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When the levees break: the cost of vicarious trauma, microaggressions and emotional labor for Black administrators and faculty engaging in race work at traditionally White institutions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to offer insight to administrators and human resource professionals at Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) about developing action plans that provide meaningful support to Black administrators and faculty who are coping with racial trauma. Operationalizing tenets of Critical Race Methodology (CRM), the counter-narratives presented here are drawn from 15 years of unpublished professional and personal communication created by an individual Black faculty and administrator. The lectures, conference presentations, commencement addresses and other ephemera trace the development of battlements and emotional battle scars over the early years of one scholar-activist's career at TWIs. The calamitous aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is considered in this context both as metaphor and collective psychic wound. As such, it illuminates other instances of vicarious trauma, foreshadows the Movement for Black Lives, and provides a devastating illustration of administrative unpreparedness. Revealing the ramifications of racial trauma can serve to help others who suffer to feel less alone and can provide stakeholders in higher education with valuable knowledge for the sake not only of recruitment and retention, but institutional transformation.

Introduction

On Monday, August 29, 2005, at 8:00 AM, New Orleans Louisiana Mayor Ray Nagin reported that water was flowing over one of the city's levees (Drye, 2005). By midmorning the following day, the storm that caused the breach had subsided. Winds that were recorded blowing at speeds of 175 miles per hour on August 28 were gusting at 35 mph on August 30. The storm was over, but for residents stranded in the flooded city of New Orleans, the horror had just begun.

Spike Lee's award-winning documentary *When the Levees Broke* (Lee, 2006) centers the voices of survivors of Hurricane Katrina (Gebhardt, 2012). To date, (November 2018), Katrina remains the costliest disaster worldwide since 1970 (Link, 2010), as well as the deadliest hurricane to make landfall in the United States since 1928 (National Hurricane Center, 2018).

In this article, we engage with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as collective psychic wound, resonant metaphor, and presage of the Movement for Black Lives (Harris-Perry & Perry, 2015).

We did not have direct experience with Hurricane Katrina, and we humbly acknowledge that the visceral, embodied nature of that trauma is beyond our grasp. We turn to literature on vicarious trauma (Bell, 2008; Figley, 1995) as we reflect on the ways in which the horror of Katrina and other instances of racial trauma are visited upon Black and Brown people in the United States, regardless of proximity to the actual incident. In engaging the disaster as metaphor in the inquiry, we participate in a tradition of creating art 'against forgetting' (Forché, 1993, p. 29), moving our research into a realm wherein 'it is not only a record of experience but an exhortation and a plea against despair' (p. 32). We honor victims and survivors of Hurricane Katrina with the solemn recognition that we share their vulnerability. We respect their resilience, even as we wish it were not required of them. Moreover, we engage the metaphor as an illustration of the inadequacy of certain systems that are ostensibly designed to protect all people, but instead disenfranchise the marginalized among us, calling on those in positions of power to commit to resource readiness and investment in structural change.

In the final act of *When the Levees Broke*, musician and New Orleans native Wynton Marsalis reflects on the lessons we must learn from what happened in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It is a mirror, Marsalis says, reflecting the nation's true position on race and class in the body politic: not upstanding after all, but rather crooked, distorted, deeply twisted. Only if we, as a collective, choose not to look away from this dreadful reflection, can we make the urgent necessary changes before it is too late.

Against forgetting, against despair: memory and metaphor.

Positionality statements

This article is written by two authors, whose positionality statements are outlined below.

Myntha Anthym

I am a queer Black feminist, poet, and statistician. My epistemological grounding is in Critical Race Theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1995; Delgado, 1989) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1986; King, 1988; Smith, 1985), with a methodological commitment to critical arts-based inquiry (Denzin, 2000; Finley, 2003, 2011) in its myriad manifestations. I am dedicated to teaching, research, and service that employ radical honesty (Williams, 2016) and radical reflexivity (Anthym, 2018). I am also dedicated to interdisciplinary inquiry, drawing on scholarly and creative projects as well as cultural criticism in my academic explorations of problems that plague higher education and educational research. I value creativity and cultural humility in the pedagogy and praxis of research methods, and I am especially interested in expanding the role of the arts in equity initiatives.

Frank Tuitt

I am a critical race scholar of West Indian heritage. I am currently a senior administrator and faculty member at Mountain West University (pseudonym). I have over 25 years of experience as an administrator, academic, and change agent. I have spent my career helping higher education institutions in the United States and around the world to build and sustain effective, equity-minded, and inclusive campus environments, with an emphasis on access and success for historically marginalized communities. In scholarship and praxis, I am dedicated to the examination and exploration of topics related to access and equity in higher education; teaching and learning in racially diverse college classrooms; and diversity and organizational transformation. Specifically, my research critically examines issues of race, Inclusive Excellence, and diversity in and outside the classroom in the interests of faculty as well as students.

