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## Invisible Minds: Marginalizing Minority Women in the American Academy of Higher Education

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**Invisible Minds: Marginalizing Minority Women in the American Academy of  
Higher Education**

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of English

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Gianna Suzanne Kujawski

May 2, 2019

## **Invisible Minds: Marginalizing Minority Women in the American Academy of Higher Education**

*“I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect more than ourselves. We’ve been taught that silence would save us, but it won’t.” – Audre Lorde*

The year 2018 witnessed the evolution of the #MeToo movement, which spurred more women to run for U.S. political office than ever before and more women to ascend to the position of CEO in male-dominated fields. The representation of female voices has grown with the times, but there is one institution that continues to silence women: the American Academy of Higher Education. Generally speaking, the female voice continues to be silenced in today’s society, but it is still especially difficult for women representing a racial minority status to be heard. The world of academia remains a male-dominated field which marginalizes women and people of color, and thus leaves little to no room for women of color. A small sample of the hardships faced by women of color academics includes pervasive silencing, tokenization, and frequent demands made by universities to take part in many institutional committees without compensation, thus stretching themselves egregiously thin. The combination of the lack of representation and the systemic problems that exist within many institutions leaves the academy with an ongoing socio-political problems.

Unfortunately, the problem is deep-seated within the academy, and is continuously perpetuated by racist, classist, and sexist societal ideologies. For women of color working in academia, the use of narrativization to vocalize these issues is not only a critical tool for self-healing, but also a critical tool in forming a community with other women who endure similar hardships. The problem, however, is how one elicits

institutional change based on the problems presented in texts such as *Unlikely Allies in the Academy* and in pieces of published peer-reviewed scholarship by women of color in the Liberal Arts and Sciences. These texts provide a foundation from which these women can create a community that is necessary to survive the institution. Through narratives, a platform is created from which others – those who perpetuate or endorse the adverse actions exposed in such narratives – can become cognizant of the pervasive problems continually infiltrating the ivory halls. The academy of higher education is a microcosm of the dominant, patriarchal values found outside the ivory tower; thus, an awareness is needed of the ways in which what is perceived as a “liberal” and “progressive” institution is also in need of political reformation (Redfern 169).

In the current era of high racial, sexist, and classist tensions fueled by the United States’ President, Donald J. Trump, silencing is horrifyingly pervasive towards minorities. Unfortunately, there is no exception to where such silencing occurs. The institution of higher education was founded – and continues to be dominated – by white, heterosexual, upper-class men, thus placing anyone who deviates from that established norm in a place of expected submission and exclusion. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that women of color started entering the academy, as

the traditional academy was not designed as a place for people of color, white women or people from working class origins.... the academy was intended to be occupied by white males and is still designed to serve such a group of men, particularly those with economic power and social status. (Balderrama et al.139)

Therefore, minority women today continue to face “mechanisms developed by white men that reinforce their dominant values and their power to define who is included, excluded or kept in the periphery of the academy” (Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul 95), and this established model ultimately “works against minority women who have to overcome gender and race issues on top of trying to excel in the academy” (95).

It is no surprise that speaking against the traditional and discriminatory practices present in the academy causes repercussions to one’s career, which then leaves the individual in anguish due to the feeling of being rendered voiceless and invisible<sup>1</sup>. This is consistently the experience of women of color within the academy, which is utterly disheartening. The safest – albeit not entirely risk free – form of vocalizing the discriminatory actions taken against women of color is through writing; that is, through *narrativizing* one’s experience. As of the current moment, to have a voice this appears to be the most beneficial option for women of color.

This interdisciplinary thesis will illustrate the adverse experiences faced by women of color professors in the academy through narratives and peer-reviewed scholarship, thus placing all the adverse forms of discrimination in one collated place. Providing a collection of these experiences is essential for understanding the magnitude of the obstacles that women of color face within the academy. Through the application of trauma theory, I will prove the precarious state on which both the academy and women of color are wavering, based on the testimonials provided in the narratives of women’s experiences. The analysis of such texts makes apparent that these experiences elicit

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<sup>1</sup> (See: Baldarrama et al., Odhiambo, Charoenpanitkul, Yenkia-Agbaw and Hidalgo-de Jesus).

similar reactions to that of a minor traumatic event. I propose, that although the experiences women of color face in the academy are not necessarily traumatic, the current state of the academy is placing these women in a precarious state of a climacteric affliction – a state of psychological distress – which then produces effects similar to those associated with a trauma; therefore, an exigency to acknowledge and interrogate the adverse experiences women of color face in the academy exists. I explore the ways in which writing is a fundamental tool that can help an individual cope, as it acts as a form of scriptotherapy. I then demonstrate that writing is one of the only outlets for women of color to express their grievances, and is a fundamental tool needed for growth, coping, and stability when occupying a career within the academy. Finally, I will demonstrate how the text *Unlikely Allies in the Academy: White Women and Women of Color in Conversation* is proof of the benefit that narrative writing can have, due to its generation of dialogue and formulation/cultivation of cross-racial alliances. It is through these narratives that a cultural shift can be made within the academy.

Ultimately, all of this will contribute to the overarching, and perhaps unanswerable, question: *Where do we go from here?*

### **Part One: The Rules**

Prior to an exploration of narratives written by women of color in the academy, understanding the adverse hardships they face within the institution is critical. The infrastructural problem that exists within the tenure-track system forms the rocky base from which subsequent grievances inflict immense stress upon women of color faculty.

Tokenization and pervasive silencing are the two primary adverse entities that contribute to the unfortunate reactions such as burnout and feelings of imposter syndrome, which in turn prompts a need for coping strategies in order to thrive within the ivory tower.

Ultimately, the “marginalization of minority faculty continues to challenge institutions of higher learning” (Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul 93), thus requiring deep interrogation of the practices that do so.

## **Tenure**

Before analyzing the individual discriminatory experiences that many women of color faculty face in their day-to-day academic lives, one must acknowledge the infrastructural problem plaguing institutions of higher education. This issue is the root of the socio-political problem that forces women of color professors to remain in a stagnant position that subjects them to adverse actions such as tokenization, pervasive silencing, and disproportionately high work demands.

Tenure is the problem. Or, more succinctly: the lack of available tenure-track jobs.

The job market for tenure-track professors is utterly nonexistent at the moment, as Frank Donoghue explains in *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities*. He continues, “too many observers now describe the current state of higher education...as a crisis” (20), and that “the origins of that ‘crisis,’ however, can be traced to the early 1970s, when universities began hiring adjunct teachers as a money-



saving policy” (45). As a result, “the proportion of tenure-track jobs steadily declined” (45).

Furthermore, under the tenure system, there are different sets of “rules,” both hidden and transparent, that every faculty member must follow. Women of color, however, are subjected to a variety of ‘private’ rules that impose additional obstacles when climbing the tenure ladder, as exposed by Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M. Ling. It is through the exposure of these private rules that the inequities of the system become more visible.

