said courses are those that focus on issues of racism, white supremacy, inequity, and diversity. This aligns with research as, nationally, a disproportionate number of instructors of color are engaged in teaching diversity courses in higher education (Porcher, 2020). For professors of color, the classroom, like the larger academy, may reproduce systems of racial oppression. We were teaching in teacher education programs where more than 90% of students are white. As PoPs we were not given the best practices and/or strategies to engage in these discussions (Porcher, 2020). Nor were we reassured that our positions were safe when students wrote negative course evaluations about us and the course content. Furthermore, we did not always feel physically protected from bodily harm during or after class, due to the comments from students during class. This was the case for Tasha Austin.

Safety: Strong and hardy. Mules are ideal for labor as they take up little space and have extreme endurance.

In a particular class session, wherein I (Tasha Austin) showed a short film depicting how the resilience of recent immigrants was not perceived accurately by those who occupied various spaces with them in the United States (i.e. school, work, public transportation), I fielded numerous comments regarding alternative experiences of life in “the States.” Among them, was a comment from a Chinese-American post-baccalaureate EdM student who contested that this difficult experience was not common at all. He continued recounting his family’s immigration story and merit-based ascent to the upper-middle class. There were murmurs of agreement, and once class was over, he, and three other adult male students decided to stay and discuss the topic further. While lingering to discuss after class was common, I felt a distinct concern for my bodily safety, considering the following information:

- *The men were Asian-American and white, all standing upwards of 6ft;*
- *I was to field contrary opinions of the students by myself as a 5’4” Black woman;*
- *The class ended at 10:30 pm in a basement classroom space. The four male students stayed after for nearly 30 mins.*

Although I did not feel safe after this class and others, I was constantly reminded that I was hired because of my expertise in the lives and experiences of emerging bilinguals. In contrast, other scholars argue that identity politics in higher education, along with increased commitments to diversity-centered education, actually affords Black professors a new and authoritative academic space at predominately white institutions (Perry et al., 2009). Professors of color are uniquely qualified through their lived experiences and their consciousness of systems of oppression to instruct diversity-education courses. Dougherty (2000) and Mayberry (1996)

argue that diversity curricula and pedagogical positions are based from “teaching what you are” (marginalized positions) contrasted to “teaching what you are not” (white, heterosexual, middle or upper-class positions) and they assume that some level of credibility and authority is then extended to the outsider within perspective in the classroom. This position provides the opportunity to elevate the voices of marginalized groups, such as Black women (Austin & Hsieh, 2021); however, it shifts the burden and the work from faculty that are privileged by race, when all faculty should be committed to the work of diversity. Love (2019) adds to this argument, “the fact that dark people are tasked with the work of dismantling these centuries-old oppressions is a continuation of racism” (p.9). Teaching the courses that no one wants to teach and teaching content that at times, emotionally triggered us and threatened our safety, demonstrates that we are mules. The workload should be equitable, meaning that one group of people should not be expected to carry the load. There should be a redistribution of power to ensure that there is not a continuation of racism. The workload is not just heavy in courses, but in clinical experience as well.

Clinical Experience

Through the lens of Black women as mules, two themes were revealed through the narratives focused on clinical experience. The two themes are devalued: *navigating rocky terrain* and *dismissed: braying amiss*. We were responsible for supporting students in their clinical experience. Support involves conducting classroom observations, providing effective feedback, and at times, teaching preservice teachers content and pedagogical practices. Specifically, the observations are critical to the teacher education program as it is a required component for state certification. Although we were aware that we were hired to complete clinical observations, the workload was beyond extensive and inequitable. For example, on average, during the fall semester, we conducted close to 100 observations. While conducting observations, we were also required to teach a course, which in most instances, was a required course for students.

