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## Maintaining Credibility and Authority as an Instructor of Color in Diversity-Education Classrooms: A Qualitative Inquiry

The movement for multicultural or diversity-centered education has resulted in changes to the academic demography of the United States (Banks, 1991; Butler & Walter, 1991; Goodstein, 1994; Morey & Kitano, 1997). Institutions of higher education have integrated the voices, knowledge, and lived experiences of various underrepresented cultures and excluded groups into their formal academic curriculum. A recent survey by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AACU) shows that 63% of colleges and universities report that they have in place, or are in the process of developing, a diversity education component in their undergraduate curriculum (AACU, 2003). Of those that have implemented dimensions of diversity into their curriculum, the majority of campuses (68%) require their students to take at least one course from among a list of approved diversity-education courses.

Special thanks to Professors Harriet McLeod and Kwakiutl Dreher and for *The Journal of Higher Education* reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

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*The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 80, No. 1 (January/February 2009)  
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The success of many colleges and universities at integrating this level of multicultural or diversity education into the academic curriculum marks a significant higher education milestone. However, an organized and entrenched resistance to this movement has emerged at both individual and organizational levels (Butler & Walter, 1991; Jayne, 1991). The diversity-education classroom, in particular, is a site wherein this conflict takes on particular meaning for instructors of color at all academic ranks including graduate teaching assistants and full professors (Perry, Moore, Acosta, Edwards, & Frey, 2006; Turner, 2002). Much of the existing scholarship on higher education and multicultural classrooms has focused on the impact of backlash and resistance in the general academic workplace (Yang, Barrayo, & Timpson, 2003; Timpson, 2003).

Our current study is part of a larger investigation into the professional, emotional, and physical labor associated with teaching diversity-education courses in higher education. Nationally, a disproportionate number of instructors of color (that is, faculty members or graduate student instructors who identify or are identified as “non-white”) are engaged in teaching diversity courses in higher education (Brayboy 2003; McKay 1997; Perry et al. 2006). These diversity courses are often touted in campus publications as explicitly intended “To increase students’ understanding of individual and group differences (e.g., race, gender, class) and their knowledge of the traditions and values of various groups in the United States” (Bemidji State University Catalogue 2006). Schneider (2001) as President of the AACU noted that “diversity requirements signal the academy’s conviction that citizens now need to acquire significant knowledge both of cultures other than their own and of disparate cultures’ struggles for recognition and equity, in order to be adequately prepared for the world around them.” She further states that “diversity courses, especially those that deal with racism and other forms of systemic bias, implicitly appeal to democratic values such as justice, dignity, freedom, and equality.”

We do not assume that all instructors or all diversity courses on all campuses meet resistance from students or colleagues. However, some instructors and some departments or programs do report political and/or individual backlash at predominately white campuses (Gonzales, Rios, Maldonado, & Clark 1995; McKay, 1997; Brayboy, 2003; Castañeda, 2004). We argue that the experiences of instructors of color intertwine with campus efforts to recruit and retain minority instructors in higher education and should raise questions about the role of the required diversity course, its structure, process, and outcomes. In this paper, we explore key themes from in-depth interviews with 20 instructors of color who teach required diversity courses at a predominately white college or

university (PWCU) in the Midwest. From these responses, we identify central challenges for instructors of color. We are interested in how they engage their own agency in the face of student resistance, and the countermeasures they craft to maintain their credibility and intellectual authority in the diversity classroom.

At this historical juncture, PWCUs continue to reflect race relations in the larger US (Aguirre, 2000; Alex-Assenoh, 2003; Altbach & Lomotey, 1991; Benjamin, 1997; Smith, Altbach, & Lomotey, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000). In an essay on the troubled existence of Black women in the predominately white academy, McKay (1997) characterizes the culture and politics of PWCUs as follows:

The academy is a microcosm of the larger society in which we live and that America and all Western society remain provinces in which white men, and some White women, of a particular class and with particular dominant ideologies determine the nature of all of our existences. (p. 15)

The demographic representation of instructors of color at PWCUs has increased over the past forty years, yet their status in the academy can still be characterized as marginal (Turner 2002). Full time instructional faculty remain disproportionately white and male. In 2003, 81% of full-time instructional faculty in all types of institutions combined were white, 5.5% were Black, 3.3% Hispanic, and 8.7% Asian/Pacific Islander (NCES 2004). Hispanic/Latino, Native American, and African American faculty are disproportionately represented in the humanities, education, and social science fields and these are the disciplines in which we found the bulk of required diversity-education courses on the campus of our study.

Structural changes to the academy have occurred simultaneously with the increase in required diversity-courses. University administrators have shifted a large proportion of teaching duties away from regular faculty to part-time and adjunct faculty (Pratt, 1997) and to graduate teaching assistants (Lafer, 2000). In 1998, 43% of faculty and instructional staff in post-secondary institutions were part-timers (NCES, 2002–08). Between 1975 and 1995, graduate teaching assistants responsible for instruction increased by nearly 40%, while tenured faculty were cut by 10%. In areas such as English, Modern Languages, and social sciences, 65% or more of classroom instruction is performed by non-tenure track faculty and graduate teaching assistants (Pratt, 1997).

Both the formal and informal dimensions of PWCUs are often rooted in socio-cultural ideals and configurations of institutional power that are derived from or beholden to a racist social system (Feagin, Vera, & Imani 1996). Instructors of color struggle to penetrate the halls of the

predominately white academy—a social institution that excluded the physical and intellectual presence of instructors of color (Gonzalez et al., 1995). This chilly reception permeates all levels of PWCUs, creating systemic experiences with institutionalized racism, and perhaps particular experiences in the diversity classroom (Smith et al., 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000).