Finding a tenure-track position within the Liberal Arts and Sciences is nothing short of an uphill battle. Currently, traditional job openings in the academy consist predominantly of “instructor,” “lecturer,” and “adjunct” positions, which are defined/limited by lower wages and virtually zero job security. Conversely, once one has achieved tenure status, job security is attained. Under this status, one has greater academic freedom in what is taught and generally cannot be fired or dismissed unless an act considered criminal is done. Although this seems to be clear, cut and dried, the tenure system is rapidly changing under nuanced, covert rules from which tenure is granted and then taken away. These hidden parameters behind the tenure process is addressed in Professor Leah Wasburn-Moses’ article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “We Make Tenure Decisions Unfairly. Here’s a Better Way.” Wasburn-Moses, professor in the College of Education, Health and Society at Miami University, states “after 12 years on the tenure track, having played the game well enough to be promoted to full, I was simply fed up with the system” (Wasburn-Moses). She proclaims, “our futures hinge on: (1) the amount of research we produce that nobody will ever read, (2) the extent to which

our students like us, and (3) the number of committees we chair that will never do anything” (Wasburn-Moses). Aligning with attaining tenure, the guarantee of job security once achieving tenure is, too, changing rapidly. In an article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Why 2 Tenured Faculty Members Were Dismissed After a Departmental Dispute,” Cailin Crowe exposes that job security is no longer a guarantee. Crowe explains that “the communications department at St. Edward’s University had been without permanent leadership for some time” (Crowe), resulting in tensions between faculty. Tensions rose after a heated exchange during a department meeting, and Professors Shannan Butler and Corinne Weisgerber were both dismissed exactly one month later (Crowe). When the American Association of University Professors conducted an investigative report, it was concluded that the professors were “dismissed because of their outspoken criticism of the administration” (Crowe). This situation is representative of the temperamental climate within the tenure system, and understanding the system is an important step toward gaining better insight into an often harsh academic climate. With this in mind, it is clear that instructors, lecturers, and adjuncts live in a particularly precarious state within the academy and are not afforded the luxury of job security. In fact, these individuals are not even afforded the option to work towards tenure unless they occupy a tenure-track position. Additionally, for minority women, “obtaining tenure is much more difficult...because they must prove themselves harder than others” (Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul 101).

Women of color instructors, lecturers, and adjuncts live in a perilous state within an institution. The message is sent that their jobs within the ivory tower are highly tenuous, thus inciting a demand for ways of coping. However, individuals without job

security must be vigilant of their actions. Speaking out against a problematic system, or the ways in which racism and sexism exists within the ivory walls, is causal for dismissal. Additionally, one risks possibly losing promotion – even through the tenure system – when speaking out against injustices within the system.

Further, it cannot be denied that this is even more risky for women of color, who have a preexisting inequity within the academy due to their ethnicity. When some faculty were asked if they would contribute to the conversation surrounding this issue for the book *Race, Women of Color, and the State University*, it was noted that “while many untenured female faculty of color liked the idea and would have loved to contribute to the volume, they felt they would be punished” (Yenika-Agbaw and Hidalgo-de Jesus 9), while others thought it would be a “waste of time” (9) because “nothing would change” (9). These sentiments are indicative of how oppressive the system is and how defeating it can be to these individuals.

Hardships targeted toward women of color, specifically, within the tenure system are expressed through Amarilis Hidalgo-de Jesus’ narrative “It Is My Time to Speak Out: A Puerto Rican Woman’s Teaching Journey in Rural Pennsylvania,” which makes evident the racial biases working against her. Now a full Professor of Spanish at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, Hidalgo-de Jesus shares experiences of discriminatory actions committed against her by her department. When up for review for promotion from Assistant to Associate Professor, intimate details of her professional and personal life were discussed amongst colleagues (Hidalgo-de Jesus 60). Hidalgo-de Jesus faced a myriad of invasive actions, such as a colleague calling her house accusing her of being a “harasser,” labeled by her fellow university community members as a

“conflictive” person, and “someone who was not collegial” (Hidalgo-de Jesus 59). These negative assessments had no validity for Hidalgo-de Jesus, as she had upheld amicable relations with all her colleagues. It was not until *after* she was ranked the #1 candidate for the position by the provost, and *not* by the departmental committee, that these actions were committed against her. Sadly, this experience is not unique and not solely experienced by women of color, but to all women in the academy. There are gendered implications that women encounter when up for promotion, or if speaking against the dominant system; these women are frequently labeled “whiners,” or “complainers”.

Upon hearing of this ranking by the provost “members of the committee who discuss/promote professors to full tenured positions, were infuriated by the provost’s decision to place her on the priority list and called other professors to conspire against her promotion” (Hidalgo-de Jesus 59). Hidalgo-de Jesus recalls, “it is not a secret in my department and the university that I have been the object of an open and vicious academic persecution and that specific personal interests have been protected at the expense of my students’ academic performance and my own professional integrity” (61). Even after receiving promotion, her colleagues went to the Dean in order to “request the dismantling of a program she co-created” for Latinx students (60). Thus, because Hidalgo-de Jesus’ narrativized her experience, one is able to see how the undermining of her promotion and character directly impacted her students, who the university should be serving first and foremost.

Hidalgo de-Jesus explains,

I have learned to focus on working closely with my students, the Hispanic student association, the international students, the exchange and study

abroad programs, and the university community in general. I have a commitment to the Hispanic community in exposing their culture and struggles... (62)

In this case, perceived “social responsibility” carries a heavier weight than the prejudices and maltreatment perpetuated by the institution and those privileged within it. Although the actions committed against her affects her well-being, Hidalgo de-Jesus keeps her students at the forefront of her attention. Concluding her narrative, Hidalgo de-Jesus poses a question; writing:

As I finish writing this essay, I persist in asking myself how institutions of higher education that are aware of all the injustices that year after year are perpetrated against their faculty by their own faculty and administrators, do not openly broach the issue. I also ask myself why the system perpetuates the abuses committed against faculty, and why those abused faculty engage in the same vicious cycle. There are still moments when I question myself on why I have kept struggling here. (65)

Hidalgo de-Jesus not only highlights multiple issues I will address in this essay, but also shows the ways in which – through utilizing the narrative process to start a dialogue regarding the pervasive issues that target women of color professors – storytelling can open the doors for a much-needed cultural shift.

Overall, “women of all ethnic minorities are faced with marginalization on common grounds such as racial and sexual discrimination, lack of role models, and lack of professional contacts” (Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul 98). In Anna M. Agathangelou and L.H.M Ling’s piece, “An Unten(ur)able Position,” the authors express the

significance the academy has provided regarding multiculturalism and multicultural learning for students. Although this may be true for the student population, it is almost certainly not the case for the faculty and staff populations, specifically women of color who are the very individuals who tend to spearhead such multicultural learning. The authors explain that “publicly, [the academy] offers an array of multiculturalism while, privately, it bars real entry to those who are diversity’s foremost agents.... the U.S. academy’s abysmal record for tenure for its least represented yet most crucial faculty for multicultural learning: women of color” (Agathangelou and Ling 369). Agathangelou and Ling propose that tenure reflects “a narrative of institutional power” (370); through drawing on narratives from women of color they find a

series of private rules and power relations operating *behind* the public rhetoric of tolerance and diversity. These rationalize racism, sexism, and classism in order to screen out persons who do not fit the academy’s designation of who and what the faculty of color should be. (370)

Acknowledging these “private rules” is a necessity in order to dissect the racism, sexism, and classism that exists within the academy. Through acknowledging and vocalizing these “private rules,” they become visible and are open to interrogation, which can potentially dismantle the covert discrimination plaguing women of color.

