Whiteness at Work

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Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

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The name on your résumé. The way you style your hair. The sound of your voice. The wording and punctuation you use in emails. The length of your commute. These are just a handful of the considerations that researchers have found disproportionately burdensome to people of color pursuing employment and advancement in the workplace.

This is, of course, by design. It is whiteness at work.

Though American mythology tells us that hard work pays off, fewer and fewer Americans are buying that line. The Pew Research Center found in 2014 that 38 percent of its survey respondents agreed with the statement that "hard work and determination are no guarantee of success for most people." That was 8 percentage points higher than when Pew asked the question two decades earlier. Though a Gallup survey in 2019 found that only 29 percent of respondents said that working hard and playing by the rules will not guarantee you'll achieve the American Dream, that was 5 percentage points higher than when Gallup asked the same question a decade earlier and 16 percentage points higher than when they asked it at the turn of the century. Nonwhite respondents were even less optimistic than White respondents; 37 percent said the American Dream was unattainable. The myth, it seems, is losing its grip on American workers, who are ever more cognizant of discrimination and income inequality and the systems and policies that perpetuate them.

You don't have to be a pollster, a human-resources professional or a scholar to know that who gets hired, how they're managed, and whether and when they're selected for promotion has little to do with merit. You need only have applied for or had a job. You've seen how academic pedigree, family connections and political ties influence hiring decisions. You've witnessed how workplace disputes are adjudicated and workload and credit are distributed. You've recognized the tokenism, prejudice and ostracizing that results in attrition of colleagues of color. You know that the myth of

meritocracy comforts some and gaslights others. You know that no workplace is neutral.

In this book, we present a series of personal essays that explore the role of whiteness in the workplace.

What Do We Mean By "Whiteness"?

Whiteness is a social construct devised to categorize people—to create a privileged ingroup and disempowered outgroup. There is no biological basis of race, but the concept of whiteness has, as Halley et al. put it in their book *Seeing White: An Introduction to White Privilege and Race*, "helped to solidify the social power of the economic elite by encouraging poor and working-class people who became white to see themselves as a part of an ingroup with the elite, a group that excluded and subordinated people of color." In her 2011 essay "White Fragility," Robin DiAngelo, who later penned a book by the same name, described whiteness as "dynamic, relational, and operating at all times and on myriad levels." Whiteness is ubiquitous and for that reason invisible. It is seen as normal, default and ordinary.

Throughout American history, various ethnic groups have acquired whiteness and the status and privileges it affords. The Irish, for example, were granted whiteness after previously being considered a lesser race and being subject to "No Irish Need Apply" advertisements for jobs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Writing in the *New York Times*, Nell Irvin Painter, author of the book *The History of White People*, explains: "Then new waves of poor Eastern and Southern European immigrants arrived, inspiring new racial classifications: the 'Northern Italian' race, the 'Southern Italian' race, the 'Eastern European Hebrew' race, and so on. Their heads were measured and I.Q.s assessed to quantify (and, later, to deny) racial difference. They were all white, members of white races. But, like the Irish before them, the Italians and Jews and Greeks were classified as inferior white races." Jews, who face bigotry and hate crimes like other outgroups do, have been categorized as White since the Naturalization Act of 1790, and "[t]here's no doubt that the vast majority of American Jews live with what we would call white privilege," Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO of the Anti-Defamation League, told *The Atlantic*. He continued: "They aren't looked at twice when they walk into a store. They aren't looked at twice by someone in uniform. … That obviously isn't a privilege that people of color have the luxury of enjoying."

Whiteness even has been granted, sort of, to those who do not necessarily pass for White. Eric Liu, who directs the Aspen Institute's

Citizenship & American Identity Program, noted in a 2014 column for CNN.com that "Asian Americans who've achieved in visible ways have been granted 'honorary white' status (wanted or not)." Writing in *The Guardian* about the Trump administration's move to no longer categorize people with Middle Eastern and North African origins as White for the U.S. Census, columnist Arwa Mahdawi explains, "[W]hiteness has always been a fluid category. Whiteness isn't a biological fact, rather it is a sort of members-only club that has rewritten its entry requirements over the years." It would be wrong, however, to interpret this fluidity as meaning that anyone, regardless of appearance, might be granted entrance to the whiteness club. Whiteness is about exclusion, not inclusion. We see this, especially, in the workplace.

Discrimination is "Distressingly Uniform"

Populations that have not been granted whiteness experience discrimination in the workplace at different rates and in different ways. Below, we will look at a sampling of evidence for and variation in discrimination at the application, interview, hiring and advancement stages. Though we are starting with the application stage, we want to emphasize that school segregation, housing discrimination, and other systems of oppression set the stage for what plays out during the application process and thereafter.