As PoPs, we were hired to be context-pedagogical supervisors for preservice teachers. We were hired because of our extensive background in K-12 settings as former teachers, administrators, and consultants. However, as described before, our expertise was not valued by our colleagues. Furthermore, the majority of our colleagues were not actively in school buildings observing students, making their perspectives less than valid when it comes to feedback. We were expected to be the mules of the observation work because our colleagues had no interest in this work; however, our perspectives about student performance were not valued or taken into consideration. This was the case for Tasha Austin.

Devalued: Navigating rocky terrain. Mules are ideal for labor as they can perform routines under harsh conditions.

I (Tasha Austin) worked closely with my student teacher, Beth, to further her practice as a middle school English teacher. Beth’s performance was uneven, and the final observation was to be of a class that I hadn’t had the pleasure of observing until said final observation. During

the lesson, the preservice teacher sorted worksheets and wrote necessary directions on the board after the bell had rung and the students were already seated and waiting.

I took notes and realized that not only did Beth not smile, but she also had miscellaneous cut and paste, matching and “Google the term” station work for the students to complete. As the class drew to a close, a young LatinX student turned her back to Beth, which drove Beth to exclaim, “Don’t you turn your back to me! I will send you directly to the principal, do you hear me?!”

After a difficult post-conference, I notified all program faculty associated with Beth to share her concerns. These exchanges resulted in a unanimous agreement that during a scheduled virtual call with said faculty, Beth and myself, the preservice teacher would be made aware of her need to extend her student teaching experience. Nevertheless, when I called in at the appointed time, I received no answer twice - and finally found myself reading an email that explained that the meeting time was moved up, and the student was encouraged to try the lesson again and record it for feedback. Sending that video to her program advisor would allow her to pass for the semester, and I was copied with a final recommendation to Beth that she, “[e]mail Tasha if you need support.”

After I completed four observations of the preservice teacher and spent considerably more time than the program coordinator had with her (as the program advisor only knew the student by name), my voice was not valued and I was ignored and disrespected by my colleague. I had already navigated the rocky terrain with Beth and carried the workload of observing multiple students, only to be excluded from the decision making. This was also the case for Dr. Kisha Porcher.

Dismissed: Braying amiss. While the vocalizing of mules is distinct, many cannot identify it from other more favored beasts of burden.

One student teacher was switched to my (Dr. Kisha Porcher’s) district for her full-time clinical experience, a few weeks before the semester began. Because of my relationship with the teachers in the district, I reached out to one of the best biology teachers in the district, a LatinX woman, to serve as her full-time cooperating teacher. She is loved by all of her students and well respected by her colleagues. Every student teacher that works alongside this biology teacher is offered a job in the district and they grow in their preparation to enter the classroom. The majority of our student teachers are white, and have very few experiences with people of color. The student teacher told lies about the biology teacher, and indicated that she was uncomfortable being around her. She later told the program coordinator that she was uncomfortable working with teachers of color. I highlighted the students’ comments as racist, privileged and entitled. I also indicated that this was in direct conflict with our goals in the urban social justice program. I urged the program coordinator not to move her, and to use this opportunity as a learning opportunity. The program coordinator moved her to another district to work with a white teacher, without my permission. The student teacher subsequently dropped out of the program.

Our expertise was not taken into consideration by our colleagues. We were devalued, excluded, disrespected, and dismissed from opportunities for student growth. With expertise in recognizing effective teaching, and giving feedback, based on our years of teaching and leading, we were still not acknowledged as experts in our career field. Our workload included work that our tenured colleagues do not engage in; however, they had the power to make decisions without us. This mistreatment and workload extended beyond the course work and clinical experience, to committees and meetings.

Committees & Meetings

Through the lens of Black women as mules, two themes were revealed through the narratives focused on committees and meetings. The two themes are unseen: ***neither donkey nor mare*** and ***blamed: placid and useful***. Along with teaching courses, completing clinical observations, we were also responsible for attending faculty meetings and serving on committees. This was a great opportunity for us as PoPs, as it helps with becoming acclimated to the culture of higher education and more specifically it helps us understand the components of the teacher education program. This is imperative as we are accustomed to the experiences of our career field, and not higher education. We were expected to attend general body faculty meetings and department meetings; however, we were not always respected and/or acknowledged in these meetings as faculty. This was the case for Tasha Austin.