Agathangelou and Ling expose the following “private rules”:

- 1) For women and faculty of color – especially women of color – the tenure process typically induces a highly charged atmosphere where hidden rules and subsidiary criteria suddenly apply. A candidate’s *particularities*, rather than a supposedly universal standard, tend to predispose her tenure

outcome, even if the decision is made in the name of liberal rationality, transparency, universality, and objectivity.

- 2) .... the candidate's acceptability is measured, invariably, by how much her position approximates the 'mainstream' rather than adds to it
- 3) routinized applications of Affirmative Action or Equal Opportunity guidelines conflate 'representation' (a warm body) with 'participation' (an active voice). Faculty of color as 'extras' expected to play pre-scripted, supporting roles in the academy.
- 4) For women faculty, an unspoken heteronormativity further requires their adherence to conventional definitions of 'femininity'. This institutionalized hierarchy of values and rewards produces an internalized racism, sexism, and classism among women and faculty of color. (370)

Agathangelou and Ling documenting these "private rules" demonstrates the unjust ways in which the dominant system transitions to a more visible state, and thus becomes more susceptible for interrogation. Acknowledging additional rules that women of color professors should follow in order to thrive in the academy shows the inequality that exists for these women in comparison to white faculty members.

In contrast to Agathangelou and Ling's "private rules" that are systemically imposed, Alicia King Redfern describes a different set of rules she – as well as other women of color – uses in order to survive within the academy in "Surviving in PASSHE: Five Fundamental Principles for Women of Color." In order to counteract the rules depicted by Agathangelou and Ling, Redfern proposes these strategies to assist in better navigating one's careers and daily, pervasive hardships:

- 1) Learn the rules which the academy “plays by”
- 2) Know who’s who in the academy
- 3) Know what one REALLY wants to attain in the academy, that is, have specific goals
- 4) Develop basic survival (or resiliency) strategies
- 5) Be aware that racism is alive and well in the academy (Redfern 164, emphasis original)

Redfern affirms that, “these principles have not only sustained me over the years, but enabled me to be happy working at Bloomsburg University for the past 15 years” (164).

Although such rules or strategies are helpful to note, it is incredibly problematic that such rules *need* to exist. (Food for thought: such rules are nonexistent for white men in the academy.)

In her article, “Lectures, Evaluations, and Diapers: Navigating the Terrains of Chicana Single Motherhood in the Academy,” Michelle Tellez neatly explains the perpetual plight for women of color in the higher education system. She states,

as a faculty member who is also a Chicana, my presence in the academy stands in the face of decades of marginalizing practices and policies in the U.S. education system. These policies and the engrained Western culture of the education system of privilege, support, and validate the experiences of bodies of white, able-bodied, middle-upper-class heterosexual males [and] as it stands, women and faculty of color are less likely to earn tenure and to enter tenure-track positions. (80-88)



This is the simple truth in the contemporary moment, which needs further attention in order to create a positive shift within the institution that does not discriminate against women of color and does not require ‘rules’ in order to progress in the institution.

### **Tokenization**

As defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, tokenism is “the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from under-represented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce” (“tokenism”). As a result, this individual often becomes the voice for the racial minority, their personal ethnic culture, and a myriad of other racial issues within an established system. Therefore, due to the underrepresentation of women of color within the ivory tower, the amount of excessive work (meaning the additional commitments made on top of preparing and teaching courses; researching and writing for publication; and other departmental requirements) and subsequent added pressure is troubling.

This added work and pressure derives from the overuse of these women for work in diversity committees and diversity initiatives. Due to their perceived “ethnic authority” women of color are frequently called upon to assist in diversifying the student and faculty populations on campus; to assist in improving campus environments for all students across races; and to assist in recruiting diverse voices to speak to and educate the campus community. Further, there are often added commitments in advising, as the woman of color professor frequently acts as advisor to many students of color who seek mentors of

similar minority status. Diana I. Rios, associate professor in the Department of Communications Sciences at the University of Connecticut-Storrs, explains why students pursue such mentors, “because we faculty of color are all they have as role models of academic success” (385). As a woman of color within the institution, Rios confides “we have a tall order to fill in life” (Reyes and Rios 385). The combination of a rigorous workload and additional commitments inflicts immense pressure. Eucabeth Odhiambo and Chantana Charoenpanitkul explain in their piece “Marginalization: A Continuing Problem in Higher Education” that “minority faculty face pressure to perform above and beyond normal levels. Minority faculty often find themselves serving on various university-wide committees as official and unofficial advisers, often resulting in added pressure” (93).

A veil of “social-responsibility” often exists when one is of a minority status in a predominantly white institution. Therefore, many women of color in the academy do not want to deny tasks that fall outside of their “required” workload, due to the perceived responsibility to be a voice against racist, sexist, and classist issues found within the institution. A woman of color’s ethnic status places her between a rock and a hard place: there is the pressure to assimilate and perhaps deny one’s own cultural identity in order to better “fit” in the institution, while the white majority simultaneously (if perhaps unintentionally) takes advantage of the woman’s ethnic status via overbearing demands to work on diversity committees and diversity initiatives. Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul add that “the pressure to deny one’s cultural identity comes from the fact that the academic environment reflects the majority white culture and in order to survive, minority faculty members must assimilate” (94). Yet, on the contrary, many in the white

administration and faculty populations use the ethnic minority in the academy to fulfill diversity related quotas.

Perhaps the most addressed form of tokenization that women of color face is the demand to take part in campus diversity work<sup>2</sup>. This added work “prevents them from focusing on teaching, research, and publishing in order to gain tenure and promotion” (Odhimabo and Charenpanitkul 102). This particular issue is highlighted in Odhimabo and Charenpanitkul’s work. These authors explain that minority professors are expected to “carry out diversity initiatives such as student recruitment” (102), and “to serve on numerous institutional committees, to spend significantly more time on advising and counseling minority students and confronting prejudice” (102). Both authors – who happen to be women of color academics themselves – note that the work is without a doubt fulfilling, but when adding this superfluous effort, an inevitable deviation from the work required for promotion takes place, as well as an increase in stress. Additionally, if a woman of color in this position decides to take a step back from the added work, a sense of guilt may manifest, which causes further stress and mental anguish<sup>3</sup>.

Although having a person of minority status speak on matters involving social justice and diversity is necessary and beneficial, the work done by diversity committees on campuses cannot solely fall on the token few minority women of color. It is not the sole responsibility of these individuals to see diversity initiatives through; instead, administration, faculty, and staff need to be doing this work collectively. This is a larger issue explored by Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy in his piece, “The Implementation of

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<sup>2</sup> (See: Odhiambo and Charenpanitkul, Balderrama et al., Tellez, McKinley Jones Brayboy, Lease, August and Waltman, Austin and Rice).

<sup>3</sup> (See: Balderrama et al., Reyes and Rios).

