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In Praxis: Creating a (Web)Site of Resistance and Disrupting the Hidden Curricula of Academic Socialization

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The navigation and socialization within academia is rife with toxicity and a hidden curricula reflective of neoliberal competitiveness, drawn from White cis-hetero colonialist patriarchy. To challenge and resist the toxicity within academia, Communities of Color have created counterspaces to share resources, build beyond the purported individualism, and connect through vulnerability and care. Within this reflection, are the lessons learned of creating one such counterspace through the development of a website— a “site” of resistance.

It started as letters to my students. In 2016, I was in the process of leaving a full-time position in student affairs and moving across the country to start my doctoral program. With the announcement and subsequent transition, my students and I joked, laughed, and strategized on how we could still *do advising*. In addition to “academic” mentorship, advising was also made up of moments where my students could feel seen and could have raw conversations about things like imposter phenomenon, navigating immigrant parental pressures, challenges of being first-generation, and dealing with racism and policing both on and off campus. We decided to make a website of sorts, where I could write out the advice I would have shared, had I stayed in West Harlem, New York City. In the coming months, I posted tips and advice for professional development, how to craft a resume, what to consider when applying to graduate school, along with reflections about the bicoastal move to Los Angeles. While continuing to create these posts for my undergraduate students, I slowly integrated letters for the younger version of myself, a doctoral student learning about academia. This website

transitioned from being a mechanism to stay in touch with my students, into a place to support myself and emerging scholars. In short, it became a place to support *us*.

Several years and a doctorate later, I can name what we created: a digital counterspace for ourselves within the larger landscape of higher education that consistently messages to marginalized communities that they/we do not belong (see Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Sanchez et al., 2020; Steele, 2018; Yao et al., 2019). From experiences of microaggressions to deficit narratives to even the critique of *me-search* and doubts of rigor regarding research design (see Delgado Bernal & Villapando, 2010; Stanley, 2007), scholars have long described how academic socialization and toxicity specifically and disproportionately impacts racially marginalized students, faculty, and practitioners. Communities, especially Communities of Color, have created counterspaces for survival (Ong et al., 2018; Yosso, 2006)— physical and virtual— that represent connections, healing, knowledge spaces, generational wisdom, and a shared belonging (Mac et al., 2021; Tichavakunda, 2020). Within academic navigation, these types of counterspaces offer not only mentorship, but a (re)humanization against the disembodied pressure to produce and *push through*. In what follows, I offer a reflection on how the “letters” to my students turned into the development of a website and digital counterspace, weaving in its purpose and goals, lessons learned, and implications for praxis.

Evolving a Website

Higher education institutions, the field of academia at-large, remains rooted in white supremacy, coloniality, capitalism, hetero-cis-gender patriarchy, with a continued proclivity to rebrand itself rather than address the rotted foundations of its core. In doing

so, the onus remains placed on an individual level (Ahmed, 2012, 2021) where success and excellence are celebrated, absent of the larger systemic and structural critiques in which our navigations exist. Academic publication processes reward and encourage solo submission over collaborations, purporting a *myth of the independent scholar* (Harris, 2016; Sullivan, 1994). Collaborators must parse out percentages of contribution and authorship order— all of which reinforce individualism, potentially abusive power dynamics, neoliberal logics, and gatekeeping (Patel, 2016). As such, the toxicity of academia encourages against *the communal*, with incentive towards competition — viewing opportunities and knowledge as resources of scarcity, as property to colonially claim and hoard (Patel, 2016; Sarnecka, 2019).

The purpose, goals, and evolution of my website (www.katscho.com) reflects a growth in my own resistance and response to academic socialization. When first starting out the letters to my students, I knew little of the aforementioned concepts and instead, grounded the content in my educational experiences of consistently feeling a beat behind and not belonging. As a Korean American daughter of immigrants, I faced interpersonal and structural gendered racism, which included assumptions about my (lack of) English skills and microaggressions, reflective of the research on Asian Americans being viewed as perpetual foreigners (see Lee et al., 2009). Despite coming from a family of educators, I missed almost every deadline related to college, incorrectly filed for financial aid (FAFSA), and struggled with navigating the bureaucracy of a predominantly white university. As a doctoral student, I *still* felt a beat behind, unsure of how to find the opportunities to which to apply, conferences to attend, and continued to grapple with the forms of systemic oppression (e.g., racism) that disproportionately

impacts Students of Color (see Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Patrón et al., 2021), that is further magnified at the intersections of gender, class, immigration status, sexuality, and ableism.

These experiences concretized the first goal of this site: developing resources to navigate academia. While these first started because of how I wanted to support my students, I also realized that the resources I had crafted for myself, could also serve as support. The advice and tips then included the notes I had saved about the difference between a conference paper and class paper; strategies for how to disseminate an article once published; and lessons learned from creating several virtual writing groups, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. I shared my running list of fellowships, conference opportunities, and organizational deadlines. From bullet journal layouts for weekly and monthly plans, to GoogleSheets and platforms like Notion, I digitized what I had been using for people to be able to duplicate ways to “organize the academic job search” and “create a semester plan”— the latter, informed by the National Center for Faculty Diversity and Development.