While job applicants of color might want to believe that hiring discrimination is a thing of the past, that simply is not true. (This may be especially disappointing for first-generation college grads of color hopeful that their academic credentials will afford them acceptance and greater opportunities than were afforded to their parents.) Princeton University researchers conducted a meta-analysis of all available field experiment studies of discrimination at the point of hire from 1989 through 2015 and found no reduction in the rate of discrimination against Black people and only a "marginally statistically significant" reduction in discrimination against Latinos. Writing in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the researchers concluded, "we find the persistence of discrimination at a distressingly uniform rate." Studies focusing on the specifics of the hiring process show how this discrimination happens.

Reading Résumés

Over the years, there have been many studies demonstrating that the name on your résumé affects your chances of getting a callback after

applying for a job. Though there's a lot of variation in study design, with some researchers choosing names that sound decidedly Black and decidedly White and others choosing names that are ambiguous, and thus variation in the results, experts agree that your name matters, because it conveys information not only about your race but also your socioeconomic class, which brings us to your home address.

David Phillips, a researcher at the University of Notre Dame, reported in 2018 in the *Journal of Human Resources* that managers screening applicants for low-wage jobs are less likely to call Black applicants who have longer commutes. "In many cities, urban revitalization has also led to increased rents, gentrification, and movement of low-income, minority groups away from jobs," Phillips explained in the *Harvard Business Review*. "So, when a low-wage employer avoids an employee due to their commute, that penalty disproportionately affects groups facing other disadvantages."

On top of that, the actual contents of your résumé, for example the section on extracurricular activities and community service, can work against you. A study by Harvard University researchers in 2017 found that both Black and Asian job applicants who "whiten" their résumés double their chances of getting called for interviews. And lest you think that companies that claim a commitment to diversity are a cut above, in fact, "Employers claiming to be pro-diversity discriminated against résumés with racial references just as much as employers who didn't mention diversity at all in their job ads."

Note that the studies we have described here say nothing about qualifications. They demonstrate that people of color face discrimination at the application stage that has nothing to do with their skills or experience. To underscore this point, we will share one more finding: The late Devah Pager at Northwestern University in 2003 found that employers are more likely to consider White men with criminal records than Black men with clean records. That alone speaks volumes.

Negotiating Pay

The gap in pay between men and women (about 20 cents in 2017) is getting more and more attention by policymakers, the media and hiring managers. Disparities along racial and ethnic lines are less often discussed but even more extreme. It should come as no surprise to you that White men earn more than Black and Latino men and women of all backgrounds. According to the National Women's Law Center, Latinx women made 53 cents to every dollar White men made in 2017. Black women made 61 cents, and Asian women made 85 cents. There are several intersecting beliefs and

behaviors that contribute to the perpetuation of these and other disparities in compensation, and we'll touch on only a few below, but whiteness, without question, is at the core.

After job seekers of color do get to the offer table, they must contend with the salary negotiation process. In a series of three studies, researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology took a close look at the role race plays in those negotiations, and the findings are illustrative. In the first study, participants evaluated the résumés of job applicants and judged Black candidates as less likely to negotiate. In the second study, the researchers zeroed in on racially biased study participants, who indicated that they expected Black applicants to be less aggressive during negotiations. In the third study, the researchers had the evaluators interact with the applicants and found that, though the Black and White applicants negotiated comparably, the White evaluators perceived Black applicants as being pushier, which resulted in lower salary offers. It seems, as the saying goes, Black candidates are damned if they do (negotiate) and damned if they don't.

The relative success of Asians in America often is used by pundits and politicians on the right to argue that pay and other disparities affecting Black and Latino workers are of their own making—that they would have successes similar to Asians' if only they'd raise their kids right, if only they'd prioritize education, if only they'd work hard. This argument has been bolstered by the popularization, by those on the left as well, of the "tiger mom" archetype. It is, after all, reassuring to tell yourself that proper rearing and educational attainment will help you or your children overcome an inherently unfair system. Research by Nathaniel Hilger at Brown University, however, found in 2017 that, though the model-minority myth alleges that Asian upward mobility is a product of scholastic achievement, in fact, Americans simply have become less racist toward Asians, which has allowed them to, among other things, close the wage gap with White workers. Nonetheless, Asian-American white-collar professionals are the least likely group to be selected for management positions.

Advancement

Given what we know about the discrimination faced and burdens carried by workers of color, only a sampling of which we've described above, it should come as no surprise that few manage to reach positions of power in their respective fields.

Fortune magazine, which tracks diversity in the ranks and in the C-suite of Fortune 500 companies, reported in 2017 that 72 percent of top officials were White men. The population of CEOs is even more White and male. A

2016 survey by the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility found that about 4 percent of executive officers at Fortune 500 firms are Hispanic and that Hispanics held just over 7 percent of board seats. Importantly, 99 percent of those Hispanic executives are men. Black CEOs are even scarcer: In 2018, there were only three (in total) at Fortune 500 firms.