Diversity in Predominately White Colleges and Universities.” McKinley Jones Brayboy states: “I intend to show how and in what ways the implementation of diversity may, in fact, reify the status quo and continued marginalization of diversity and faculty (or scholars) of color” (73). McKinley Jones Brayboy exposes the ways in which this process tokenizes minorities taking part in such committees. He further proves the ways the process of implementing diversity perpetuates a state of color-blindness; explaining “the concept is suggestive of the way that predominantly White institutions of higher education often view diversity as a free-standing policy, and the way that diversity is something that can be implemented without necessarily changing the underlying structure of the institution and its day-to-day operations” (73). This assessment can certainly be extended past the student body and on to the faculty and staff that comprise the university as well. Through the tokenization of the very individuals the university is trying to attain, the root of the problem is ignored. McKinley Jones Brayboy continues to explain:

Being marked as part of the implementation of diversity means that faculty of color carry an extra responsibility at the institution; White faculty, by remaining unmarked, continue to operate under the expectation that they can be faculty members. Faculty of color, are thereby, expected to be faculty members and facilitators to implement diversity. (74)

Complicating this issue further is the fact that diversity work is often not rewarded or acknowledged as a major contribution to the university, thus hindering the career advancement of those who would perform that work. Adalberto Aguirre, quoted in “Una Lucha de Fronteras (A Struggle of Borders): Women of Color in the Academy,” notes that such roles, particularly when fulfilled by women of color are “ignored in the faculty

reward system, especially the awarding of tenure” (qtd. in Balderrama et al., 138).

Ultimately, tenure is the goal, but as explained above, this is already difficult to achieve due to the dominant structure it continually follows. Setting that aside, when a woman of color is being reviewed for tenure or promotion, the diversity-related work she may have done is frequently not only not taken into consideration, but is also actually seen as a disadvantage due to it taking time away that could instead be dedicated to publishing. The institution tokenizes the woman based on the color of her skin, but does not reward her for the work they demand of her. Aguirre further complicates this predicament, illustrating the tough terrain that women of color have to navigate as they are “ascribed a peripheral role in the academic workplace and are expected to perform roles that are in conflict with expectations” (138). These “expectations,” of course, are in reference to the “publish or perish” ideology that completely encompasses the tenure-track path.

In Maria Balderrama’s narrative, found in “Una Lucha de Fronteras (a Struggle of Borders): Women of Color in the Academy,” she expresses her experiences as a Latina woman in the academy. Balderrama, an Associate Professor in the College of Education at California State University-San Bernardino explains that the “social responsibility” she feels surpasses the frustrations that derive from being tokenized, but also acknowledges that she certainly falls victim to tokenization. She explains, “all I knew was that I wanted to teach others and to help others discover themselves and the world through books, research, [and] learning” (145); she continues, “social responsibility became and has remained a priority in my personal and professional life. By social responsibility I mean a sense of altruism, or duty, to do my part in addressing and interrupting inequity, unfairness, injustice and inhumanity in their various forms” (145). Balderrama shows the

power that social responsibility can have in a beneficial light. For her, a difference is being made through the inevitable tokenization that derives from being a woman of color at a university, but the difference made *is* the reward for her. Although the added stress from the social responsibility is there, Balderrama shows how the pros can sometimes out way the cons.

## **Silencing**

Silence perpetuates oppression. Not acknowledging, addressing, or admitting a problem exists contributes to the act of silencing, and in this case, specifically the silencing of women of color within the academy. Although there are allies, and some individuals may participate in the system unintentionally, this silence is most often perpetrated by white men, white women, tenured professors, and through the delegitimization of women of color's publications. With an issue this pervasive and oppressive, it is hard to fathom how to lessen its destruction. The first step is to vocalize the experiences that keep women of color in a state of silence, which I propose is through narrative writing.

The American battle against silencing women has spanned centuries. From the Women's Suffrage movement (which, historically, omitted women of color), to the #METOO movement, women are constantly fighting to be heard. The continual discrimination against women in the workplace is also a longstanding issue, and the discrimination that exists in such a place is heightened if the woman embodies a marginalized status on top of her already disadvantaged gender status. Therefore, women

of color are at a greater disadvantage in the academy where the act of silencing is already pervasive towards women as a whole.

In the academy, the primary act of silencing is done through acts of exclusion and social isolation. The exclusion “is mainly the result of majority faculty perception that minority faculty are hired to fulfill affirmative action and/or that they are less competent” (Knowles & Harleston qtd. in Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul 94). Regardless of an individual woman of color’s credentials or quality of work, she is frequently seen as less than qualified – as getting a free pass (simply because of their ethnic minority status). Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul note in “Marginalization: A Continuing Problem in Higher Education,” “affirmative action requires that a certain number of minority are employed; however, it does not mean sacrificing quality” (94). Unfortunately, this is a common misconception.

The act of exclusion is enforced through mechanisms “developed by white faculty that reinforce their dominant values and their power to define who is included, excluded or kept in the periphery of the academy” (Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul 95). It is these mechanisms that assert and reinforce the “traditional academic model, designed by and for white males” (Odhiambo and Charoenpanitkul 95). This particular model implements competition instead of cooperation and works against any individual who exhibits multiple intersections: racial identity, sexual orientation, gender, etc. Balderrama, Texeria, and Valdez explore the ways

the traditional academy was not designed as a place for people of color, white women or people from working class origins.... The academy was intended to be occupied by white males and is still designed to serve such

a group of men, particularly those with economic power and social status.  
(139)

The academy of higher education began as a man's world, and continues to be a man's world. Thus, when a woman of color utilizes her voice, particularly when attempting to publishing a piece of scholarship, her work is often delegitimized. Balderrama, Texeria, and Valdez express that "many regard our scholarly work, framed by a consciousness of social responsibility, as 'watered down' scholarship" (140). The authors explain that it is not uncommon for this type of work to be questioned for its relevancy, which derives from the simple fact that most of this work is calling attention to the inequities that exist within a white supremacist, patriarchal society. Mary Texeria specifically notes that many faculty of color explore "minority issues" in their research, which is not considered legitimate to the white, tenured faculty that review it (149). She continues: "oral histories, ethnographies, and case studies, especially if these are done within a feminist framework, are not given the validity as quantitative research" (149). Additionally, a woman of color's fear of potential repercussion if she speaks out against the discriminatory system that is the academy, is a form of silencing that is deeply rooted within the system's infrastructure.

Christine A. Stanley explores this issue in her article, "Coloring the Academic Landscape: Faculty of Color Breaking the Silence in Predominantly White Colleges and Universities," in which she ascribes this form of silencing as a "burdensome cycle that is rarely broken" (701). This is further compounded when white women are also afraid to speak up for the fear of similar repercussions; however, when an individual from a



dominant group speaks out, it can have a greater impact. Stanley shows the duality that occurs when an individual from the dominant group speaks up, stating:

When members of the dominant group speak up, it has tremendous impact because the dynamics of power, positionality, and authority are attributes that can only serve to deepen dialogues and influence policy and decision making on diversity and social justice in our colleges and universities.