### *Outsiders Within Diversity Classrooms*

The academic reality for many instructors of color may be understood from the outsider-within perspective rooted in black feminist literature (Collins, 1986, 1998, 2000). To illustrate how the experiences of instructors of color largely emanate from their “peculiar marginality” we draw on Hill Collins’ framework (Collins, 2000, p. 11) focusing on women of color—and black women in particular—as identifying distinct worldviews and social standpoints as a result of holding multiple and oppressed social statuses. These statuses place them as outsiders within varying social contexts defined by whiteness, maleness, wealth, and other dominant social statuses. This position at the margins of the predominately white academy is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and includes physical, intellectual, and psychic isolation.

For instructors of color, the classroom—like the larger academy—may reproduce systems of racial oppression (Vargas, 1999, 2002). Instructors from political and social minority groups are described as estranged from their colleagues and students, from their original intentions for entering the academy (including goals for social change and outreach to minority communities), from their teaching and scholarship, and ultimately from themselves (Aguirre, 2000; Alex-Assenoh, 2003; Baraka, 1997, Sutherland, 1990; Turner & Myers, 2000).

Other scholars have noted that diversity classrooms are sites of struggle for instructors from marginalized positions (Brown, 2002; Gititi, 2002; Moore, 1996). Surely classroom resistance can be experienced by any and all instructors, and all instructors may potentially struggle with multiple dimensions of classroom management and interaction (Hendrix, 1998; Patton, 1999). Past research concludes that instructors of color’s classroom experiences are both inextricably and negatively linked to their outsider status within PWCUs (Butler, 2000; Housee, 2001; Vargas, 1999). Contentious micro classroom experiences often result from inappropriate acts of student opposition framed by distorted stereotypic belief systems that are inextricably and negatively linked to the instructors’ outsider within status (Butler, 2000, Housee, 2001; Vargas, 1999). These students do challenge the credibility and authority of

instructors of color in ways that are structured and defined by issues of race (Hendrix, 1998; Luthra, 2002; Vargas, 1999). Castañeda particularly highlights the dimensions of “students questioning their [instructors of color] knowledge and expertise as instructors and accusing them of promoting their own agendas” (2004, p. 152).

The newer hiring pipelines of faculty and graduate students of color are subordinated to the entrenched structural privileges of academic senior “insiders” (mostly white, male, and heterosexual). Senior faculty members benefit from access to their preferred teaching assignments, and from the fact that they have historically aligned more closely with the dominant definitions of what constitutes valued curricula and scholarship (Aguirre, 2000). At the macro level of institutionalized racism, students’ classroom challenges may be supported through the institutional efforts of some whites in the academy (administrators, senior faculty), and political voices in the larger community, to publicly resist the validity and inclusion of instructors of color and diversity curriculum goals (Rains, 1999; Turner, 2002; Vargas, 1999; Gonzalez, 1995).

Drawing from Collins’ outsider-within perspective, the tokenism, marginalization, and exclusion of instructors of color at PWCUs may be identified as the result of social factors that have constructed the professoriate, or *legitimate* academic space, as white male space (Collins, 1986; DeLoria & Wildcat, 2001). The institutional exclusion and marginalization of “marked” groups or outsiders within the curriculum, within scholarship, and within spheres of academic power and influence contribute to the collective lack of power and authority among instructors of color (Turner, 2000). These limits are generated and maintained through historical, legal, and contemporary practices in the academy (Aguirre, 2000; Butler, 2000; Sutherland, 1990; Turner, 2002). The outsider-within perspective highlights the systematic exclusion of persons of color from positions of power and authority, and their limited access to resources to address these inequities within the academy (DeLoria & Wildcat, 2001).

In contrast, other scholars argue that identity politics in higher education, along with increased commitments to diversity-centered education, actually afford instructors of color a new and authoritative academic space on PWCU campuses. Dougherty (2002) and Mayberry (1996) contend that most instructors of color are uniquely qualified through their life experiences and consciousness of systems of oppression to instruct diversity-education courses. Their definition emphasizes diversity curricula and pedagogical positions based from “teaching what you are” (via racial minority or other marginalized positions) contrasted to “teaching what you are not” (via white, heterosexual, middle- or upper-

class positions) and they assume that some level of credibility and authority is then extended to the outsider-within perspective in the classroom. We question the extent to which the identity politics of race (or other marginalized statuses) encourage validation for instructors of color in the diversity-education classroom. We also note that assigning diversity responsibilities disproportionately to instructors of color shifts the burden away from faculty already privileged by their race, ethnicity, gender, etc. What are the consequences of assigning the responsibilities for diversity education disproportionately to instructors of color on the presumption of “fit?”

The outsider-within perspective can move us beyond identity politics to better understand the actual standpoint of instructors of color. We examine the effects of the “outsider within” status of instructors of color in the very specific context of the diversity classroom. We approach this analysis with both a theoretical and experiential understanding that instructors of color, even when teaching diversity-education courses, may face additional challenges in securing their professorial credibility and authority.

In the current study, the assumptions of the outsider-within perspective allow us to interrogate a particular instructional space, the diversity classroom, as a potential site of “peculiar marginality.” We inquire into the classroom practices of instructors of color as they manage their credibility and establish their instructional authority in the diversity-education classroom. We enter the field with the following theoretically-grounded assumptions: (a) an instructor of color’s credibility and authority, even in the diversity-education classroom, is problematized by his or her outsider status within the larger academy, and (b) his or her credibility and authority is further jeopardized by teaching required diversity-education courses—whose subject matter is widely debated by students and instructors as peripheral to or outside of the academic canon (Butler, 2000). At this juncture, more in-depth and systematic analyses are needed of how these processes unfold in the diversity-education classroom.