Prologue: 'hope is not a plan'[1]

August 2017. Long hot days give way to long hot nights.

It is not the first time he has felt the need to withdraw, and it will not be the last.

The new school year will begin in a few short weeks. He is preparing to teach a Critical Race Theory Seminar to graduate students in a college of education at a Traditionally White Institution (TWI), and white supremacists are marching *en masse* on the streets of Charlottesville Virginia (Heim, 2017). The flickering light from the tiki torches they wield washes over white faces contorted with rage.

His mouth is dry, his body frozen. He cannot look away from the TV screen. This footage is not historical. This horror is happening now. Against the ringing in his ears he can still make out the chant: 'You will not replace us!'

A newscaster, neutral expression, neutral voice, takes over the frame. 'The scene in Charlottesville tonight …'

The scene in Charlottesville, tonight.

Charlottesville. Tonight.

With fumbling fingers, he grasps the remote control, presses the power button. Powerless.

He paces the hallway of his home, doesn't turn on any lights.

'You will not replace us!'

Charlottesville. Tonight.

He's supposed to be updating his syllabus. His laptop computer, quiescent, is open on his desk. His is the only Critical Race class in the entire college of education. The gravity of that responsibility feels like something else tonight, not grounding, but drowning.

He presses the power button, wakes the computer back up. Twenty tabs are open. He knows which one he wants.

His hands are heavy on the keyboard.

'I need to check out of the real world,' he writes in his Facebook account, 'and get away from all this violence, racism, threat of war, loss of loved ones, hurt, and overall chaos that seems to be occupying the air these days.' He doesn't want anyone to worry. He doesn't know what else to say. He shuts the computer down, turns from his desk, and walks away.

He has lived all his life as a Black man, most of it in the United States, with all the attendant slings and arrows, microaggressions and invalidations (Sue et al., 2007), insults and injuries. He has committed his academic career to producing scholarship and practicing pedagogy in the tradition of Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). He knows that racism is endemic, persistent, enmeshed (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Between CRT and lived experience, he thought by now he'd have all the coping mechanisms that anyone could for facing racial trauma (Smith, 2004). But some days—these days—

Charlottesville tonight

he wonders if any defense can withstand such a storm.

He has known fear, frustration and fatigue before: those feelings are common to People of Color (Franklin, 2016; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011). He knows, too well, that People of Color in institutions of higher education—students, faculty, and administrators—experience a type of chronic racial stress that can be every bit as fatal as any other untreated chronic health condition (Fasching-Varner, Albert, Mitchell, & Allen, 2014; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007). The impact of this stress is especially significant damaging to mental health (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Carter, Lau, Johnson & Kirkinis, 2017). McGee and Stovall (2015) refer to this phenomenon as 'weathering': over time, the effects of living in a racist society take a toll on physical and mental health. Weathering can lead to heart disease, diabetes, and accelerated aging. Weathering can cause depression. Weathering can lead to early death.

He knows. He feels it. Like other activists on the front lines of the Movement for Black Lives, Black souls doing race work in ivory towers (Tuitt, 2012) can be particularly vulnerable to the

weathering effects of constant racial tension. Every time his attendance is required at a meeting where he has no opportunity to speak, every time a campus safety officer asks to see his ID, every time a colleague comments that it must be nice, teaching 'only' the electives, he feels a defensiveness that turns quickly to despair.

He writes. In his private journals, in secret social media groups, sometimes in letters that he does not send. He writes about the way certain aspects of the work seem to siphon off pieces of his soul day by day and year by year. 'It's killing me,' he confides on the page, and it is no exaggeration.

He writes, trusting in the worth of word as weapon, writing to forge strength from pain or find affirmation in struggle. He writes, not knowing if his words will have value beyond the page. He writes against despair. He makes note of incremental progress, momentary gain: maxing out his class enrollment three years in a row; approval of funds for a diversity summit; hiring on of new professors who look a lot like him. These things matter. There is reason for hope.

But hope is not a plan; it offers minimal protection. What use is hope when Philando Castile is killed by a cop, without cause, in front of his partner and their four-year-old child (Boddie, 2017; Khan-Cullors & bandele 2018; McCluney, Bryant, King & Ali, 2017)? What use is hope when Sandra Bland dies in jail after being pulled over by police on her way to do good work in academia (Klein, 2018)? What use is hope when white supremacists terrorize a college town with the tacit approval of the President of the United States (Wang, 2017)? What use is hope when the levee breaks? He must flee, as far and as fast as he can, by any means necessary. He must escape, or risk being swept away by the torrent.