Conversely, when members of the targeted group speak up, the cost for us is enormous because these same dynamics are not yet equitable. (702)

For these reasons, narratives are important because they uniquely allow for the expression of inequities one has experienced in one's own words. When using the written word to express such hardships, it becomes something tangible for an individual to pick up and absorb – as opposed to having the ability to silence someone when that individual is speaking aloud. Stanley, too, conveys the power of narrative writing. She expresses that such narratives can act as “tuning forks for faculty and administrators at predominantly white colleges and universities. The purpose of this work is to share the themes from these narratives as well as offer recommendations for individuals and institutions working to recruit and retain faculty of color in higher education” (703).

Writing becomes a critical tool to vocalize the personal, the political, and to contribute to the changing of an oppressive, pervasive systemic culture in the academy.

## **Part Two: The Risks**

The adverse entities that affect the lives of women of color within the academy can/may bring about damaging consequences. These consequences include mental and physical anguish brought on by imposter phenomenon, which leads to job burnout, and therefore, a subsequent lack of retention. Seeing the ways in which all of these entities connect and coexist allows for a better understanding of the hardships that women of color face in the academy, and for others to better understand the tremendous loss institutions of higher education suffer due to the longstanding white supremacist, patriarchal infrastructure that breeds such pervasive, oppressive effects. It is easy to overlook these injustices when enduring the daily grind; therefore, reading the narratives and writings on such issues allows for the visibility of such problems, and allows for an opening for positive development.

### **Imposter Phenomenon**

The accumulation of adverse entities against women of color in the academy takes a toll on both mental and physical health, which is seen through imposter syndrome, or imposter phenomenon, and job burnout. In her study, “Outing the Imposter: A Study Exploring Imposter Phenomenon among Higher Education Faculty,” Holly M. Hutchins outlines the ways in which untenured faculty “experience moderate levels of IP [Imposter Phenomenon] with the highest reported by untenured faculty” (3). Imposter phenomenon is described “experiencing the burgeoning doubt that somehow they lucked out to have

experienced the success they did and that they are waiting – and fearing – that someone will soon find out that they really are not as good as other’s believe” (Hutchins 3). The study was first founded by Clance and Imes in 1978. They described it as “the experience of fraudulent thoughts and the inability to internally attribute personal achievement as imposter phenomenon (IP) by studying a sample of highly successful professional women, many of who had obtained advanced degrees and were in leadership positions” (qtd. in Hutchins 3).

Imposter phenomenon is mostly observed in women and is heightened if the individual is a woman of color. In “What Imposters Risk at Work: Exploring Imposter Phenomenon, Stress Coping, and Job Outcomes,” Holly M. Hutchins, Lisa M. Penney, and Lisa W. Sublett state, “women overwhelmingly attributed their success to external reasons (e.g. luck, mentors, and colleagues and had a persistent fear of being viewed by others as unworthy of their career status” (32) and “through subsequent studies, researchers have found that imposters typically underestimate their own ability, make inaccurate attributions about success and failure and live in fear of being discovered by others” (32). The phenomenon manifests itself in the individual in both physical and psychological ways. Hutchins states, “common effects of sustained IP thoughts are increased bouts of depression and anxiety, psychological distress, and low self-confidence, thus making the experience and persistence of IP adversely related to job well-being, satisfaction and performance” (4). If one considers this effect in tandem with the adverse actions described previously, being a woman of color in the academy yields more mental anguish than what meets the eye. Imposter phenomenon is certainly not exclusively tied to the academy, but it is disproportionately associated with certain

personality traits that are often founded within those in the academy. Clance and Imes suggest that “IP is common among individuals with particular personality traits (e.g. neuroticism, conscientiousness, achievement-orientation), have perfectionist expectations over work (Want & Kleitman, 2005), and who work in highly competitive, stressful occupations similar to that of the academic environment” (4). Hutchins further expresses that

these traits may be further heightened within the ‘publish or perish’ academic culture, where performance targets are often vague, support can be inconsistent, and a highly competitive research and funding climate may inadvertently create a setting conducive to feelings of self-doubt and fraudulence especially in the areas of research and publication. (4)

When adding this information to the fact that research and publications authored by women of color are often delegitimized due to its content, one can reasonably conclude that imposter phenomenon is far more likely to be present for women of color.

The repercussions of imposter phenomenon are evidenced by job burnout and emotional exhaustion, both a function of “work-related stress and refers to feeling overextended and depleted of one’s physical, mental and emotional resources” (Hutchins 5). Hutchins explains, “emotional exhaustion represents the stress dimension of burnout and often manifests itself by increased fatigue, depression, emotional and cognitive distancing from work resulting in adverse work outcomes such as satisfaction and performance” (5). Lastly, the third form of research on imposter phenomenon focuses on how faculty use “adaptive and maladaptive coping skills” (Hutchins) in order to address present imposter tendencies; “*adaptive* coping skills include seeking out emotional or

instrumental support, relying on positive reinforcement, or using humor, whereas more harmful or *maladaptive* approaches include coping with alcohol and other substances, disengagement (or giving up), and self-blame” (Hutchins 5; emphasis original).

It is important for adaptive coping strategies to be readily accessible to women of color, who are likely the most predisposed to imposter phenomenon. A simple, yet effective, adaptive coping strategy is social support founded within the academy with professional colleagues. Social support works in multiple ways: not only does it help ease the effects of IP, but if a woman of color can gain social support from those around her, that also means others are understanding the issues at hand. Further, these individuals can then become allies. Hutchins states, “there is evidence for social support as an adaptive coping strategy in helping faculty address uncertainty in their identity development, especially in forming realistic attributions concerning doubts about their professional legitimacy” (5). A beneficial way of obtaining this social support within the academy is through the utilization of a mentor. Sharon K. Gibson highlights the importance, and benefits, of the mentor relationship in her article, “Mentoring of Women Faculty: The Role of Organizational Politics and Culture.” She acknowledges the feeling of being an “outsider,” and states that women of color faculty often find themselves isolated and constrained by the existing structure of academia (Gibson 63). Therefore, as Gibson points out, an important intervention “that can enhance socialization, orientation, and career progress of faculty, as well as improve equity for women faculty, is the establishment of mentoring relationships” (64).

The recognition of imposter phenomenon is the most important step to better combat it. Hutchins concludes her piece, “Outing the Imposter: A Study Exploring

Imposter Phenomenon among Higher Education Faculty,” by calling for faculty to be aware of this very real phenomenon. She explains that “given the importance of others recognizing imposter tendencies and the subsequent effect of burnout, faculty can be alerted to the concept of imposter phenomenon and adaptive coping approaches, as a part of new faculty orientation and continued faculty development programs” (9). If this simple step can be accomplished, progress can be made in alleviating the tensions and mental anguish in women of color that result from imposter-based thoughts.

Imposter phenomenon, if not dealt with, leads to job burnout and an obvious lack of job satisfaction. If one reaches a state where the stressors and lack of satisfaction outweigh the positive aspects of a career in academia, there becomes an increased likelihood of a loss of competent, diverse educators. Imposter phenomenon leads to decreased job satisfaction due to the emotional exhaustion that is a result of avoidant coping; that is, the avoidance of dealing with the thoughts associated with IP. This needs to be avoided in order to abate the tremendous loss of diverse voices due to this phenomenon, which derives from the white-supremacist, patriarchal system through which the academy is operating. The first step in addressing this problem, I propose, is writing.