### *Purpose of the Study*

This qualitative study explores how instructors of color struggle with and strategize in maintaining their professorial credibility and authority while teaching diversity-education courses at a Midwestern PWCU (hereafter referred to as Midwestern University). Our primary research objective is to explore how these 20 instructors of color are challenged *and* triumphant in maintaining their professorial credibility and author-

ity in the classroom. Our rationale for focusing solely on instructors of color is twofold. First, much of the existing scholarship concerning the experiences of instructors of color in academe pays minimal attention to how they negotiate their credibility and authority in the classroom. More to the point, little attention has been given to how instructors of color negotiate this process within the confines of the diversity education classroom to which they are disproportionately assigned. Second, we enter into an academic conversation with some scholars, some university and departmental administrators, some instructors, and some students who believe that instructors of color are better equipped to teach diversity-education courses. We view the current study as providing much needed insight on the current conditions of academic labor for instructors of color in the academy. Our research goal is to investigate the assumption by some that an instructor of color's credibility and authority is enhanced rather than challenged when teaching diversity-education courses.

*Researchers' Positionality and Subjectivity as Outsiders  
and Insiders*

As researchers, our study is both strengthened and at times hindered by the various lived experiences and social roles we bring to this study. We each have taught diversity-education courses at Midwestern University and we each bring lived experiences and social standpoints that are influenced by our diverse racial-ethnic, gender, age, sexual, political identities, and academic positions as graduate instructors or as a Full Professor. To minimize the inaccuracies in both our coding and interpretation of the qualitative data, we routinely met as a group to discuss our understanding of the data (a process of peer review or debriefing [Creswell, 1998]). The validity of our findings was also tested by confirmatory and review comments from some participant-instructors who read earlier drafts of the manuscript (a process of member checking [Creswell, 1998]).

*Study Participants and Design*

This current study is part of a larger project in which participant-instructors were purposefully selected from an original list of approximately 82 instructors, of all races and ethnicities, who taught at least one required diversity-education undergraduate course over a two-year period. The diversity-education courses were compiled using the Midwestern University Undergraduate Bulletin that outlines specific three-hour credit courses that satisfy the requirement in diversity education



(courses formally defined by the campus as meeting the 2001 AACU definition). We recruited participants either by electronic-mail, telephone, or in person, and drew participants from a wide range of disciplines and program areas, including Communication Studies, Curriculum and Instruction, Economics, English, History, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Ethnic and Women's Studies.

Sixteen of the instructors were unavailable for interviews due to retirement, lack of retention, or loss of contact information as a result of graduating from their doctoral program. We successfully completed and transcribed 42 interviews from the adjusted list of 66 potential participant-instructors. For the purpose of the current study, we focus on the 20 participant-instructors who self-reported racial-ethnic identities classifying them as an instructor of color. Like most of the existing literature, we define an instructor of color as any and all participant-instructors whose *self-reported* racial-ethnic identities are other than non-Hispanic white or Caucasian. Table 1 summarizes the diversity among the 20 participant-instructors by other self-reported demographic characteristics. It should be noted that ten of the participant-instructors were adjunct or graduate instructors and six were non-tenured Assistant Professors. Only four (or 1 in 5) instructors of color were tenured Associate or Full Professors during the period when they taught a specific diversity-education course. Our instructors identified as Hispanic/Latino, African American, American Indian, and African, but we found no Asian instructors in the required diversity course listing. We use the general term "instructor-participant" for all of our respondents of any academic rank. To protect the confidentiality of our participant-instructors, we use pseudonyms throughout this paper, and do not identify their respective disciplines or program areas, although at times we identify rank in order to emphasize some generalizability across positions.

We conducted in-depth interviews with each of the 20 participants. We selected in-depth interviews as the format best suited to a population whose voices are often omitted or distorted in more positivistic research inquiry (Reinharz 1992). The current study focuses on responses to a subset of questions from the interview instrument that centered on issues of professorial credibility and authority in the diversity-education classroom. Our line of questioning was essentially twofold. First, we asked each participant to indicate if their process of teaching a diversity-education course as an instructor of color ever created challenges to their professorial credibility and authority. Second, if a participant answered in the affirmative, he or she was then asked to explain or illustrate such challenges (we later probed to understand their perceptions of how these challenges might differ for their white colleagues). Without exception,



TABLE 1  
Self-Reported Demographic Characteristics for Instructor-Participants by Racial-Ethnic Group

Total Measure	African-Am (n=11)	Latino/a (n=6)	Am Indian (n=2)	Black-International (n=1)	(N=20)
Sex:					
Male	7	4	1	1	13
Female	4	2	1	0	7
Sexuality:					
Heterosexual	9	5	1	1	16
Gay-lesbian	1	1	1	0	3
Refused/Missing	1	0	0	0	1
Age (Cohort):					
25–30	2	1	0	0	3
31–40	3	1	0	0	4
41–50	3	1	1	0	5
51 or >	2	0	1	1	4
Refused/Missing	1	3	0	0	4
Professional Rank					
Full	1	1	0	0	2
Associate	1	0	0	1	2
Assistant	4	1	1	0	6
Adjunct	0	0	1	0	1
Graduate instruct	5	4	0	0	9

all participant-instructors indicated that their professorial credibility and authority had been challenged memorably in the classroom; thus we rely on the responses of each of the 20 participant-instructors of color for our thematic coding.

We analyzed our data using a “stream-line coding” method (Creswell, 1998), allowing us to both individually and collectively develop a comprehensive list of over 20 initial codes. These codes were later collapsed and edited into more focused codes that conceptualize how the participants both struggle with and at times succeed in remaining credible and authoritative while teaching diversity-education courses.