Methodology

In a report to the Trauma Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association (APA), Richmond and Hailu (2018), stress the need for qualitative research on minority people's experiences and understandings of trauma, broadly defined, arguing that too much trauma research ignores the role of systemic oppression. Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005) observed that '[r]elatively little research or firsthand information is available about the racial experiences of senior college and university administrators' (p. 155). Wolfe and Dilworth (2015) echoed that observation a decade later. This study, grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), addresses both of those gaps. Central to CRT is an understanding of the endemic nature of racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998), as well as a foregrounding of the experiential knowledge of People of Color (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Using stories to highlight experiences with race and racism is a centerpiece of Critical Race Theory and Critical Race Methodology (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In his seminal book, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, Derrick Bell (1992) describes his use of stories 'that offer an allegorical perspective on old dreams, long-held fears, and current conditions' (p. 12). Specifically, Bell contends that racial storytelling, which he sees as a product of experience and imagination, allows the storyteller to discern racial themes that are otherwise ignored. Personal racial stories are important for understanding lived experiences and how those experiences relate to dominant belief systems (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Reflecting specifically on the role of personal storytelling in higher education, Williams (2016) introduced the concept of radical honesty, which she describes as the 'pedagogical practice of truth-telling that seeks to challenge racist and patriarchal institutional cultures in the academy' (p. 72).

Connecting Critical Race Theory to methodology, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined Critical Race Methodology (CRM) as methodology. CRM foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process; challenges traditional research paradigms, including rationale and method; focuses on experiences particular to marginalized identities (especially racial, gender, and class identities); offers a transformative solution to racial, gender, and class subordination; and takes
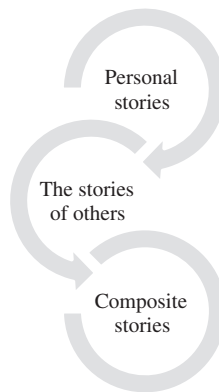
Figure 1. Approaches to counter-narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

an interdisciplinary approach, (including ideas and techniques from disciplines such as ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, humanities, and the law).

The tenets outlined above are typically operationalized through counter-stories or counter-narratives (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Williams, 2015). Critical Race Theory reveals the lies of the master (dominant) narrative (Delgado, 1989) that presupposes a society in which race and racism have little to do with individual experiences and outcomes. Counter-narratives demonstrate ways in which race and racism remain relevant (Bell, Desai, & Irani, 2013) in the lived experiences of People of Color.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002) describe three approaches to counter-narrative, as summarized in the graphic above (Figure 1):

Personal stories and narratives are 'autobiographical reflections of the author, juxtaposed with … critical race analysis … within the context of a larger sociopolitical critique' (p. 32).

Other people's stories or narratives 'offer biographical analysis of the experiences of a person of color, again in relation to U.S. institutions and in a sociohistorical context' (p. 33).

Composite stories or narratives 'draw on various forms of 'data' to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color' (p. 33).

While the primary purpose of narrative research is to inform (Byrne, 2017; De Mello, 2007), the purpose of the counter-narrative is to *transform*: 'Those in power sleep well at night—their conduct does not seem to them like oppression. The cure is storytelling' (Delgado, 1989, pp. 2413–2414). Counter-narratives expose the systems and symptoms of racism in its many forms, subtle and overt, conscious and unconscious, in the hope that exposure can lead to change (Bell, Desai, & Irani, 2013). Counter-narratives also offer an alternative explanation for the oppressive circumstances under which Black people especially all too often live and die. In many ways, 'Critical Race Theory … provides a foundation for understanding that violence against Black people stems from a larger narrative' (Aymer, 2016, pp. 357–358). Counter-narratives address that larger narrative, exposing it as powerful, harmful, and most importantly, false (Hooks, 1989; Lorde, 1984).

In addition to speaking truth to power, counter-narratives can speak truth to the powerless, helping those who share in the marginalization of the storyteller to realize that they are not alone (Delgado, 1989). Patrisse Khan-Cullors (2018) underscores the value of counter-narratives within in-groups in her memoir of the beginnings of the Black Lives Matter movement: 'I wanted confirmation that that which we did not speak of was real' (Khan-Cullors & bandele, 2018, p. 21). Counter-narratives provide that confirmation, valuing and validating knowledge borne of lived experience. Hardy (2013) contends that validation can 'provide an array of resources (emotional, psychological, and behavioral) that help build … strengths and provide a buffer against future assaults to … dignity and sense of self' (p. 28).