### **Part Three: Application of Trauma Theory**

From the narratives and research included to depict the adverse experiences women of color face in the academy, it is possible, and absolutely necessary, to analyze such experiences through a trauma theory lens. In the following section, I will utilize

Judith Lewis Herman's work on trauma to prove women of color are facing experiences within the ivory walls that elicit similar symptomology to that of more severe traumas. Although I do not claim that the adverse experiences women of color face in the academy are inherently traumatic, the similarities between the experiences vocalized in such narratives and Herman's theory nonetheless are meaningfully connected, and thus show the exigency behind rectifying the aforementioned issues presented in my thesis. When traumatic symptomology presents, there is a necessary need for coping strategies. I propose here that the best strategy is writing as a means of coping – otherwise known as *scriptotherapy* – in order for women of color to overcome the adverse work conditions within the ivory walls.

### **'Trauma' in the Ivory Walls**

Judith Lewis Herman, M.D., professor of psychiatry, emerita, at Harvard Medical School, and acclaimed trauma theorist, provides theory in her seminal text, *Trauma and Recovery*, from which I can effectively illustrate the similar symptomology that women of color experience within the academy. Similar symptoms, such as increased anxiety from imposter thoughts, proves a need to write in order to better navigate the harmful, liminal state many women occupy. The general experience for women of color in the academy, as seen through the narratives featured, consists of disparaging attacks against one's credibility. These attacks may elicit similar reactions to what Herman describes in trauma victims experiencing in *Trauma and Recovery*. Although women of color do not necessarily experience "trauma" within the ivory tower, the similarities that do exist are

enough to prove that Herman's theory can have a broader applicability – in this case, to the ways women of color are affected within the academy and the general state of women today.

Herman first explains that it is through “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events...[that] both...the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (1) can occur. This directly relates to the ways in which writing and narrativizing one's experiences not only aides the individual in comprehending their experiences to heal, but it also aides in the potential restoration of the space in which such adverse actions occur – in this case, the academy. For women of color in the academy, pervasive discriminatory acts are an attack on the women's personal and intellectual integrity, which mirrors the discrimination faced in society via racism and microaggressions. Unfortunately, an escape from constant marginalization is unavoidable for women of color. It is not until the climacteric affliction is confronted that an individual can heal, and in this case, better endure their careers. Elsa Valdez, professor of Sociology at California State University-San Bernardino, writes that “women of color have to contend with the interconnected realms of racism, classism, and sexism. When you consider the cumulative effects on women of color's emotional status, it's amazing that most of us can continue to have a positive outlook on life” (149).

Women of color are able to sort through their daily climacteric afflictions produced by the infrastructure of the institution and those who perpetuate the longstanding discriminatory practices through narrativization. The aim is to start a dialogue from such narratives with those who would perpetuate “the norm” in order to work toward a positive, equitable shift within the institution. This exact potential solution



is effectively exhibited in the text *Unlikely Allies in the Academy: Women of Color and White Women in Conversation*. Through thoughtful consideration of these narratives – written by women of color – white women can come to an awareness of the inequities within the institution that brings them – the bystanders – to “understand the past in order to [help] reclaim the present and the future” (Herman 2). In Vivian Yenika-Agbaw’s contribution to the book *Race, Women of Color, and the State University System*, she expresses hope for such narratives to ignite change. She states,

We hope that women of color and other scholars/educators who read the essays in this book would perhaps contemplate participating in a similar conversation at their respective universities – be it a research or state university. We have joined the academy to stay and nothing will send us packing: not the males who historically are perceived as the ‘real’ professors deserving of respect, accolades and professional recognition, nor our Caucasian sisters who get promoted more often than us because of their strength in numbers and in some cases their ability to navigate the system much better. (20)

Because of the silencing that oppresses women of color within the academy, it is essential for the witnesses – the white men and women who would be allies – to risk their own comfort and push past the denial, repression, and dissociation that could be the result of speaking out, in order to help change the patriarchal, racist infrastructure of the academy (Herman 2).

## **The Proof is in the Theory**

Herman explains that “silence [is] the perpetrator’s first line of defense” (8) and if it fails, “the perpetrator attacks the credibility of the victim” (8), which is akin to the silencing of women of color within the academy that the problems aforementioned exist. When defining trauma, Herman states “psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force” and “traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning” (33). For women of color in the academy, fear of repercussions, job instability, and the general lack of support from others render them powerless and helpless by the overwhelming institutional force built against them. Maria Balderrama, Mary Thierry Texeria, and Elsa Valdez express in their text “Una Lucha De Fronteras (A Struggle of Borders): Women of Color in the Academy” found communally they had all experienced “daily acts of humiliation ranging from occupational stress to persistent questioning of one’s ability to perform, think, teach, talk and write – BE a scholar” (142, emphasis original) and experiencing such “pervasive and daily humiliation...[is] apt to break one’s spirit forcing many women faculty of color to eventually leave academe” (142). These feelings, a result of the daily experiences women of color endure within the academy, coincide with similar symptoms associated with a trauma. In fact, feelings of helplessness and risk provide a common denominator to Herman’s work on trauma. The fact that these similarities exist show the gravity of the difficult daily reality for women of color in the academy.

Relationships with colleagues in dominant position are called into question when women of color feel they cannot rely on them for support, defense in discriminatory situations, and/or in situations of inequity (e.g., undeserving promotions or recognition of white faculty in comparison to minority faculty). Without allies or positive reinforcement, one may question her position within the academy, her qualifications, and fall victim to the negative effects of imposter phenomenon. Negative effects of imposter phenomenon, the negative effects include the concept of “burnout,” which is “a condition of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment” (Lease 288). When such effects occur, the results are not only devastating for the woman herself, but for her students, as well. Suzanne H. Lease, in her article “Occupational Stress in Academic Faculty,” writes that “faculty who are experiencing more stress than they can cope with are likely to withdraw from student-professor interactions, be less accessible to students, and be less involved in the departmental decision making and committee work” (287), thus making it essential to combat the inequitable system women of color face that garners this mental response.

Additionally, “traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and community” (Herman 51). A broad, supportive community is what is lacking for women of color in the academy and is what women of color are constructing through their narratives; that is, both a community with other women of color facing similar hardships and a community with allies in the academy. What is expected when beginning a job within the ivory tower is equity and equitable treatment from superiors, regardless of race and/or gender, so when discriminatory practices are

perpetrated by such individuals, a damage to the woman of color's perception of community can be quite severe (Herman 55). When prejudicial and/or preferential treatment takes place between members of the academy, there is a profound disruption in trust, which produces in the victim feelings of "shame, guilt, and inferiority," resulting in "withdrawal from...relationships" (Herman 56). As seen through imposter phenomenon research, the feelings caused by the disruption in trust give way to the harmful outlook of being inadequate, and worst case scenario, leaving academia altogether.