Leadership positions in the nonprofit sector also are held overwhelmingly by White people (almost half of whom are White women, by the way). One of the usual excuses for the whiteness of nonprofit executives is that there simply aren't enough diverse candidates for such positions. Yet despite the development of leadership programs specifically aimed at developing talent of color for those positions, their numbers on the job haven't been increasing, according to a report by the Building Movement Project. "The results call into question the common assumption that to increase the diversity of nonprofit leaders, people of color need more training," said Frances Kunreuther, BMP's co-director. Another myth is that people of color are less likely than White people to aspire to leadership positions at nonprofits. On the contrary, BMP found that people of color were 10 percentage points more likely to say they want those jobs than White people. "The findings point to a new narrative. To increase the number of people of color leaders, the nonprofit sector needs to address the practices and biases of those governing nonprofit organizations," Kunreuther said.

In the public sector, things are better but not equitable. Nonwhite civil servants make up 38 percent of the federal workforce, which is close to their share of the U.S. population. However, according to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, in 2018 they held only 21 percent of senior executive jobs. Importantly, the 2018 OPM report doesn't include the Trump administration's numbers, "but no one expects things to improve under this president. Quite the opposite," wrote Washington Post columnist Joe Davidson.

Uncompensated Labor

Whiteness affects the day-to-day lives of workers of color in ways that those who consider themselves White are unlikely to recognize. Here is just a handful of examples:

- The Good Hair Study in 2017 found that White women, who make up about one-third of managers, demonstrate, more so than any other group polled, both implicit and explicit bias against textured hair and believe it to be "less professional than smooth hair."

- Candy Lee, a professor at the Medill journalism school at Northwestern University, examined how voice characteristics affect perceived leadership capabilities. She wrote in *Forbes*, "My research showed that—based solely on audio—a white man is the preferred leader over a black man, a white woman and a black woman."
- In a study describing Black women's experiences with promotion opportunities, Marlese Durr and Adia M. Harvey Wingfield wrote: "They speak of performance weariness in verbal and nonverbal communicative interaction-exchanges with white colleagues. Many simply state that they feel they are in a 'parade,' being judged for appearance, personal decorum, communication skills, and emotion management in addition to productivity."

It is whiteness that cloaks the above described emotional, uncompensated labor.

Reporting Discrimination

Workers of color who experience racism on the job and hope to get some sort of restitution or resolution have an uphill battle. Many employers require that disputes be handled through private arbitration, and discrimination cases fare worse than other types of cases in that venue. Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to investigate complaints, the agency is not a safety net. Maryam Jameel and Joe Yerardi at the Center for Public Integrity reported in early 2019 that, of the 100,000 workplace-discrimination cases closed by the EEOC and its partner agencies each year, fewer than one-fifth of them result in some sort of financial compensation or workplace change. Upon concluding their analysis of seven years of data, the journalists wrote: "What emerged is a picture of a system that routinely fails workers." Indeed, the backlog of cases is long, and many workers pursuing EEOC cases simply give up. Importantly, discrimination cases are especially difficult because the burden of proof is on the employee, but the employer holds the keys to personnel files. "Many workers who sue—generally permitted only after they seek assistance from the EEOC or its partner agencies—file in federal court, where workplace discrimination cases number less than 15 percent of annual EEOC claims," Jameel and Yerardi reported.

Whiteness Controls the Narrative

Most of the statistics and studies mentioned in this introduction have been reported within the past few years by the media. While that might lead you to think that the press does a reasonably decent job of exposing the effects of whiteness on workers of color, that is and isn't the case. Yes, one-off studies sometimes make headlines. That's how we found a lot of the ones we've described here. But we rarely hear in-depth discussions on cable news or talk radio about how the compounding effects of whiteness affect workers of color on a day-to-day basis or over a lifetime. You don't need a crystal ball to predict that drive-by, shallow reporting won't have sustained or meaningful effects on workers.

You might feel inclined to attribute the lack of comprehensive and contextualized reporting on workers of color on the whiteness of newsrooms themselves, and, again, you'd be right, but only partially. In 2018, the Pew Research Center found that newsrooms are both more white and more male than typical American workplaces. Some 77 percent of newsroom staffers were White (compared with 65 percent of all U.S. workers), and 61 percent were male (compared with 53 percent of all U.S. workers). These numbers align with estimates by the American Society of News Editors, which in 1978 pledged to pursue parity with national averages and has so far failed to achieve that goal.

The whiteness of political reporting is undeniable and concerning. Case in point: Farai Chideya of Harvard's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy asked 15 news outlets about who made up their 2016 presidential election reporting teams. Though only four outlets responded in full, the data Chideya received were revealing. The team covering the election for the *New York Times*, for example, was 90 percent White. Numbers like that should worry workers of color. Politicians, after all, are the ones who write, vote on and sign legislation affecting workers' rights, pay, healthcare and protections.