## *Findings*

### *Challenges to Professorial Credibility and Authority*

Each of the participant-instructors discussed ways in which their credibility and authority have been challenged in the diversity-education classroom and on the larger campus. When we asked for illustrations,

considerable variation was evident across the participant-instructors' responses. But we emphasize that all four tenured faculty of color, and all six assistant professors (with a range of 1 to 4 years of tenure track teaching) shared experiences of having their authority and credibility challenged by students at Midwestern University (including some challenges by colleagues to be discussed below). They included only 3 instructors under age 30, and the modal age category was 41–50 years of age.

We discovered three primary themes that characterize and underline this range of varied experiences: (a) student resistance, (b) questioning of integrity, and (c) devaluation.

*Student Resistance.* We define student resistance as an in-class process wherein some students challenge a participant-instructor's credibility and authority by inappropriately opposing or contesting the instructor's very presence in the classroom. While it is true that most faculty of color are likely to experience student resistance even when not instructing diversity-centered courses, our data reveals that the student resistance described by our participant-instructors went beyond solely challenging their outsider-status. It included a refusal to accept their credibility and authority when teaching diversity-centered materials. For each of the participant-instructors, having their credibility and authority resisted in the diversity-education classroom, in conjunction with the diversity-centered curriculum, became a daily expectation. Some participant-instructors interpreted such resistance in the context of *doing war* with their students, as Joyce describes:

I'm going into this place where it's going to be me against them. It feels awful. It feels like you are before the class and you basically put on your fighting gear [. . .]. You feel like you are putting your armor on and it's only you . . . it's only you.

All college instructors may at some time encounter a classroom environment that leaves them feeling as if it is “me against them.” A number of our participant-instructors echoed Joyce's argument, but many also acknowledged that there is a pervasive resistance within the academy to their right, as outsiders, to be in positions of authority or to even be employed within the academy at all. Some participant-instructors linked this resistance to the fact that many of their non-minority students have had little if any contact with or significant exposure to persons of color in positions of authority either within or outside of the academy. According to Tanisha:

For a lot of them (non-minority students), when they enter into your classroom, you're the first black person that they've ever encountered that has any sort of authority. And for some of them that's very difficult.

Some participant-instructors felt such resistance was not as common for their white colleagues. Latoya, in particular, felt that her outsider status in turn allowed her white colleagues to occupy positions of power and privilege inside the academy, even when teaching diversity-education courses. She argues that if a white instructor were to teach the same diversity-education-courses she did,

my students would be more likely to listen to what the person is saying [. . .]. They are more willing to listen; they are more receptive to white teachers. Even in the [diversity-education classroom], they are more receptive to a white person than to me.

In efforts to maintain their authority in light of this student resistance, participant-instructors discussed how they would labor to add significant amounts of supporting and supplemental materials into their diversity-education curriculum beyond the normal scope of a curriculum. These materials were to buttress the participant-instructors' statements about topics concerning social inequality or discrimination. In spite of their scholarly efforts, most stated that they continued to be resisted. According to Tanisha:

Part of it is that they're dismissing both your academic and your personal experience—even though it's not necessarily your personal experience that you're presenting in the class [. . .]. I remember students were just simply unwilling to look at the evidence. And I think that's because I am a black female, (and) there is a certain element that they reject things I tell them as far as race [. . .].

Most of the participant-instructors described extra and often invisible labor when preparing to “do battle” with student resistance. This invisible labor included ongoing efforts by the participant-instructors to locate resources beyond the assigned curriculum that would bolster and protect their professorial credibility and authority—as a scholar of color—in the diversity-centered classroom. Although most instructors integrate supplemental and instructional resources into their course curriculum, we must not ignore that the experiences by these faculty of color in the diversity-centered classroom warrants that they take extra precautions in both securing their professorial credibility and authority as well as warding off attacks on their professional credibility and on course content.

*Questioning Integrity.* We define questioning integrity as direct and indirect acts of non-rational challenges by students that target the motives and agendas of both our participant-instructors and the credibility of the subject matter they taught in the diversity-education classroom. Such challenges are generally twofold. On the one hand, the participant-instructors discussed their perceptions and observations of students

directly questioning their capacity to teach objectively. On the other hand, they noted students' efforts to challenge or undermine the subject matter itself.

Over the course of our study, participant-instructors shared accounts in which their students assumed that they were biased. As Edward (an Assistant Professor) recalls:

I learned early on that when I made certain statements about certain events, the students thought that this was just *me* speaking and this is how *I* thought [. . .]. So I would get student evaluations at Midwestern University such as "He *hates* all white men;" "He is a *racist* and I want my money back;" "All he talks about is *black people*;" and "I didn't sign up for this *liberal class*" (italicized for emphasis).

Students also perceived Curtis (a graduate instructor) as having an ulterior motive:

My most memorable experience was when I showed this film called "The Color of Fear," and after the film there was one interesting reaction. One student waited until the class was over . . . and he came up to me and said, "Are you some kind of black racist or something?" because I showed this film.

The following account from Shebelle (an Assistant Professor) illustrates how students questioned her from the outset:

When I first got here [Midwestern University], one student asked me: "Where do you get your information? How do you know what you know?" One student did ask me that and that was from a white male.

Other participant-instructors shared incidents wherein their integrity was questioned more discretely. Vanessa (an Assistant Professor) recalls an incident during a class lecture on the post-slavery movement when a student undermined her credibility:

We were talking about the Ku Klux Klan and what the Ku Klux Klan became in the South, and I had a student [white male] in the course who was also taking a course in like history until 1877; . . . so it became a really back-and-forth thing because I was able to call upon him and he was like, "Oh, I just had that on my test." And I'm teaching about the Klan and one [white male] student turns to the student who had taken the exam . . . and I read his lips . . . he said, "Is she telling the truth?"