Unseen: Neither donkey nor mare. Mules are ideal for labor because they are less stubborn than donkeys but require less maintenance than horses.

In accepting the role as an instructor of practice, it was clear that I (Tasha Austin) was the lowest ranking full-time faculty in the teacher education department. Having earned two degrees from the institution, I took no issue in the title understanding that in this instance, as in many prior, there was no expectation that someone with my background would or could ever break into higher education considering all the challenges, financial and social access related, that were designed to preclude me from such an opportunity. Nevertheless, I found myself sitting at the first department meeting of the year, during which the department chair shared that there would be a change in the travel stipend for each rank. The department chair began with distinguished professors, then to associate, then to assistant professors. I waited. It seemed as though she'd already changed the subject as I squinted my eyes in a half attempt to recover what I knew was never shared. "What about my rank?" I thought. Beside me sat an ally who was largely responsible for my sustained connection with the university. We sat in such close proximity that I felt my ally shift in her chair. Before thinking about it too deeply, my hand shot up. The department chair was on her third agenda item when she made eye contact with me to acknowledge that I'd been seen, but that she'd need to finish her current point. Then, my ally's hand shot up. The department chair nodded to me and asked that I share my concern. "I want to clarify the stipend amount for instructors of professional practice as we were categorically not referenced during that agenda item." The department chair quickly apologized for the oversight, reassuring the group that it was "all the same." For a moment, I wondered if I was hyperconscious of my invisibility. Had everyone accepted that instructors and assistant

professors were equivalents? Was I perceiving a fantastical and invented microaggression? Were rank and status just a necessary means to provide a promotional path or a true professional and social hierarchy? Just then, the department chair signaled to my ally that she may share her question. To this, she simply answered, “she asked it already.”

This narrative is extremely important as I was one of only two instructors of practice, and I felt invisible in the meeting, not just among tenure-track faculty but other PoPs that have doctorates and thereby the distinct title of ‘assistant professor’ rather than ‘instructor.’ Regardless of my rank the erasure was a reminder of my expendability despite my workload being just as heavy as everyone else’s.

Blamed: Placid and useful. Mules are ideal for labor as they take up little space and have extreme endurance.

During a meeting with PoPs, one tenure track faculty joined the meeting. She was the first person on the agenda. She began the conversation by stating, “Students in our program are not learning in their clinical placement. They are leaving the program, not ready to teach in their field. You all need to change their placements.” Nothing was mentioned about their coursework, only their clinical experience. We were told, not asked to rearrange their placements, to ensure that preservice teachers were learning. PoPs are responsible for all placements for students in their district. We work diligently to ensure that preservice teacher placements meet the state requirements. The associate dean knew how hard we worked to maintain partnerships with districts and provide quality support for student teachers. She did not stand up for us and allowed the tenure track professor to disrespect us, and make statements without evidence. I (Dr. Kisha Porcher) decided to speak up for us and let her know that her statements were not true and lacked evidence. She left angry and the entire mood of the meeting shifted.

Along with attending faculty meetings, PoPs are also responsible for attending professor of practice meetings. These meetings are supposed to be used to discuss clinical work, professional development, and best practices; however, they turn into spaces where PoPs are constantly bombarded with additional responsibilities considered menial and undesirable. This sacred space for PoPs also turns into spaces wherein tenure-track faculty inform PoPs of the best way to do their job and/or that they are not doing their job correctly. We were blamed for the challenges that students have without evidence of us causing the problem.