When whiteness blinds the watchdogs, the consequences aren't distributed evenly. Earlier, we mentioned that many racial-discrimination complaints brought to the EEOC end up being abandoned by the complainants. One reason for that is the case backlog; it can take months to get a response from the agency. The backlog exists, in part, because, though the EEOC's responsibilities have expanded over the decades, its budget has not kept pace. Today, there are simply too few agents available to investigate all the complaints the agency receives. Though the backlog affects all complainants, it hurts Black workers disproportionately, because their reports of racial discrimination make up a quarter of all EEOC cases. It's worth considering what the news coverage of the EEOC and what the agency's backlog might

look like today had White men been the ones on the receiving end of racial epithets, threats and violence in the workplace.

Importantly, the media allow politicians to set the national tone by giving them a platform for their ideas, even when they are wrongheaded or, as we have seen in the case of Donald Trump, downright dangerous. The workplace is not immune from infectious invective. When the president spews anti-immigrant rhetoric on the White House lawn before a gaggle of reporters, news outlets give him a platform and then repeat his hateful rhetoric on a loop. We can't act surprised when attacks on immigrant workers increase or, worse, a gunman mows down immigrants and Americans at a Walmart. Whiteness determines what is newsworthy, consequences be damned.

In addition to having the power to give dangerous people the bully pulpit, the media also have the power to erase marginalized perspectives when it suits whiteness. When the #MeToo hashtag in 2017 blew up on Twitter, in response to a post by actress Alyssa Milano, millions of women shared their stories of sexual harassment and assault and expressed solidarity with other victims. Tarana Burke, however, panicked. "I felt a sense of dread, because something that was part of my life's work was going to be co-opted and taken from me and used for a purpose that I hadn't originally intended," Burke told the *New York Times*. You see, Burke already had coined "me too" and had used it in her campaigns for abuse victims. But the Milano tweet was the talk of the town. Later, Milano credited Burke on "Good Morning America" and elsewhere, but, as they say, you cannot unring a bell, and most Americans will go on without associating Me Too with Tarana Burke.

Another example of erasure has to do with Democratic calls for Trump's impeachment. U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters of California, who is Black and often the target of the president's racist insults, began calling for impeachment in early 2017. U.S. Rep. Al Green of Texas, who is also Black, filed articles of impeachment in July 2019 in response to Trump's racist attacks on U.S. Reps. Alexandria Ocasio–Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan. (All women of color, they are often called "The Squad" by the president and the press. Trump said they should "go back" to their ancestral homelands, despite the fact that all are American citizens, and three were born in the U.S.) Once House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced the formal impeachment inquiry on Sept. 24, 2019, the one that Waters and Green had been calling for all along, CNN's Dana Bash in a Sunday feature showcased four White congresswomen as "unlikely leaders on impeachment." Bash

said on air: “Backing an impeachment inquiry is risky political business for these congresswomen,” who had won election in “mostly Trump territory.”

Though newsroom diversity has improved slightly over the years, and younger newsroom employees are more diverse than older ones, this isn’t just a numbers game. To begin with, minority employees have many obvious incentives for upholding whiteness. As Kathleen McElroy, director of the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, makes plain in a column for the Poynter Institute, a journalism training organization, “throwing bodies at journalism’s diversity problem hasn’t worked.” McElroy argues that the “longstanding yet flawed journalistic tenet” of objectivity is at the core of the newsroom diversity problem. “Both sides” journalism, as it is practiced in newsrooms across the country today, undermines justice. Sometimes one side is flat-out wrong, and sometimes one side is disproportionately wronged. Performative neutrality aids oppressors.

Swimming in It

Many of the stories in this collection were written by people who’ve been employed in a variety of fields over the years but who today work in the education sector, including the editors, so we’d like to say just a bit about whiteness in education.

We ask you to first consider the denazification of Germany after the Allied victory of World War II. Nazis were removed from positions of power and their various organizations were disbanded. The effort included physical scrubbing, too. “Stone swastikas were chiseled off the façades of buildings, Nazi insignia were taken down from flagpoles, and, in towns and cities across Germany, streets and squares named after [Adolf] Hitler reverted to their previous designations,” writes Richard J. Evans in *Foreign Affairs*. Nonetheless, to this day the vestiges of ethnic cleansing remain emblazoned on schools named after party members and supporters. Imagine how Jewish students, teachers and staff members, among others who during the war would have been considered biologically inferior, must feel walking into schools honoring war criminals who exterminated their ancestors. It’s an unreasonable ask, really, and an unnecessary one. And yet certain segments of local communities remain resistant to efforts to name those schools after those who were not complicit in genocide.