These experiences relate primarily to how students questioned the participant-instructors' integrity, but some identified instances when the integrity of their subject matter was called into question. These participant-instructors described occasions when students sought to discredit the validity of the subject matter simply because it may have contradicted their own worldview. Teresa illustrates this point:

I had one student who would bring in Nazi paraphernalia to class. He put books in front of me that had a swastika. He was very verbal and very aggressive in class about what he proudly felt . . . he was constantly questioning everything I talked about, even if he observed things [ . . . ].

Many participant-instructors noted that student questioning of their integrity often stemmed from the fact that many of their students were unable to view them—an instructor of color—as a disinterested party. Dadisi (a Full Professor) provides this example:

And if I attempt to correct any notions—In some student evaluations at the end of the semester not too long ago—I had students commenting that I should stop—ah—making excuses and accept the facts. That I had tried to correct whatever received notions you have about Africa. That was interpreted as my “making excuses and not facing facts.” The person who wrote that had never been to the African continent—but she acts as if she knows a whole lot. It makes her competent to question what I am teaching.

Tanisha offers an excellent summary of this:

Because I am a black female, there is a certain element that rejects things I tell them as far as race, because they see me as just another complaining black person. So they automatically dismiss my coverage of race because they view me as not being able to separate my personhood—my African-Americanness—from my professional qualifications as an instructor.

*Devaluation.* We define devaluation as student acts that challenge our participant-instructors and their subject matter by actively undermining or dismissing their value and legitimacy through disrespectful actions carried out in front of student peers. Latoya conveys this point in the following statement:

I stopped teaching [diversity-education course] because I kept getting very, very bad responses from students who felt that they were being insulted by being put in a class . . . taught by this African [ . . . ]. I have on a number of occasions in the past—especially when I taught courses that were listed as taught by staff—experienced walking into the classroom in the beginning of the semester and going to put my book on the desk and students getting up and walking out.

When faced with direct acts of devaluation in the diversity-education classroom, other participant-instructors discussed how they would internally suffer given the assaults on their credibility and authority. For Bobby, these acts left him feeling both powerless and insignificant:

There are times when I cannot get someone to consider a different perspective. Those are the most stressful things, to leave a classroom and someone just refuses to consider a different perspective.

Many participant-instructors also acknowledged how their racialized position in the academy, hence the larger society, underlines the process of being devalued. Diego argues that:

I think the minority instructor is going to have a harder time because from the get-go it's a disadvantage; because they [students] don't look at the instructor as part of their own clique and part of the class. Although I'm a U.S. citizen . . . I don't portray the nationality of what an American should look like [. . .]. Undergrads don't look at you as being a professor.

Dadisi (a Full Professor) describes how:

Under normal circumstances, [students] do things that you would not expect them to do. You have to look at people's circumstances and judge their behaviors against that scene . . . And one particular student kept saying—I was trying to have a decent rational argument—he kept dismissing everyone as “these are animals” and all the rest of that. And I kept trying to say—“but look at their circumstances.” And—they turned on me in class in a way that shocked me—so that I stopped talking to him. And I asked him at the end of the period—he was very, very insulting—saying that I was being rude to him—asking him all kinds of questions.

Joyce notes how her race and sex intersect when affecting how her students come to devalue her in the diversity-education classroom. She identifies how her outsider status influences how students evaluate and respond to her as an instructor:

[. . .] often times, much of the feedback that I get from the [student] responses I still question whether if I was a 50-year-old white male would that student have asked me that? The answer is no. Would I have been challenged if I were a gray haired or even just a witty man? No!

Aside from having their own presence in the diversity-education classroom devalued, many participant-instructors have to contend with preserving and communicating the value of the subject matter to their students. While most academic courses require such efforts, the participant-instructors' responses illustrate how the devaluation of the diversity-education curriculum, as noted earlier, is complicated by a resistance towards the *other* as well as an opposition to worldviews that contest that of the students. Edward (an Assistant Professor) further explains our observation:

People don't want to hear that [diversity-education curricula] so they just sit there and wonder “Why do I have to take this required general education course. I know about black and white people.”

Edward's notion that much of the resentment is in response to these courses being required, in addition to the subject matter being widely

devalued, is a conclusion shared by other participant-instructors. Some noted that forcing students to take diversity-education courses may in turn foster a sense of resentment and disinterest among students. According to Oliver (an Associate Professor):

They're not interested in things that I'm interested in and that's the problem in terms of attendance and interest and my general concern about it is that I think it [diversity-education courses] should be an elective; that they should not be required to take it because it hardens their attitudes against it . . . and it's a majority of the course that's opposed to it. I think they're opposed to it not so much for the content, but that it's required.

Some participant-instructors even highlighted forces outside of the diversity-education classroom that seek to devalue the diversity-education curricula as well as instructors of color. At the time of her interview, Gloria (an Assistant Professor) recalled an article appearing in a Midwestern University paper that argued that opportunity hires—racial-ethnic minorities in particular—lack legitimacy and are less qualified. As Gloria sees it:

Students read that and then they think, "Okay, well anybody who's minority . . . only came here because they're special, or they [Midwestern University administrators] gave them a special thing, they're not as prepared." So the question is, where do the students get this? And obviously it starts in the home . . . and then it moves on to the professors that are racist or homophobic and the administration who feels that, "well, you know, this kind of hiring is letting in lesser prepared professors." So, it comes from all different points . . . and then it lands on our [instructors of color] shoulders and it really affects us.

Other participant-instructors expressed their concern with the growing movement to under fund or dismantle diversity-education programs as a response to the increased budget cuts in higher education. Ike (an Associate Professor) expressed concern that university administrators may become less supportive of diversity-education in light of such growing budget constraints:

There are many, many ways of dealing with diversity across the curriculum that people could address, and I have not seen that here. While [diversity-education] programs all across the country are having their funding cut, it is my hope that this will not happen here at Midwestern University.