In the introduction to Khan-Cullors' memoir, Angela Davis reflects on the 'productive intersection of personal experiences and political resistance' (Davis, in Khan-Cullors & bandele 2018, pp. xi–xii) that defines counter-narrative, making our stories 'catalysts for greater collective consciousness and more effective resistance.' Her comment echoes Forché's admonition against forgetting, against minimizing or ignoring the power of personal narrative: 'If we give up the dimension of the personal, we risk relinquishing one of the most powerful sites of resistance' (Forché, 1993, p. 31).

Resistance is necessary. Narrative is necessary. Counter-narratives are narratives of resistance, narratives as resistance. The rallying cry of second-wave feminists has intersectional intergenerational applicability: 'The personal is political' (Hanisch, 1969, p. 113).

Data

The project presented here is a collaborative counter-narrative: part composite, deeply personal (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Data for the project were select unpublished professional and personal documents written by Frank Tuitt. The source material includes lecture notes, conference presentations, invited speeches, personal correspondence, commencement addresses and social media posts created between 2003 and 2018 (see Appendix A. Data was also collected in an audiotaped semi-structured conversational interview between the co-authors (June 2018).

Creative analytical process

Data was analyzed using an adaptation of Glaser's (1965) constant comparative method (CCM) for qualitative data analysis. Glaser's goal in designing CCM was to identify properties of a phenomenon, such as 'conditions, consequences, dimensions, types, processes, etc.' (Glaser, 1965, p. 438) and to develop theory based on those identified properties. As indicated by Glaser (1965), the four steps of CCM are as follows (p. 439): Comparing incidents applicable to each category; integrating categories and their properties; delimiting the theory; writing the theory.

CCM is well-suited to constructivist research paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). While strict adherence to CCM limits the researcher to finding meanings that emerge from immersion in the data, constructivists respect the social and experiential nature of knowledge, using a 'dialectical interchange' (p. 111) to develop an understanding of the research participant's truth. Knowledge is elicited and validated through an ongoing conversation between researcher, data, and participant. A constructivist approach to CCM honors the lived experience and personal truth of the research participant, and in so doing, honors the tenets of Critical Race Methodology. While CCM was originally designed for generating theory (Glaser, 1965), the same process can be used for revealing themes; some have argued that it is better suited to that latter purpose (Boeije, 2002; Fram, 2013). For this project, our interest was in revealing themes rather than generating theory, and we found that CCM served that aim.

His missives, her methods

Preferring to work from hard copies, I (Myntha Anthym) printed out the documents and read through them several times, along with notes from the June 2018 conversational interview. Drawing on knowledge from other higher education counter-narratives (Griffin, 2012; Hackmann, 2002; Tuitt et al., 2009; William-White, 2011), I highlighted passages that seemed to speak to common experiences. I made notes in the margins of the documents and took additional notes in a research notebook. Themes emerged as I reviewed the highlighted portions and I made additional notes. For example, from Frank's Black History Month speeches there emerged a theme of 'staying in your lane.' From commencement addresses and speeches to alumni

associations came the theme of 'there's no place like home/home is no place.' A profound isolation was evident in many of the documents I analyzed.

I developed several narrative vignettes with those themes in mind: professional homelessness, isolation, race-based constraints. I shared early versions of the vignettes with Frank to ensure that my use of artistic and ethnographic license did not result in undue distortion or inadvertent erasure (Chapman, 2005; Visweswaran, 1994). After noting that Frank referenced the concept of 'weathering' (McGee & Stovall, 2015) in multiple sources, I reflected on the impact that heavy storms have on landscapes and structures over time, including rust, rot, and erosion. Thinking along those lines brought the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to my mind. When I suggested the metaphor of a levee breach to Frank, he indicated that it resonated on an intuitive level.

Invoking hurricane katrina: memory and metaphor

What gives us the right to use Hurricane Katrina as a metaphor in our analysis, or to relate Black struggle—our struggle—for recognition and protection within institutions of higher learning to the Movement for Black Lives?

When Beyoncé Knowles-Carter released the music video for *Formation* on February 6, 2016, commentary and criticism dominated the news cycle in the United States for several days (Ball, 2016; Blay, 2016; Caramanica, Morris, & Wortham, 2016). The singer seems to have anticipated just such a response, intoning in the final phrase of the song: 'You know you that b**** when you cause all this conversation' (Knowles-Carter, 2016). One of the chief criticisms leveled at the pop star regarding the video was that she exploitatively appropriated imagery of the Black Lives Matter movement in general, and Hurricane Katrina, in particular, for personal gain, without wrestling with the life-and-death reality related to that imagery (Brasted, 2016; Ghogomu, 2016; Lewis, 2016). As authors and critical race scholars, we are sensitive to such criticism, recognizing our positions of privilege relative to many others who share our race but not necessarily our academic credentials or socioeconomic status. Did Beyoncé have the right to invoke Hurricane Katrina? Do we?