Of the messages and responses I receive regarding my site, the majority are related to the blog section of the website. These entries are snippets and excerpts of the *rough drafts* in navigation. I write about how I have fallen out of love with writing, about the anxiety of dissertating, and experiencing imposter phenomena. I share these “uncut” versions of myself because academic toxicity extends to the ways we are rewarded for only showing the final product of papers, of ourselves, of our brands. In doing so, we fold into a neoliberal reduction where our lives are treated simply as lines within a curriculum vitae. Thus, while these entries describe my navigation, advice, and

struggles within academia, they also highlight who am I outside of them— the penchant for listening to podcasts about food, the young adult books I love, the trials of finding a new hobby— a life beyond the *work*.

Considerations

In application, maintaining a website requires the deliberation of what platform to use, which incorporates issues of user design and accessibility; questions about purpose and audience; as well as planning for content, consistency, and literal services for hire. The past twenty years has demonstrated a trend of academics utilizing social media and digital platforms to connect to the larger public (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2016). A growing number of avenues afford scholars to share their research, whether on publication-based sites like GoogleScholar, ORCID, BePress, ResearchGate, and Academia.edu; social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok; or developing a personal website through Weebly, Wordpress, and Squarespace. These platforms can and do additionally serve as data points, whether through the analytics and metrics they offer in terms of readership, engagement, and downloads to supporting research as landing pages for project information, supporting recruitment, and data collection. Yet at the same time, maintaining these types of sites are not only costly in terms of labor, time, and potentially finance, but also in terms of mental health. Public engagement can and has led to disproportionate harm to Scholars of Color, especially at the intersections of gender and sexuality, with cyberbullying, doxxing, and harassment (McGlotten, 2016; Noble & Tynes, 2016). At the same time, public engagement metrics are increasingly valued by academic institutions (Cabrera et al.,

2017), further evidenced through lists like the *RHSU Edu-Scholar Public Influence Rankings*.

I recognize that in some ways, showcasing a website might look as a recommendation or encouragement for others to create similar platforms, potentially folding into the neoliberal engine of *more*— more labor, more products, more rankings (see Gonzales & Núñez, 2014). Yet more *is* necessary, when considering the ways Communities of Color have *not* been served through mainstream websites, digital platforms, media outlets, and even the backend algorithms themselves (see Noble, 2018). Thus, the recommendation from this reflection is not for every scholar to create a website or establish their own digital counterspace, but instead consider the ways to best challenge academic gatekeeping and share information. For some, that could be a replication or expansion of a digital site, which is both necessary and welcomed. For others, that could translate into not developing or investing along these lines and instead, considering the ways to build and support the counterspaces and *placemaking* at their respective universities.

Within these discourses and *service*, I encourage us to consider and challenge knowledge production: who has it, who holds it, who legitimates it. Existing literature has well-documented the ways Scholars of Color, especially Women of Color are overlooked and not-credited for their intellectual labor (Neimann, 2012; Settles et al., 2021), which is additionally compounded in the ways they take on ghost advising (see Schultheiss, 2018) both in the physical and virtual world. In creating digital counterspaces, I encourage us to extend our citation politics (e.g., #CiteASista from Williams & Collier, n.d.) and consider how we credit syllabi, book lists, images, photos,

and other digital mediums. This too, reflects the deepening network of knowledge outside the traditional peer-reviewed articles, located behind paywalls. An example, within my own site I connect to reading lists from the *Asian American Feminist Collective*, hyperlink to *Black Women's Studies Booklist*, and highlight scholars and podcasts with like-minded purposes of creating a digital community of resources and resistance.

Having a website does not come without its tensions and challenges. In 2020, I transitioned into becoming a faculty member. In doing so, I debated fiercely within myself about whether to retain the entries and blog posts of my journey, balancing the gendered, raced perceptions regarding who is *allowed* to be vulnerable and the less-than-perfect drafts of ourselves (Neimann, 2012; Pittman, 2010). As seen by its continued existence, which includes a post about the decision, I engage in an act of political refusal. Academic socialization requires not just our disembodiment, but also that we silence our experiences to remain *professional*, remain the final product of ourselves. In doing so, manifestations of academic toxicity translate into the proverbial *rat race* and the pressure to perform and produce (Gay, 2004; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Pelletier et al., 2019), at the expense of our humanity, dignity, and livelihood.

Conclusion

Challenging academia requires a communal response. As Lilla Watson states, “our liberation is tied to each other.” While the institution of academia is rarely if ever a liberatory vessel, I argue that it can be a site of resistance. For many of us, community allows us to navigate and survive the academy (Muhs et al., 2012)— these communities are an act of resistance against neoliberalism, white supremacy, and coloniality. They

become the buffer that allows us to engage in the liberatory work so many of us believe in, and yet, are targeted for. This collective support is what I refer to as (web)sites of resistance within an institution that celebrates rugged individualism and an academy that encourages productive perfection.

In a given year, the site receives about 10,000 to 15,000 views. I share this number, not as a metric of it being a lot or a little, but rather as a commentary and observation of how people desire this information, community, and resistance— things that are not available unless we proactively build, share, and distribute. Much in the ways the site and myself reflect a work in progress, I humbly offer this praxis in conversation and community with so many because there is space for all our stories and learnings. We have already started to dismantle the knowledge hoarding and in sharing this reflection, I encourage us as a community to continue to challenge, and disrupt the gatekeeping and socialization in which we are all complicit. I look forward to visiting your sites; may we build webs of resistance.

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