*Countermeasures.* Our participant-instructors' professorial credibility and authority were substantially challenged within these classrooms, but the process did not paralyze most. The participant-instructors developed distinctive strategies for managing their classroom roles and curriculum in the face of student resistance, questioning of integrity, and devalua-



tion. These countermeasures, or strategies, may be conceptualized from our coding processes as: (a) anticipatory teaching, (b) depoliticizing, and (c) disarming. We should note that these strategies are neither mutually exclusive/independent of each other nor were they discussed equally among the participant-instructors. We also consider the potential for these strategies to undermine some dimensions of the goals for required-diversity courses.

*Anticipatory Teaching.* We define anticipatory teaching as a strategy of anticipating and potentially preempting any challenges to individual credibility and authority as well as that of the subject matter in the diversity-education classroom. These anticipatory countermeasures are twofold. Some participant-instructors equipped themselves with in-depth supplemental materials. These materials were intended to reinforce and underscore their scholarly credibility and authority or to defuse non-rational student opposition to the integrity of the course and the subject matter itself. Tanisha contends that:

You have to be aware of the type of environment you're walking into when teaching a diversity course here . . . You have to be more diligent about making sure you have all the statistics to back up any theories that you're covering because the students are very hostile to the subject, so you have to bombard them with information to avoid having you be challenged on the accuracy of what you're presenting in the class on a daily basis.

Bobby reinforces Tanisha's countermeasure of being well informed and over prepared:

You are asking them [students] to challenge their belief systems, so you have to prepare for different types of questions from the students and you try to prepare for every contingency [. . .].

Bobby's specific strategy for pre-empting student challenges evolved over time:

What I found myself doing in the past, is when someone didn't agree or challenged a point or perspective I had, I would release the classroom and answer their question on my own time [and] find the information that would help them to make the transition from their own perspective to a new one . . . [and now] I'll prepare a lecture for a class . . . [and also] prepare a lecture for the one or two students; find something to try and convince them that they should reevaluate their positions.

Another anticipatory teaching countermeasure involved the participant-instructors' *presentation of self* (Goffman, 1959). For some participant-instructors, particularly senior level instructors, disclosing their academic qualifications can cement their credibility in instructing a specific curricular topic in the diversity-education classroom. This strategy

disarms or minimizes the devaluation strategies that undermine their right to be in the diversity-education classroom. According to Ike (an Associate Professor):

I try to establish right up front my credibility in my classes: I have written extensively in this field; I have textbooks out in this field, etc. Establish your credibility right up front by the way you comport yourself; the way you deliver your content and it will be extremely difficult for someone to challenge you [ . . . ].

In a parallel move, Joyce exhorts her credentials as a means of preemption. She notes:

If you tell them what your experiences are: I was in a classroom; I have 10 years of classroom experience; and I have my Master's degree, so I think that adds a little bit of credibility.

Some participant-instructors who lacked high academic status (or the lengthy professional experience of participant-instructors like Ike, Joyce, Dadisi, and Oliver) depended more on their physical presentation of self. As a means of anticipatory teaching, they constructed the diversity-education classroom as a *front stage* (Goffman, 1959) for claiming authority. In the case of Diego, he managed his professorial credibility and authority through his attire:

I have to dress up and be legitimate to students. Unlike [non-minority] grad students that go to class with shorts and sandals and all this other stuff, I have to legitimize myself by putting on some nice slacks and a dress shirt and shoes and this sort of stuff.

Anticipatory teaching also goes beyond the extensive preparation and packaging of materials and self. This strategy is both physically and emotionally taxing. Henry illustrates:

Because I felt that the nature of the subject matter sometimes lends itself to potential problems [ . . . ], I was always thinking and sitting up at night wondering if the lecture was too aggressive on this, or should I try to make it a little more palatable. I really went in the classroom with "full armor" and ready for anything.

For Henry and many of the other participant-instructors, their efforts to preempt or anticipate potential challenges in the diversity-education classroom were often effective. Their in-depth analysis of the presentation of the outsider-within role (dress, credentials, anticipating instructional barriers) gave them a pedagogical anchor within the classroom. However, most participant-instructors continued to face contentious moments requiring further strategies.

*Depoliticizing.* We define depoliticizing as an in-class process used to manage direct challenges to professorial credibility and authority by in-

structors minimizing or controlling the politicized and/or contentious nature of their subject matter. For those participant-instructors whose countermeasure is to depoliticize the diversity-education classroom, their responses suggest a conscious effort to present the subject matter in a less threatening manner to students. Others constantly gauge the students' emotional reactions to the subject matter. Arturo (a Full Professor) illustrates this strategy in his account of how he depoliticized a discussion on prejudice:

Whenever you teach directly about the notion of prejudice, you have to be very careful because it drives at the core of everybody because there's no such thing as an unprejudiced person [. . .]. What I like to do is teach about the causes of prejudice; that is what causes people to be prejudiced towards other people. What I do is say, "We're studying the past. We're not studying your values and your beliefs. Here's what the research says, and here's how it happens." So it's kind of like studying the anatomy of prejudice, separate from you.

Ike also engages in the countermeasure of depoliticizing (an Associate Professor). For Ike, allowing the students to come to an understanding of contentious issues in an objective, or less personal, manner can help minimize the potential resistance or backlash some students might display when they feel threatened by the subject matter. Ike notes that:

Over the years I have adopted skills for managing these kinds of delicate and controversial issues that would not create tremendous discomfort for most students. My basic approach is to humanize the problems instead of localizing them. Even though these problems are problems that are locally grown, if people come to see them as human problems they become less resistant to them and less contentious to the delicate subject matter.