Meanwhile, here in America, there are upwards of 100 schools that still bear the names of members of the Confederacy, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center. We expect Black children, teachers and staffers, and others from groups that were considered inferior by White slaveholders, to do their best work under the banner of Robert E. Lee, Jefferson Davis and

"Stonewall" Jackson. Again, it is an unreasonable ask, really, and an unnecessary one. But whiteness prevails.

Even at American public schools that bear the names of true role models, children of color are unlikely to be taught by teachers from backgrounds like their own. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2015–2016 school year, 80 percent of teachers were White, 9 percent were Hispanic, 7 percent were Black, 2 percent were Asian, and 1 percent were of two or more races. This is concerning because study after study has shown that students of color who have teachers of the same race are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college. More disturbing, though, are the studies showing that Black and Brown children are perceived by White adults as older and more mature than their White peers of the exact same age, which explains why even the youngest of students of color face harsher penalties, including suspensions and expulsions.

At colleges and universities, where several of this collection's authors work, the protection of whiteness is most obvious when faculty and administrators defend White supremacist ideas and behaviors under the guise of protecting free speech and academic freedom. They call townhall meetings after hate crimes on campus but fail to expel or otherwise sanction the perpetrators. They arrange anti-discrimination workshops but do not require employees to attend them. They say they are striving for inclusion but allow neo-Nazis to assemble and spew hate speech on campus. They claim to prioritize diversity in hiring but fail to make the institutional changes required to retain faculty of color.

Times of Crisis Shine a Light on Injustice

The COVID-19 pandemic and nationwide protests against extrajudicial killings of Black people by police officers have provoked a barrage of formal statements by companies, organizations and institutions about their commitments to the safety and well-being of their customers and workers and to racial justice. What remains to be seen is whether those statements will result in meaningful changes.

Black, Latino and Native American communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 in large part because of longstanding inequities rooted in racism: air pollution, segregated housing, lack of access to grocery stores and medical facilities, and resulting health disparities. These people of color are dying at higher rates than White people in part because the work they do has been deemed "essential," putting them at increased risk of infection. Indeed, they are the Walmart employees, the Instacart shoppers, the meatpackers, the migrant farmworkers, the grocery

store clerks and the hospital workers who make it possible for the rest of the nation to work from home, order dinner in and watch Netflix. Rather than "essential," a more appropriate word might be "sacrificial." Furthermore, as the labor market deteriorates, they are among the first to be furloughed and laid off. A June 2020 report by the Economic Policy Institute found that women in general, but Black women more than any other group, have faced the largest losses. "'We're all in this together' has become a rallying cry during the coronavirus pandemic. While it is true that COVID-19 has affected everyone in some way, the magnitude and nature of the impact has been anything but universal," the report said. Less frequently discussed, but worthy of mention here given the focus of this text, is the fact that even those workers whose jobs can be done remotely do not necessarily have equal access to the technologies, space or time required to do so. Black and Latino workers are more likely than White workers to lack access to high-speed internet required for teleconferencing and more likely to live in multi-generational homes with less space and greater caregiving responsibilities.

As the pandemic rages on, millions of Americans have taken to the streets to protest killings of Black people. America has a long history of these killings, going all the way back to slavery, but a handful of cases in the past year have, at least it seems, put America on a course toward reckoning. A law enforcement officer fatally shot 28-year-old Atatiana Jefferson, a Black woman who worked in pharmaceutical equipment sales, through a window of her home in Texas in October 2019. A group of White men hit with a truck and then gunned down Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man who wanted to become an electrician, while he was taking a jog in Georgia in February 2020. Police killed 26-year-old Breonna Taylor, a Black emergency medical technician, while she was sleeping in her apartment in Kentucky in March 2020. The police killing of 46-year-old George Floyd, a Black man who lost his job as a bouncer in Minnesota during the coronavirus shutdown, was documented in May 2020 in a graphic video wherein he told officers "I can't breathe" and cried out for his dead mother. We include here these dead Americans' professions and professional dreams because it is important for White employers and workers to consider that their colleagues of color are not even safe in their own homes and neighborhoods. Venturing out to the office, to see a client or to a work site carries even greater risk.

The Lived Experience

The stories in this collection illuminate both the perniciousness of whiteness and the downright appalling manifestations of it in the workplace.

Most of the writers are people of color, who, as Lauren Michele Jackson of Northwestern University wrote in *Slate*, "are by default experts on racial interactions." A handful have been granted whiteness and explore how their whiteness has affected the trajectory of their careers, how it allows them to live their day-to-day work lives with less psychological harm, and how they have perpetuated whiteness at work. Some of the pieces describe overt discrimination and hateful acts experienced by the writers themselves. Others describe how whiteness affected colleagues, clients, students and friends.