Vicarious trauma: weary years, silent tears

William Faulkner famously wrote 'The past is never dead. It isn't even past' (Faulkner, 1951, p. 73). Emerging social science research on intergenerational trauma validates that assertion (Connolly, 2011; Prussing, 2014). The felt presence of the past is also explored from many angles in the humanities. For example: Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *Beloved* (1987) interrogates slavery as a 'great and deep collective wound of a people' (Slattery, 2000, p. 207). African-Canadian-Caribbean poet Dionne Brand describes Black bodies as 'fixed in the ether of history … [cleaving] … to the collective and acquired memories of their descendants' (Brand, 2001, p. 35). Yancy (2008) wrestles with the present-day phenomenological consequences of the historical social reality of embodied Blackness. These reflections, alongside many other creative and scholarly works, engage with the transmission of trauma from generation to generation. There is no sense in arguing that *it didn't happen to 'us'*; there is a very real sense in which it did happen to us and is indeed still happening.

Closely related to intergenerational trauma is vicarious traumatization: mental health professionals have come to understand that people need not experience a trauma directly in order to feel its effect (Newell & MacNeil, 2010). The concept of vicarious traumatization was initially developed to describe the experiences of mental health workers who exhibit symptoms of trauma due to close interpersonal contact with traumatized clients (Bell, 2008; Figley, 1995; Newell & MacNeil, 2010). Over time, research on the topic has led to an expanded definition of the phenomenon, based on the recognition that vicarious trauma is not limited to professionals

or others who have direct contact with traumatized people (Smith et al., 2014). For example, Blanchard et al. (2004) reported on vicarious traumatization among U.S. college students after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Meanwhile, Jackson (2017) studied vicarious traumatization in the queer community after the June 12, 2016 massacre at the Pulse Night Club in Orlando, Florida. Relatedly, Simic (2017) shared autoethnographic reflections and literature analysis on vicarious traumatization among qualitative researchers whose studies take place in societies undergoing violent transition.

Most relevant to our research are the studies on vicarious traumatization following natural disasters (Messiah et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2014), research and personal accounts describing vicarious traumatization related to exposure to stories, and videos of police violence against Black and Brown people (Baylor, 2016; Blue, 2017; Clyde, 2015; McCluney et al., 2017). Related research by Miller and Wang (2018) on trauma associated with what they term 'social disasters' shows that the social conditions that precipitated a particular event are extant, and 'the injurious effects linger because the threats are recurring' (p. 40). Collectively, these studies underscore the ongoing trauma for people in relation to events that occur at the periphery of their lived experiences. Trauma ripples outward, and 'whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly' (King, 1963, n.p.).

Symptoms of vicarious trauma are similar to symptoms of direct trauma (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Hemmings & Evans, 2018), and can include insomnia, depression, anxiety, change in appetite, substance abuse, difficulty concentrating or staying on task, a sense of hopelessness, and heightened susceptibility to illness (Miller & Wang, 2018; Yeager & Roberts, 2005). In McGee and Stovall's (2015) terminology, trauma has a weathering effect.

How is any of this relevant to the work of higher education? In his award-winning, best-selling memoir *Between the World and Me*, Ta-Nehisi Coates writes 'You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body' (Coates, 2015, p. 10). Coates was writing specifically about the material consequences of social science research, exhorting readers to remember that 'research has not only results, but also consequences' (Anthym, 2018; p. 22). But the statement can also describe the vicarious trauma that can develop from spending the majority of waking hours thinking, reading, writing, teaching and doing research about, in addition to experiencing, the many forms and functions of racism, as Black scholars and administrators doing race work in TWIs do.

Much of the research on racism in everyday life is limited to direct exposure to what Pierce (1970) was among the first to describe as *microaggressions* (Pérez Huber & Solorzàno, 2015; Solórzano, 1998). Sue et al. (2007), in a seminal work on the subject, identified three forms of microaggression: micro assault, micro insult, and micro invalidation. A thorough exploration of the Sue et al. microaggressions framework is beyond the scope of this manuscript; we refer the reader to the original article. The utility of the framework has since been challenged, with some critical race scholars arguing that "using the term 'micro' minimizes the effects of racist incidents and downplays the severity of these incidents" (Garcia & Johnston-Guerroro, 2015, p. 60; Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). We would add that limiting racial trauma research to research on microaggressions fails to account for the effects of vicarious trauma.