In addition to Ike and Arturo's approach to depoliticizing the classroom, this strategy was also discussed by some participant-instructors in a fashion similar to anticipatory teaching countermeasures. Participant-instructors like Tanisha and Madonna often depoliticized their classes by allowing the students to engage contentious issues through self-inquiry or working-definitions. Tanisha reports depoliticizing her diversity-education courses by engaging in more non-confrontational means of teaching controversial topics:

I always try to get students to give me examples of racism or discrimination or whatever difficult topic I'm dealing with; so that if they can point it out for themselves, then I'm not the bad guy that's telling them they are racist or prejudiced or they're behaving in a discriminatory way.

Madonna's non-confrontational approach was achieved by presenting her subject matter in a more value-neutral context:

I really like to structure it so that the students are answering and posing the questions themselves. Kind of like inquiry learning [. . .]. I try really hard not to impose how I think it should be [and] whether people are racist or not, but, rather, to give them lots of different viewpoints.

Other instructors relied on what they deemed as empirical evidence. In Donovan's case:

I rely heavily on the text and I rely heavily on my own research so it's really abstract in the presentation; so there are times that I might suggest to them various experiences to somewhat provide some texture for what I provide to them in numbers or I might actually provide some reading that points to someone else's experiences, but if you rely too heavily on personal experiences it becomes more of a rhetorical discussion as opposed to a factual discussion [. . .].

Donovan's depoliticizing strategy is further illustrated in statements by Edward:

What I have to do is say "Don't believe me. These are not my words; these are Joe Feagin's words. These are Elizabeth Higginbotham's words. I'm just expressing to you a theory, a point of view." So, it's not my knowledge that is challenged [. . .].

In sum, the countermeasure of depoliticizing the diversity-education classroom is underlined by the participant-instructors' intent to depersonalize their presentation of topics that are at times contentious. The goal is to create "value neutral" spaces for subsequent in-class discussions and interactions that may require the instructor to remove himself or herself from the subject matter, even as minority race/ethnicity places them within the subject at hand. Reliance on empirical supports to challenge students' taken-for-granted understandings is often exhorted as a strategy for facing student challenges.

It is important to note that in some disciplines, the dearth of in-depth research on some diversity topics (e.g., health disparities for racial minority elders; gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people in minority communities) may leave instructors with a thin defense against student resistance. Consider the situation in which an instructor of color may be the only scholar in their national discipline or on their local campus engaged in research on a specified topic. The added dimensions of academic isolation in scholarship and teaching intersect here with the multiple identities of instructors of color.

*Disarming.* We define disarming as an objective of the participant-instructors to protect their professorial credibility and authority by creating a classroom environment that minimizes non-rational challenges from students. The participant-instructors seek to create a classroom en-

vironment that is inclusive of every student's perspective and less judgmental of his or her political positions and worldviews. In discussing how he minimizes acts of inappropriate student resistance and opposition, Ike suggests the following:

It's the manner in which one communicates these kinds of sensitive issues. If you approach the issue confrontationally, or try to make the students feel guilty about historical facts, you were bound to have those kinds of actions [i.e., student resistance]. But, you should really go in with the intention of explaining and allowing them to participate in that explanation, regardless of their position or posture. I think it's good to have an environment that reduces tension.

Shabelle shares similar approaches to Ike in disarming students, but she also highlights the challenges in reaching that goal:

I think the challenge really comes to navigate the discussion. You have to navigate the discussion because you don't want to alienate anyone. So, you have to really run the class in such a way where no one will be alienated but also make it okay for others to be angry and make it okay for others to feel uncomfortable. That takes time, but I think that's the way with any discussion.

At the core of both Ike and Shebelle's disarming strategy is their objective to incorporate the voices of all their students. Their goal is to create a less confrontational and more student-centered classroom. This student inclusion can minimize the hostility that many students harbor both toward instructors of color as well as the subject matter. Even as instructors labor to create this safe space, there are ongoing incidents when students violate this refuge. When a student vigorously disclosed her negative stereotypes regarding Mexican Americans, Vanessa was faced with the same dilemma as Shebelle. Vanessa recalls her reactions:

I definitely wanted to create a space where students felt comfortable and classroom climate is very important to me, in terms of talking about students who are really trying to hash out and work through ideas. I want my class to be a comfortable space where you can work through those ideas. But at the same time, how did you get that comfortable to say some of the things you've said?

Students who are ignorant of or refute the goals of diversity education and who assume that instructors of color are untrustworthy, yet are then required to attend these diversity courses, may undermine the efforts of instructors to build trust within the classroom. Resistant students may also directly undermine the professional development and retention of their instructors, especially those instructors who find their pedagogical strategies directly thwarted and their racial/ethnic "position" and scholarship actively devalued.

*Discussion*

Our research identifies three major dimensions of student challenges to credibility and authority for instructors of color who work in required diversity-education classrooms at a Midwestern PWCU. One overarching theme is student resistance generated when instructors of color hold a position as outsiders-within a predominately white academy and classroom. This resistance is reflected at all levels of instructional effort, by full professors as well as graduate instructors. A second theme was the systematic questioning by students of their participant-instructors' integrity and fairness in negotiating the diversity classroom processes and topics. Students also actively devalued the subject matter of the diversity course. This devaluation of participant-instructors and their scholarship was evident in student resistance tactics and represents an important focal point for diversity retention policies and strategies for PWCUs. The consequences for assigning the responsibilities for diversity education disproportionately to instructors of color on the presumption of "fit" should be assessed in light of instructor retention rates. Higher education faces high turnover and low retention rates for faculty and instructors of color (Philips, 2002; Aguirre, 2000) and we need further investigation into this association with faculty assignments to required diversity courses.

We also thematically assessed the countermeasures used by our participant-instructors to understand how they developed pedagogical responses to these challenges. They established patterns we categorize as anticipatory teaching, depoliticizing, and disarming within the diversity-education classroom. These pedagogies were dependent on the efforts of both the instructors and their students, and met with mixed success. We also highlight the possibility that a tactic of increasing the "value neutral" empiricism in a diversity curriculum may undermine efforts (and time) to increase student discussion and voice, and may also contradict efforts to teach about value laden scholarship. The instructors' countermeasures and concerns are guideposts for new and continuing instructors of color who enter the predominately white academy in increasing numbers in the coming decades.