In "You're Killing Me With Your Rhetoric: The Curious Case of the Angry Black Woman," forensic psychologist Stephanie Williams writes about being labeled an "angry Black woman" by a co-worker at a California jail and how daily oppression takes a toll on the bodies of people of color.

In "Not So Subtle: Whiteness Through the Eyes of an Immigrant of Color in the Academy," Jaime Antonio Rivera Flores offers a narrative of experiences and encounters with whiteness in academia. The chapter frames these stories within the historical context of whiteness studies in the United States. An immigrant from Mexico, the author concludes with a reflection about how personal narratives of this sort serve to complement theory, while making the conceptual more understandable and relatable.

In "Nine Sharp," satirist Dennard Dayle writes about going, as a fresh college grad, to a job interview at a New York fashion magazine, getting the position and looking for an escape hatch shortly thereafter.

In "Conquering Concord," lawyer Luisa Reyes tells a story about attending a Massachusetts chamber of commerce meeting with a Black colleague and learning after the fact that her experience was wildly different than her own.

In "The Monolingual Aspect of Whiteness at Work," Javier Sánchez reflects on the role of language in academia in relationship to the concept of whiteness. He critiques the persistent defense of English as the only viable medium for the transmission of intellectual knowledge by (usually) White, monolingual faculty members and administrators. Indeed, this outlook undermines and contradicts (often their own) efforts to globalize and internationalize the curriculum while preserving a traditional, patriarchal, White, Anglo-centric, colonial view in academia.

In "Safe Zone," the pseudonymous tano rubio recalls his experience as a first-year teacher in an alternative school. Centering on a conversation with a couple of students during a lockdown, he explores his own racial identity while trying to navigate and foster a safe space amidst a tumultuous academic environment for himself and other minorities.

In "Let's Talk About It: White Discrimination—an Act of Domestic Terrorism," Lucía Galleno Villafán writes about her encounters with discrimination by White people (what she terms "White discrimination") in the United States. She reflects on the (quickly dispelled) illusions of America that she held as a new immigrant; the cultural inferno that racism produces; and opportunities for new dialogues capable of eroding racism.

In "The Fight Against White Privilege," Mark E. Attucks Sr. writes about retiring from the military after 30 years of service, becoming an executive for megaretailer Target, and then returning to government service at the highest level. All the while, he had to fight tooth and nail for the recognition and compensation he deserved.

In "In Academia, the Gates of Entry and Advancement Are Guarded by Those Who Uphold White Supremacy," Michael A. Moreno writes about how engaging in anti-racist teaching practices made him a target for harassment and ultimately put his academic career in jeopardy.

In "Toward Restoration and Justice: Whiteness in Higher Education and Teaching Anti-Racism," public health graduate student Jacqueline Lantsman interrogates how her whiteness at the front of the classroom undermined her anti-racist course curriculum and argues that restorative justice practices in such settings could help de-center whiteness and elevate the voices of students of color.

Each story is true and has a lesson or lessons to teach us. In *Seeing White*, Halley et al. ask their readers: "If whiteness is normal, what does that communicate about the experience of other races?" We hope our book brings to life the answer to that question. We also hope it shows that no workplace is neutral. We all must play active roles in expelling whiteness from our workplaces.

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YOU'RE KILLING ME WITH YOUR RHETORIC: THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE ANGRY BLACK WOMAN

STEPHANIE N. WILLIAMS

It starts like another workday.

I am tired from the balancing act of being a working mother. I'm tired from living in a community where only 3 percent of the population looks like me. I'm tired from working in a jail system where I see Black and Brown bodies incarcerated at higher rates and for longer times than their White peers, and I am tired of paying more to have less.

But on this day, like many other days, I come into work and put on my best smile and demeanor, ready to fight the good fight.

I had decided to talk with a co-worker who had been making negative comments about my qualifications. I request the help of a neutral party to act as an observer, and then I sit down with my co-worker.

I am immediately bombarded with definitive statements:

"You're difficult, overly aggressive."

"You are hard to communicate with, aloof."

"Every time I talk with you, I feel like you're going to blow up at me, and I don't feel safe with you."

These words spin in my mind like a tornado, and I think to myself: *Stay composed, ask for examples, be clear and tempered in your tone, and offer to make it better*. Ultimately, I leave the conversation recognizing this unique feeling of humiliation that is directly related to being stereotyped as an angry Black woman.

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I have been a mental health professional for 14 years. Like many women of color, my trajectory was filled with ups and downs. While in undergrad, I applied and was accepted to several terminal master's degree programs but no doctoral programs. At my college graduation, I was the topic of many conversations. "Oh, did you hear Stephanie is going to graduate school?" A

professor who had written me letters of recommendation asked, "So, what are you going to do?" and they seemed truly surprised that I was, in fact, attending a graduate program.