Unfortunately, occupying a marginal status sets an individual up for hardship. This is especially true when there are two marginal statuses occupied by one individual – i.e., if one is both woman and racial minority. Occupying these two marginal spaces of inequality causes the individual to be more susceptible to climacteric afflictions. Herman explains, "those who are already disempowered or disconnected from others are most at risk" (60). Additionally, Herman explains "the methods of establishing control over another person are based upon the systematic, repetitive infliction of psychological trauma. They are the organized techniques of disempowerment and disconnection" (77). Valdez narrativizes her experience of the constant infliction of disempowerment and disconnection by her white male colleagues, writing:

Most of my white colleagues – especially white males – have never had to think about the impact of their actions on their personal and professional life. Things like making insensitive comments while I'm standing next to them. There have been many occasions when I felt that I was invisible.

Other examples include having to deal with what I call 'toxic' individuals

whose only goal in life is to make it to the top, and to hell with any semblance of civility. (150)

For many women of color in the academy, the disempowerment caused through silencing and the disconnection from others due to their marginal status is enough to produce negative psychological effects, thus inciting a need for therapeutic healing/coping techniques. A sense of helplessness destroys the woman of color's sense of self in relation to others, those in the dominant position, and further inflicts the notion that the dominant group is "omnipotent, that resistance is futile, and that her [livelihood] depends upon winning [the] indulgence [of the dominant group] through absolute compliance" (Herman 77). On the precipice of emotional trauma, women of color in the academy experiencing climacteric afflictions need an outlet to express their grievances and to give voice to what is silenced. In an environment that renders the individual voiceless and invisible, writing becomes the primary/most effective tool for empowerment and potential for institutional change.

### **Healing through Scriptotherapy**

In order to overcome the daily climacteric afflictions in the academy, writing – or simply narrativizing one's experiences – can prove empowering to a woman of color professor. This cathartic process of writing is known as *scriptotherapy*; a necessary form of vocalization a woman of color can easily attain under such oppressive circumstances. Additionally, the use of narrativization, or scriptotherapy, can start a dialogue with the perpetrators of the dominant institutional system in order and convert them into allies.

This is proven to be true in the text *Unlikely Allies in the Academy: Women of Color and White Women in Conversation*.

Scriptotherapy, defined by Richard J. Riordan, is “the deliberate use of writing designed to enhance therapeutic outcomes” (263). Additionally, in *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life-Writing*, Suzette Henke defines scriptotherapy as “the process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment” (xii) and further argues, “the authorial effort to reconstruct a story of psychological debilitation could offer potential for mental healing” (xii). The body of research surrounding scriptotherapy ultimately “suggests that writing intimately about traumas or other stressors has positive physical and psychological benefits” (Riordan 266). All of the narratives written by women of color included in this thesis are examples of utilizing the act of scriptotherapy, which helps the individuals positively process the discriminatory treatment they have endured. In an institution that renders these women invisible, vocalizing their truth through the written form contributes to their restoration, which Herman explains is necessary to overcome the negative psychological effects inflicted by a trauma, or in this case a climacteric affliction.

Herman states that “the knowledge of horrible events periodically intrudes into public awareness but is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level” (2). For those in a dominant position within the academy, it is easy to see the discrimination taken against women of color, but also to avoid addressing it. Thus, white men, white women, and the institutional system as a whole perpetuate inequities by choosing to be silent. Therefore, through penning such experiences, these women are contending with the “tendency to discredit the victim

or to render her invisible” (Herman 8). Ultimately, according to Herman, when confronting traumatic experiences “we need to understand the past in order to reclaim the present and the future” (2). In other words, in order to create a positive cultural shift for women of color within the academy that exhibits equity and inclusion, we must understand past experiences, as well as the white supremacist, patriarchal structure upon which the academy was built. One way it is possible to do so is by recognizing the validity of narratives produced by women of color in the academy.

In addressing the process of recovery from a traumatic experience, Herman explains, “the core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery, therefore, is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections” (133). Women of color in the academy are not only disempowered by daily microaggressions and other discriminatory practices, but they are also disconnected from their colleagues due to the hierarchy established within the institution. Therefore, through writing, these women are empowered: they are voicing what often goes unrecognized, and are also creating connections with other women of color, and white allies. Writing is the bridge out of isolation, as “recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (Herman 133). The recovery in this situation, then, is the subtle cultural shift taking place due to the power women of color are gaining from the vocalizing their adverse experiences within the academy. Herman perfectly states, “she must be the author and arbiter of her own recovery” (133). In this case, through writing or scriptotherapy, these women are truly the *authors* of their own stories. Riordan explains, “verbally labeling and describing a trauma

through writing allows an individual to cognitively process the event and gain a sense of control,” (263) and therefore re-empower themselves.

#### **Part Four: *Unlikely Allies in the Academy***

The production and execution of the text *Unlikely Allies in the Academy: Women of Color and White Women in Conversation* is proof of the necessity and benefit of scriptotherapy and narratives, and their potential to generate productive dialogue that can elicit change. The opening of the text pronounces,

*Unlikely Allies in the Academy* brings the voices of women of Color and White women together for much-overdue conversations about race. These well-known contributors use narrative to expose their stories, which are at times messy and always candid. However, the contributors work through the discomfort, confusion, and frustration in order to have honest conversations about race and racism. (Dace)

The goal and eventual outcome of the work, was a bridging of the gap that exists between White women and women of color in order to help combat the inequitable dominant institutional practices; “the narratives from Chicanas, Indigenous, Asian American, African American, and White women academicians explore [the] past, present, and future” (Dace), which not only aides women of color in overcoming the climacteric afflictions through reclamation – which Herman deems necessary for recovery – but also aides in the improvement of the academy as a whole. The dialogues included within the text model “how to engage in difficult dialogues about race and begin to illuminate the



unspoken misunderstandings about how white women and women of color engage one another” (Dace). Overall, the text “offers strategies, ideas, and the hope for moving toward true alliances in the academy and for improving race relations” (Dace).

*Unlikely Allies in the Academy* places members of the dominant system – white women – in conversation with the deplorable experiences faced by women of color. Unarguably, White women, too, are marginalized within the ivory tower, simply by virtue of being female; however, due to racial privilege they are, perhaps unknowingly, nonetheless participants in the inequitable, dominant system. This is proven through the realizations and dialogue exhibited in *Unlikely Allies in the Academy* as White women come to terms with their complicit role within the institution. Frances E. Kendall, a White woman scholar participating in the dialogue, eloquently states,

We all exist in institutionalized systems of the supremacy of whiteness. These systems were built and are maintained to benefit those of us who are White. Thus it is essential that we know ourselves and how being White affects our lives; know our histories and how they affect our present-day behavior; identify ways in which we collude with the systems of the supremacy of whiteness; and change our behavior, remembering that we do it *for ourselves*, not to look good to others. (16)

It is through processing and acknowledging this truth that “a real dialogue about what separates White women and women of Color” can occur (Scott vii). Further, allies must understand that for women of color, “communication and dialogue are confounded because our histories and role in the system have remained invisible and the very nature of the act, conversation, is driven by the rules of the system not designed to foster a sense

of inclusion” (Scott vii). The need for this conversation is imperative and the positive result of this text is poignant.

*Unlikely Allies in the Academy*'s accomplishments are twofold: the creation of cross-racial alliances necessary to better the institution of higher education and aiding in the “recovery” of the woman of color’s climacteric afflictions. To restate, Herman explains “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims” (1).