Since individuals and institutions vary, it is not our aim here to codify the racial trauma revealed in the vignettes below into a strict schema. As constructivists and critical race scholars, we recognize that in matters of racial transgression, one person's tropical depression might be another person's Category 3 disaster.[2] Instead, our purpose is to offer nuance and emotional honesty to an ongoing conversation, using the tools of metaphor and story to make a case for resource readiness as an institutional imperative.

We want to be clear that we take artistic license in this project (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2017; Hetherington, 2012): the events depicted are true to life but are not conveyed exactly as they happened. Facets of different experiences are compressed or modified to protect individual and institutional privacy. This is in keeping with Tuck and Yang's reflections on research refusal (2014), a perspective which foregrounds the needs and preferences of research

participants: 'Not everything, or even most things, uncovered in a research process need to be reported in academic journals or settings' (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 233). In this article, we 'evoke experience rather than describing it' (Anthym, 2018, p. 215).

In the following sections of the article, we provide nine brief counter-narratives of emotional labor performed at TWIs under an onslaught of racial trauma, revealing the stressed points of the levee or capturing the moments when the metaphorical levee broke.

1. 'The answer is no, it's not safe.'

On any given Monday, going to work is difficult, but some days are easier than others. It depends on what hat he's wearing—Faculty? Mentor? Administrator? It depends on whether he'll have a fire to light—in the heart of a younger scholar, or a recent hire—or a fire to put out.

As a faculty member in the classroom, he has more freedom to turn his intentions into action. His reading lists are too long, he knows, but he would rather err on the side of inclusion. He has been known to switch formats on the fly, from lecture to discussion, when the occasion calls, if something incendiary in the news or on campus presents a teachable moment.

Can there be too many teachable moments? What he knows is that lately, occasions keep calling. White supremacist recruitment flyers are posted in the campus library. Swastikas on Post-it notes are left inside several bathroom stalls. A printed-out picture of a burning cross is taped to the doors of the dining hall.

He encourages students to personalize subject matter with examples from their own lived experiences, models the practice, facilitates courageous conversations, strives to make the class-room a place that is brave, not simply safe.

As a mentor, he reminds emerging scholars that there is no need to apologize for centering their own communities, speaking in their own voices, their first languages, taking up space. He welcomes them into a community of critical race scholarship where they can fit in and stand out at the same time. There is such a thing as academic loneliness. He works to make that loneliness a little less intense.

As administrator, he reminds himself to celebrate small victories, that incremental progress has always been the way the work gets done.

But lately he has to wonder, where is his space where it's safe to be brave? Safe to talk about race and racism not only as theory, but as lived experience? When can he insist that his colleagues consider what it costs him, living alone on the frontline like this? (Otuyelu, Graham, & Kennedy, 2016).

2. 'I want somebody to know that I'm suffering.'

Today the words are resonant again: King Lear, Act 5, Scene 3: '*The weight of these sad times we must obey/Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say*'.

He's been invited to offer what he calls a 'happy talk'—something uplifting and triumphant about the state of diversity efforts on campus.

Look how far we've come.

What a time to be alive.

Inclusive.

Excellent.

He knows what they expect.

What words would Shakespeare have for times like these? He has his own preferred poets, and after the 2016 United States presidential election, he makes a mix of their most violent verses, lyrical curses to give voice to his rage and despair.

It's not as easy to find a cipher for his sadness.

Do his colleagues know? Do his superiors see?

He remembers the day after the election in 2008: high fives from other Black folk, giant smiles from strangers; walking across campus his feet never seemed to touch the ground. And now, eight years later, he feels invisible, violently erased. He never believed in the promise of a post-racial world, but he believed in progress. He had hope.

His heart is still beating, but it is badly beaten.

His colleagues don't want to know. His superiors don't want to see.

Opting out is not an option for him (McCluney et al., 2017). There are the students to think about. Everybody is thinking about the students.

Is anybody thinking about faculty and staff? Is anybody thinking about him?

3. 'George Bush doesn't care about black people.'

He wants to say yes. It's Black History Month, and they have invited him to speak, and he wants to say yes. Examples of Black excellence abound, and this is the one time of year when he has carte blanche to name them, to celebrate his people out loud in public.

He wants to say no. It's Black History Month, and they have invited him to speak, and he wants to say no. Something in his spirit rebels against complicity in this annual commercialization and commodification of Blackness. On some days, resistance takes the form of truth in lieu of reconciliation (Sachs, 1999).

The truth is, Black History Month feels like a footnote, a box to check off on the final page of an endless end-user licensing agreement: nobody reads it. Everybody thinks they already know what it says.

The truth is, February feels longer every year, his inbox overflowing with invitations from well-meaning white people desperate to demonstrate that they are not racist. Where are they come springtime?