After completing my master's in psychology, I applied to two doctoral programs. During one interview, I was asked why there was such a difference between my undergraduate GPA of 2.85 and my graduate GPA of 4.0. I explained the impact of poor academic funding in urban settings for students of color and how that significantly impacted my transition to college. My response was met with skepticism, and I was denied admission. During another interview, when I was asked if I thought I had the academic prowess to be successful, I decided to respond with a less direct answer: "I believe so." I was accepted.

After one semester, I decided to leave the school because of the blatant discrimination in the admission process, a lack of understanding of cultural sensitivity, and my poor personal adjustment to the cultural norms of Southern culture, being a native New Yorker. During this break from academia, I worked for five years as a licensed professional counselor in private practice, forensic settings, and nonprofits. I then applied to a progressive graduate program in California, where, after five years of clinical training, I received my doctoral degree. I have been employed as a forensic psychologist for the past five years.

As a forensic psychologist, I have firsthand knowledge of how biased the criminal justice system can be when it comes to people of color. Black males are about six times more likely to be incarcerated than their White peers; and, although Black Americans account for only 13 percent of the population, they account for 27 percent of arrests. Similarly, Black youth account for 15 percent of the U.S. population but make up some 35 percent of arrests (Sentencing Project 2018). Black women experience similar injustices. They are three times more likely than White women to be incarcerated (Kerby 2012; Sickmund, Sladky, Kang & Puzzanchera 2011).

As a Black person, I understand that 20 percent of the homes purchased by Black and Latino families are "higher priced," as defined by the government, compared with only 6 percent of homes purchased by White families and 4 percent of homes purchased by Asian families (Harney 2019). Research has also shown that there are large differences in the amount of credit offered to similarly qualified applicants in Black versus White communities (Cohen–Cole 2008) and that race affects the likelihood of a person obtaining a credit card, the number of credit cards they own, the credit line per card, and the conditions and fees attached to the card. These differences occur despite there being no difference in the rates of bad or good credit between Black and White households (Freeman 2017).

At the time of the incident I described at the start of this essay, I was on track to become promoted and was working very diligently to secure a seat at the table. I had the years of experience, both at the master's and doctoral levels; I had a strong vision for the department; and I already had implemented several key programs that shaped the county mental health system. While waiting for the opportunity to apply for advancement, I was told that a co-worker had been speaking negatively of my work ethic, abilities and qualifications to superiors for months, which prompted the intervention. I could not endure one more injustice outside my daily encounters with inequity.

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When I approach my colleague, I am already fatigued from dealing with the daily demands of being Black in America. I am anxious about how to broach this difficult conversation, while understanding that I cannot swallow another injustice, especially one that is within my own control.

She is defensive and becomes more rigid in her body posture. I make sure to become more open and relaxed.

As she becomes loud and demanding, I remember to speak softly and calmly because I know the appearance of this situation is more important than the facts.

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Like much of the negative imagery surrounding Black Americans, the stereotype of the "angry Black female" has its origins in 19th-century minstrel shows (Prasad 2018; FSU 2019). During this time, White actors wore blackface and portrayed the most extreme and negative stereotyped behavior representing Black women. The audiences had little to no real-life experience or interactions with Black women. These portrayals were an attempt to entertain the audience at the expense of Black women. These shows also were interpreted by the audience to be accurate representations of what to expect when dealing with Black women. For example, the "Sassy Mammy," which was later termed "Sapphire," shows Black women to be irrational, hostile, mean-spirited, and quick-tempered (Ashley 2014; Pilgrim 2008).

Even in the 21st century, the legacy of minstrel shows continues to perpetuate these false narratives of the stereotyped Black woman, through shows that display one-dimensional Black women as aggressive, feisty or loud (i.e. more dangerous) while simultaneously ensuring Black women

conform to societal standards for racial- and gender-appropriate behavior (FSU 2019; Ashley 2014).

These negative stereotypes have real-world consequences for Black women when working, with Black women being held to higher standards, while simultaneously being assumed to be less qualified than their White peers and males (Washington & Roberts 2019). The continued prominence of this stereotype comes from being Black and exemplifying "nonconforming femininity" (Jones & Norwood 2017; Ashley 2014).

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This is not my first time being labeled angry and likely won't be my last, so I understand this experience on two levels.

First, I recognize the seriousness of my colleague's accusation.

Second, I identify the immediate need to protect myself against any further damage to my professional reputation.

So, I develop a game plan:

How do I prevent this racist dog whistle from negatively influencing the opinions of my superiors?

How do I prove myself to be a level-headed, logical professional?

How can I protect my career?