*Unlikely Allies in the Academy* provides the space for women of Color to tell their truths – their adverse experiences within the academy – and share such experiences with those who can become allies. After the completion of *Unlikely Allies in the Academy*, the testament that “more than wisdom and intellect [were] exchanged. The dialogue includes the sharing of experiences and history, the ‘living it,’ ‘fighting the good fight’ and coming out with one’s sanity and soul intact” is profound (Scott viii-ix). Therefore, the power of dialogue becomes clear, through the telling of such experiences the women of color show the ways to embrace and learn from the past (Scott ix).

When confronting a trauma, or a climacteric affliction, Herman explains that it is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator and “all the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing” (7). In this case, then, the ultimate perpetrator is the institution of higher education and the bystanders are white women academics/administrators. Kendall admits that as a white woman a distance is maintained, “we often feel that race doesn’t pertain to us: ‘We’re all part of the same race, the human race.’ We don’t see ourselves as part of the problem, and therefore we don’t feel responsibility to be part of the solution”

(16). This admittance of ignorance and deflection of responsibility is the first step in the victim asking the bystander to share the burden of the pain (Herman 7).

When addressing how a victim is to recover, Herman explains “recovery...is based upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation” (133). *Unlikely Allies in the Academy* is evidence of the way cross-racial alliances can help a woman of color flourish within the institution. Ultimately, it is necessary to reduce isolation, to diminish helplessness, and to counter the dynamics of dominance to restore power to the victims and thus for a victim – in this case, women of color academics – to be empowered (Herman 134). As shown in *Unlikely Allies in the Academy* an “attempt to break a silence” many women of color have had imposed upon is successfully attempted. The text demonstrates possibilities for “bringing together the voices of women of color and progressive White women, [which] revealed a reality for some and possibilities for others – alliances across race” (Scott x).

Creating a safe environment for women of color to express their struggles is the necessary, albeit difficult, step in progressing towards institutional change. Because of the safe environment, women of color scholars like Pamela Chao are able to vocalize concerns and plausible solutions. Chao contributes,

It is important to have a space to talk, read, think about racism and how women of Color and White women can come together. I worry that others do not understand the history and the institutional underpinnings of all of our individual and psychological responses to race and gender. I am concerned that when I talk about racism as a system of advantage based on

whiteness in the United States, many readers will not understand its far-reaching historical, political and legal foundations and reduce it to an individual experience of racial identity.... historically, the consequences for women of Color who talk about racism have included loss of friends and relationships, jobs, homes, dignity, and even their lives. Society sanctions those who challenge the norms. (8)

Chao's vulnerable contribution also brings awareness to the potential resolutions of the problems she outlines. If alliances are going to happen, work needs to be done on both sides of the racial spectrum. Both White women and women of color have introspective work needed to be done in order to open themselves up for effective cross-racial alliances, which are necessary to dismantle the institutional systems of oppression within the academy.

Angelina Castagno admits, "I think many White women are unable, unwilling and perhaps unknowledgeable about how to build and nurture alliances with women of color. Some of us may be nervous about what our role is, anxious about entering new and unfamiliar spaces" (6). It is due to this apprehension that white women fall into a stagnant position of bystander. Castagno further expresses that due to the fear of doing the "wrong" thing, it is ultimately easier to "stay where we are comfortable and assume we aren't needed or wanted and that someone else will do the work" (6). On the other hand, perhaps women of color are culpable, as well, accepting the position many white women assume. Theresa Torres contends,

[women of Color] need to be resilient and give White women opportunities for change and not to hold on to past wounds and

experiences that have separated us. We must be willing to heal, open to the new opportunities for alliances, and patient as we challenge White women and have the creative imaginations that allow us to move forward together. I believe the burden of the alliance has always tended to fall on women of Color and that is tiring. I believe some women of Color, those of us who are aware of these challenges, decide that the burden is too exhausting since we have so many other challenges like tenure requirements that generally are not the same for women of Color, greater community service requirements since we have a responsibility to give back to those who have helped us. Some of us are just too tired to deal with the hard work of forging alliances. (6)

Through recognizing both sides possess fault, and placing the two groups in conversation with one another, the aim becomes a joint effort. *Unlikely Allies in the Academy* then sets the example of the dialogue, alliance, and communication needed in order to combat a deeply entrenched system of oppression. As scholar Pamela Chao states, “we are not separate from the academy and society, we are a part of them and they are part of who we are” (6). *Unlikely Allies in the Academy: White Women and Women of Color in Conversation*, provides an opportunity is provided from which others can take the lead, a move from “unlikely” to “probable” allies, working together to make the system more inclusive can happen (Scott ix). The progress displayed in *Unlikely Allies in the Academy* could not have been achieved had it not first began with the woman of color engaging with the narrativization of their adverse experiences through the written form. Through their use of scriptotherapy to recover from their own climacteric afflictions, a

conversation with the bystanders of oppression – white women – was a result, which then became a step in a positive direction.

### **Conclusion: *My Voice Matters***

Embarking on this project was one of personal and professional interest. I am a woman of color and an aspiring scholar, ready to embark into the professoriate. Therefore, it is only natural I investigate and interrogate the discriminatory practices within an institution in which I would like a career. I am a multi-racial woman, but the entirety of my life has been defined by Mexican heritage and traditions. I am a Latina navigating a country that frequently deems me “less than” and continually attacks the roots from which my very being and essence derive. It is difficult to listen to the continuous and hateful rhetoric of the current president of the United States, Donald J. Trump. As a current student at a predominantly white institution, I am continually reminded of my marginal status. Further, when I am presented with the research and narrativized testimonials of women of color occupying a role I dream to one day make my own, I feel it my *social responsibility* to further the conversation, ignite productive dialogue, and interrogate the discriminatory practices that permeate the ivory halls. I want the institution of higher education to be better; I *need* it to be better. It is not only for the careers of women just as qualified as the dominant majority, but for the students who deserve more from their professors, too.

Since the academy is currently a place of hostility and hardship for women of color, and I am an undergraduate student working towards occupying a professoriate seat,

identifying effective ways of coping through such daily microaggressions is a worthy endeavor. The research and narratives on the adverse experiences women of color face within the academy is in abundance, but information on effective ways to cope, recover, and make productive steps towards resolutions is lacking. Drawing attention to the benefit of the work exhibited in *Unlikely Allies in the Academy: Women of Color and White Women in Conversation* is a small, but important, step toward increasing the formation of cross-racial alliances within the academy to better combat the dominant racist, patriarchal system it is founded and continues to function on.

I propose, that for women of color, narrativizing their experiences can function as a form of empowerment and self-healing, but it can also elicit institutional change. This form of writing is a form of scriptotherapy; it benefits the individual by providing a means of coping with daily discriminatory actions, and educates those who may participate in the dominant system. Therefore, the benefits are twofold: it aides women of color and the institutional system, overall. The American academy of higher education must remain under the vigilant eyes of all participating members, and all participating members must enter productive dialogues, in order for it to slowly embody the “liberal” and “progressive” labels it is currently misperceived to embody.

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