We understand that we were hired as PoPs. We sincerely believed that joining faculty as PoPs was an opportunity to transition to higher education and impact the future teachers that would enter K-12 spaces. What we found was that the new PoP role exists because our presence is of interest to the teacher education program. We carried the load that our white colleagues would not, without displays of gratitude or support. We enjoyed the work that we engaged in and believed that we were impacting the lives of future teachers. However, we did not desire to be the mules of teacher education.

Discussion & Recommendations

The purpose of our autoethnographic study was to examine our narratives as two Black women professors of practice (PoPs) in a white-dominated teacher education program. We addressed the following research questions using our personal narratives: (1) How do we describe our experiences as Black women PoPs at a white-dominated institution? and (2) What recommendations would we offer to faculty and administrators at a white-dominated institution based on our experiences? The narratives were analyzed utilizing a critical race feminism theory lens.

The findings revealed themes that mirror Zora Neale Hurston's (1937) analogy, "Black women are the mules of the world." The data demonstrates that Black women carry the load that white men, white women, and Black men refuse to carry; they do the work that no one wants to do, without praise or thanks. We entered teacher education and higher education excited and ready to prepare teachers to teach students like us. Our expectations as PoPs were communicated within our contracts; however, it serves to posit that it is work no one else will do unless it is what Bell (1980) coins as interest convergence. Interest convergence is the interests of Blacks in gaining racial equality are only accommodated when they have converged with the interests of powerful whites. The presence of the seven Black women PoPs in the Teaching and Learning department presents the opportunity to enter higher education; however, it also benefits the teacher education program goals and state requirements. Unbeknownst to us, we entered teacher education programs, to carry the physical and psychological load in the courses they teach, clinical experience for pre-service teachers, serving on committees and attending meetings. Due to the small homogenous sampling, we recognize that our experiences are not generalizable and are a limitation of the study. However, autoethnographies are valued for their verisimilitude and our narratives are distinctly and authentic in that way.

If the narratives of Black women professors of color are ignored rather than amplified, the recruitment and retention of faculty of color in higher education will continue to stall. Topics of race and equity for Black women PoPs deserve a greater share of research efforts. Social science researchers should examine how both Blackness and gender impact what faculty positions that are available and offered to Black women, the ways in which they are treated in faculty positions, and given the workload that their white colleagues will not do.

Recommendations

Although our roles have changed and we are no longer professors of professional practice, we believed in the impact that we could have in this role on preservice teachers and students in K-12 spaces. We decided to leave this role due to the ways in which we were treated as mules in teacher education. We prioritized our mental health and worth, and made a decision that was best for us. However, there is much to learn from our experiences that we wish to share. Due to the experiences of Black faculty described above, there may be other Black women PoPs that have similar experiences to ours. Below are recommendations to improve the practices in teacher education for Black women PoPs and in some instances, all Black professors.

Courses. There should be a shared commitment to the teaching of equity and diversity. This load should not just be upon the Black women professors of practice, or any Black

professors. Furthermore, when Black professors are expected to teach courses that focus on challenging systems of racism, white supremacy, and oppression, it should be understood that their evaluations might reflect the discomfort of white sensibilities. Also, there should be support and strategies for them to engage their white students in a discussion about these topics. All faculty “safety” should be ensured. For example, the buildings that we teach in should have safety precautions in case uncomfortable situations arise.

Clinical Experience. All faculty should engage in clinical experience to stay connected, remain relevant and responsive to the needs of schools and students rather than its strict relegation to Black PoPs. If we are preparing preservice teachers to enter the classroom as teachers, we should be close to the work. As teacher educators, we should be aware of the context, teaching, and learning in actual classroom settings. We are aware that many tenure track faculty have the privilege to make this choice; however, how can one prepare students for something they are not connected to, aware of, or active in?

Committees and Meetings. There should be a concrete effort to ensure that professors of practice are visibly included and valued within the university setting. University administrators should ensure that professors of practice expertise are held with high regard. Furthermore, the work of both tenure track and professors of practice are equally important in teacher education, and the acknowledgement of one should not hold more weight than the other.

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