And the most menacing thought: *How will this play out in the broader context of White femininity and White female victimhood?*

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Black women historically have not been—and continue to not be—viewed as victims under any circumstances. During the women's suffrage movement, Sojourner Truth, giving a speech, asked the audience: "Ain't I a woman?" She noted that her (unique) position in the world was not one of "femininity" as defined by the male viewpoint of the time, but she was still a woman (NPS 2017). The societal ideal of normative femininity is a male-constructed paradigm where women are coerced to live up to expectations where their bodies, in both gesture and appearance, are visibly feminine. This unique construct is not race-neutral and, in fact, is formed under a strict lens of whiteness, leaving women of color the choice to either aspire to whiteness or be left out of the benefits afforded to women who are deemed feminine. The concept of femininity has been difficult for Black women because "they have historically been treated as though they exist outside of its boundaries" (Collins 2000). Qualitative studies show that Black women

understand that normative femininity places them at a disadvantage, both in comparison to White women and in the eyes of men (Collins 2000).

During the fight for equal rights, Black women have been caught between civil liberties and feminism, creating the need for the understanding of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989). Intersectionality states that Black women are routinely caught in the intersection of race and sex—causing Black women to experience a double discrimination because our experience of sexism is not deemed valid if White women are present and our experiences of racism are not deemed valid if there are Black men present.

The concept of White female victimhood is often explored under the lens of the Privilege Identity Exploration (PIE) model, which was coined by Sherry K. Watt (2007). While White women experience discrimination based on gender, they also experience the privilege afforded to them by their whiteness. The duality in identity that White women hold is a source of tension and/or blind spot when they are challenged by women of color to consider their privilege (Accapadi 2007).

White women have been depicted as the foundation of purity, virtue and beauty, and this privilege is bound to the image of powerlessness (Palmer 1994) or being the eternal victim. It is this state of powerlessness, which is shaped by historical context of what it means to be a woman in White society, that is an act of privileged femininity. This type of femininity is often wielded by White women in the form of tears—to secure their protected and often privileged place in femininity by ensuring others see them as victims. This act silences and harms women of color due to the discriminatory beliefs that women of color do not have the same level of femininity (i.e. powerlessness) as White women. Black women continue to be unprotected and voiceless in a world that prioritizes a man's strength (in a patriarchal society) and the perception of fragility (White femininity).

The complexity of bias that Black women face in the workplace is heightened by White fragility. The concept of White fragility suggests that Western society insulates and protects White people from truly addressing race-based stressors. As Robin DiAngelo explains, "Whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides" (2011). It is this lack of awareness of the intolerance for racial stress that, when challenged, causes aggressive and/or passive-aggressive tactics in the workplace. These tactics single out the person of color as the instigator or the alleged problem needing to be fixed.

In the workplace, historical stereotypes of Black woman, White fragility and narrow concepts of femininity represent a trifecta of taxing experiences of constant hostility and oppression (Ashley 2014; Crenshaw 1989). It is

this trifecta that positions me and other Black women in an arena where we are constantly misrepresented, misunderstood and almost certainly without the support of colleagues and superiors.

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Black women working in systems that uphold systemic racism are mocked, met with unnecessary hesitancy, labeled and made to believe we are unworthy of the spaces we hold. These experiences occur while we are managing the demands of being professionals, wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters. Experiences like these take up space our minds and spirits, causing restless nights, wearing on the already depleted resources that we need to navigate the world, and deteriorating our overall health.

Studies show that Black women overwhelmingly participate in the workforce and have a desire to excel at their chosen careers, but their jobs are less stable than those of White women (Mays 2015). We are perceived as less capable and offered fewer opportunities while simultaneously carrying a heavier load than our White female counterparts (Mays 2015). To have the added daily pressure of dealing with stereotypes, racial bigotry and coded language, because we are uniquely feminine and discernably Black, is just plain exhausting.

The health consequences of racism, specifically for Black women, are well documented. Researchers have found a relationship between perceived racism and elevated blood pressure (Armstead, Herbert, Griffin & Prince 2014; Din–Dzetham, Nembhard, Collins & Davis 2004; Dolezsar, McGrath, Herzig & Miller 2014). Racism increases cortisol levels in people of color, and it has been suggested that long-term activation of stress responses can impact the flexibility of neural functioning affecting emotions, attention and other cognitive functions (Berger & Saynari 2014). Some researchers conclude that racism is a contributing factor to obesity (Cozier et al. 2009), anxiety (Maddox 2013), eating and other mental health disorders in Black women (Lacey et al. 2015; Mays 1995). Other health disparities found in the Black female community include alopecia (Thompson et al. 2018), poor cardiovascular health (Pool et al. 2017) and depression (Perry, Harp & Oser 2015; Lacey et al. 2015). Overall, discrimination related to sex and gender increases the risk of poor health and reduces well-being in Black women, ultimately making Black women more vulnerable to other complications that are associated with daily individual stress (Perry, Harp & Oser 2015).

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