The truth is, he does not want to always be the one at the front of the room, reminding everyone else that Black lives matter, but without ever using those words.

Those words are as unwelcome as Black people are, eleven months out of the year.

4. 'No help, no home.'

They announced today that his office—'*that*' office—is moving to a new location. For five years, the Office of Multicultural Community Engagement (OMCE) was called something else, the entrance in an alley next to a crumbling two-story that used to house the parking office. The OMCE is moving to the Student Life building, a symbolic re-centering after years of inside jokes about outsider status made manifest have almost lost their sting. But here is the thing: it does not feel like OMCE is moving, it feels like OMCE is being absorbed. It feels like OMCE is being consumed.

The office was not much, but it was home. A place apart, an all-but forgotten corner of campus where People of Color could congregate without white gazes watching every move (Yancy, 2008).

'Just think about all the resources you'll have access to now!' one of his white colleagues says when he tells her the news. A positive spin, but he knows that is not the way it works. He knows that when everything is for everyone, 'everyone' does not mean People of Color.

The new office has a window, and people look in at him as they walk by. Eventually, he puts a poster over it. The poster says *Black Lives Matter*.

It gets defaced the very first day.

5. 'They said it was design flaws.'

Ten weeks is not enough time, but it is what he has been allotted in the academic term. One quarter, ten weeks, and he must make the most of it. His is the only Black face many of the students have ever seen at the front of the room. He knows. He knows, because experience has taught him. He knows, because he asks them, and they tell.

It is lonely in the line of fire: teaching while Black means expectations are higher (Smith & Hawkins, 2011; Tuitt et al., 2009), and woe unto his female colleagues of color. Intersectional oppression makes their classrooms into minefields (Andersen & Miller, 1997; Pittman 2010; Wingfield, 2007).

The students watch him, grade him, judge him. He hones his skills. They sharpen their knives (Ladson-Billings, 1996; Wingfield, 2007).

It is worse in different ways when he is teaching Critical Race Theory. His is the only critical race class most of these students will ever have, and he is desperate to give them all that he can, all that he has. He steadies himself, readies himself with reminders of the metaphors that best describe the work: Opening a door. Turning on a light. Driving lessons. Toolkits. The rest is up to them, he knows. But some days, it seems that it is all up to him.

Why is it all up to him? The college adopted an Inclusive Excellence statement; there are pictures of students of color plastered all over the walls. But his peers who practice pedagogy at a remove from lived experience have a distinct advantage, and fewer responsibilities (Squire, Williams & Tuitt, 2018; Williams, 2015). It is not assumed that they are constrained by bias; it is not expected that their offices become de facto crisis centers (Bair et al., 2010; Harlow, 2003).

Ten weeks as a Black man in front of a class. Too much, and not enough. He knows.

6. 'You know what it means to miss New Orleans.'

He remembers his first trip to the school that would become his undergraduate alma mater. He was surrounded by other People of Color: staff, current students, prospective students, and alums. That weekend was one of little sleep: there was too much to see, do, learn, and dream about.

He found himself at Community House, surrounded and uplifted by Black and Brown students who helped him see himself as a student on that campus. After a barbecue, and a basketball game, and talking until dawn every night that weekend, he could hardly wait to return in the fall.

But when he did return, he was surprised to find himself one of only three Black men in a class of hundreds, one of only ten Black male students in a school of thousands.

He came from a close-knit West Indian immigrant family with a strong sense of racial and ethnic pride. Growing up in a mid-sized city in the northeastern United States had sensitized him to the existence of racism, but what he experienced as an undergrad, what he was not prepared for, was a hyper-visible invisibility (Garcia, López, & Vélez, 2018), like everybody was looking at him and at the same time nobody knew he was there.

Community House was still standing, but it was not the home he expected to find.

He flashes back to that disconcertion after accepting his first tenure-track position. Where are all the People of Color he met during the interview? Where is the restaurant that they took him to, with real jerk chicken and callaloo?

Relocated. Shut down.

He is called by someone else's name, but weeks pass before he sees another face that looks anything like his.

7. 'The things we've seen catch us unawares.'

It is in the room before he arrives, and it will be there when he is gone (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It is cloaked in the myth of meritocracy (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Patton, 2016), veiled in the false discourse of rugged individualism masked in the rhetoric of the American Dream. It tells him that he has only himself to blame for working twice as hard and still struggling to get ahead.

It is in the awkward laughter of colleagues when he makes a reference they do not understand, and the equally awkward silences when he asks for meaningful contributions to the diversity initiatives they all claim to be invested in.