Our research findings suggest that the pedagogical skills necessary for the required diversity-education classroom are complex, extensive and may be beyond the skills that are modeled in current classrooms or represented in typical instructional training and development programs on campuses. Clearly these instructors are working hard to deliver the substance of the curriculum, especially in appealing to "value neutral" empirical evidence. Because the goals of diversity education may also

“implicitly appeal to democratic values such as justice, dignity, freedom, and equality,” these tactics may undermine student emotional engagement with the required diversity curriculum and with instructors’ pedagogical goals. DeLoria and Wildcat (2001) argue that reverting to such paradigms may also hinder the evolution of new scholarship.

The current sink or swim approach to learning the craft of teaching in the academy may contribute to low retention rates for scholars of color in graduate education and among academicians (Aguirre, 2000). That is, the preparation of future and current faculty of color should address all dimensions of their training as teacher/scholars, including the possibility of teaching and conducting research at PWCUs with resistant students or colleagues. Campuses may want to examine their practices of disproportionately assigning these required diversity education courses to graduate students (newcomers to the classroom) and to instructors of color in general, at all faculty ranks. Sharing the “burden” of diversity education more proportionately with predominately white instructors may spark new scholarship on teaching and learning in these required courses, and may provide respite for instructors who may already be racially and intellectually isolated. These instructors of color are left without appropriate tools or support for their professional development in these classroom assignments through institutionalized patterns of marginalization. They deserve institutional support that is not currently available.

Policy implications for our findings involve extending training in new pedagogical models to new cohorts of instructors and students. One clear recommendation we have is to develop systematic campus support for our instructors of color in their classrooms. Federally funded research agencies have established multiple formats to involve scholars of color in mentoring and development programs in the early stages of their research. We might usefully extend these models to the teaching academy as well. PWCUs can also assess the level of diversity-education support available through existing programs through campus teaching and learning centers and the reward of teaching development in the tenure and salary reward processes (Castañeda 2004). They might also consider developing new forms of teaching circles, seminars and workshops to address teaching these diversity-education courses.

Instructors and supervisors in individual departments should also consider the possibility that students’ systematic challenges to instructors of color’s authority and credibility may undermine the validity and reliability of student evaluations. Our lack of empirical assessment and information about the impact of outsider-within statuses on student summative evaluations of instructors is a structural constraint on the academy. Under the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, em-



ployment laws now require us to examine with strict scrutiny any employment discrimination as an arena in which racial minorities are likely to be treated as a class. The federal courts *suspect* that discriminatory practices may be in place when employees experience unequal outcomes in hiring or conditions of employment. As a result, we might usefully interrogate promotion and tenure practices in the academy, merit increases to salary, and all student and peer evaluations of teaching as potential arenas of differential treatment for racial/ethnic minority instructors when connected to required diversity course instruction. Additionally, we might further examine the pedagogical and evaluative impact of those students who enter these classrooms as part of a “required” experience (Darby, 2006). This may hold especially true when students have little or no background in a discipline and hold negative expectations for the classroom experience.

To buttress legitimacy for these required courses, PWCUs might consult with diversity instructors to first develop course pre-requisites, or at minimum a campus workshop, *prior to* student enrollment in these courses. These students might develop (a) their own ground rules for respectful discussions with peers and instructors and (b) the critical thinking skills necessary for approaching new scholarship and paradigms. Campus officials should take the time to give their imprimatur (and resources) to these courses so that the faculty and graduate instructors toiling in this minefield are recognized as having the scholarship and authority to do work important to the liberal arts tradition. Steps could include creating a university distinguished professorship in diversity pedagogy, and providing resources for diversity curricula development in a campus-based teaching and learning center. These efforts could combat the campus barriers for faculty of color described by Philips (2002) and help to generate a campus climate that combats faculty isolation, lack of appreciation, institutional disinterest in diversity, as well as racism, and sexism.

All research has its limitations and the first limitation of this study, as well as its strength, is that we, as co-authors, each have taught diversity-education courses at Midwestern University and in other settings. Our analyses are at times filtered through our own personal experiences and responses to these classrooms. Further thematic coding of classroom interactions on other campuses may yield divergent themes; researchers with greater distance from our own pedagogical challenges may frame their research questions differently as well. Our findings reflect the perceptions of our participant-instructors in the context of only one PWCU and generalization of our findings to other campuses should be approached cautiously.

Our interviews do reflect richly on the social reality of instructors of color as “outsiders within,” but our discussion here is limited by space. It lacks full interrogation of multiple identities, although many of our female instructors of color commented on the intersection of their gender with their racial/ethnic marginalization in the classroom. Three of our instructors of color identify as lesbian or gay (of nine total respondents in our study) and seven are female instructors. This project will be enhanced by alternative research methods that allow us to obtain more systematic and expanded insights into the work lives of instructors of color and how they manage their credibility and authority in diversity-education classrooms across campuses, across pedagogical settings and across multiple statuses.

Future research might further examine the pathways of instructors of color (and their pedagogical preparation) for this *peculiar* new higher education niche: the required diversity-education classroom. National as well as regional studies of instructors of color who teach required diversity-education courses at PWCUs are needed, with special attention to the impact on faculty retention rates. We recognize the ongoing need for research on the outcomes of the required diversity-education classroom on student learning outcomes as a whole in the liberal arts curriculum, and on student evaluations. Finally, we need in-depth analyses of the role of instructional preparation, evaluation, and reward systems in higher education as these factors influence the professional development of instructors of color throughout their academic careers.

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