It flits in the shadows when he is walking across campus from his office to his car at the end of another long day, and the campus police ask him what he is doing on the quad at this hour of the night.

He knows himself to be himself, but all they see is what he seems.

His race, refracted through their racism.

Sometimes he is surprised by how much it can affect him. He spends enough time with people who are committed to unmasking and unmaking racism that encountering it up close and personal is less usual than it used to be.

But then …

He overhears the end of a joke that started before he walked in.

He is the punchline.

He finds a flyer for a party with an 'innocently' racist theme.

He is not invited.

White students debate the loss of Black life in state-sanctioned violence.

He does not interrupt them.

8. 'He was trying to say something wonderful, eloquent, politically astute.'

Teaching, service, scholarship: the elements of an academic's style.

Is his impact equal to the sum of its parts?

The daily grind does not offer many opportunities for retrospection but preparing to go up for tenure review means it is time to take the time.

'When I began my career as an assistant professor of higher education my goal was to help higher education institutions fulfill their mission as the great equalizer for all, and especially for individuals from historically underrepresented communities.

My scholarship has afforded me the opportunity to understand the impact of organizational behavior on the experiences of racially and ethnically minoritized students, faculty, and staff simultaneously, and identify strategies to create inclusive and affirming institutional environments that respect and care for the souls of all their members.'

He pauses in his writing. He knows how to spin—that is half the work of being a mid-level administrator. He knows what to put in and what to leave out, and he is proud of the work he has done, including his high marks on teaching evaluations and the 26 dissertations he has shepherded.

Still, he cannot shake the feeling that it is not enough, that though he can take pride in the work he has done, there will always be too much more to do. Promotion and tenure: another false summit.

9. 'The storm came and swept the trash out of the city.'

Even now, he most often feels like an unwelcome guest in a grand old house. Make no mistake: these ivy-covered hallowed halls are haunted. Academia has its gothic horrors, mysterious rituals, rites of passage, hidden dangers, silent screams.

He tries to keep his wits about him, moving with caution, shining a flashlight into dark and empty rooms, avoiding the creaky stair, holding his breath.

His companions have all disappeared: the women of color, the quiet gay man, the only other Black faculty member to achieve the rank of full professor.

This is not a horror film. Still, everyone knows who dies first.

Discussion and implications

The nine counter-narratives presented here provide glimpses into the storm-tossed life of a Black male administrator, scholar, and educator. The racial trauma in his experience is sometimes direct, sometimes vicarious, ever present. As these narratives reflect, racial trauma is a factor in campus climate and recruitment and retention, and more importantly, it is a factor in the health, well-being, effectiveness and sense of belonging and safety of Black people in higher education. In the subsequent sections of the article, we discuss the insight that these counter-narratives provide higher education scholars.

A note on self-care

We recognize that self-care is essential (Lorde, 1988; Miller & Wang, 2018; Scott, 2016). Self-care is an important first-line therapeutic defense (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006); it is empowering (Lowe, Okubo & Reilly, 2012) and protective (Shorter-Gooden, 2004). As Audre Lorde asserted, self-care can be a powerful personal political act (Lorde, 1988). We support efforts to increase awareness of and access to culturally-appropriate self-care strategies for traumatized minoritized people (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Hardy, 2013; Shorter-Gooden, 2004). But we reject attempts to assign individuals ultimate responsibility for ameliorating systemic effects that should be handled institutionally (Capper, 2015; Franklin, 2016). Returning to the metaphor: self-care is a sand bag. There are many minor storms it can withstand. But when what is needed is a levee, a sandbag simply will not serve.

Resource readiness: an institutional imperative

What is required for higher education institutions to foster a campus climate that is sensitive to the specific needs of Faculty and Administrators of Color regarding racial trauma? The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina revealed 'a massive failure of preparation, communication, authority, initiative, and human concern' (Callenbach, 2006, p. 8). Research abounds on campus climate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) and best practices for recruitment and retention (Aguirre, 2000), but few studies on those issues consider the role of institutional responses to racial trauma. The five failures listed by Callenbach can serve as a guide for strengthening metaphorical levees at the institutional level.

Implications for practice: five pillars of resource readiness for racial trauma

The framework below is inspired in part by Callenbach's observation of the five failures in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: 'preparation, communication, authority, initiative, and human concern' (Callenbach, 2006, p. 8). The proposed investments and improvements are based on guidelines for transformative cultural competence training in social work education (Otuyelu, Graham, & Kennedy, 2016); suggestions from Garcia and Johnston-Guerrero (2015) for addressing racially biased incidents on college campuses; Lowe, Okubo and Reilly's qualitative inquiry on supporting victims of racism (2012); Capper's literature review of implications of CRT for
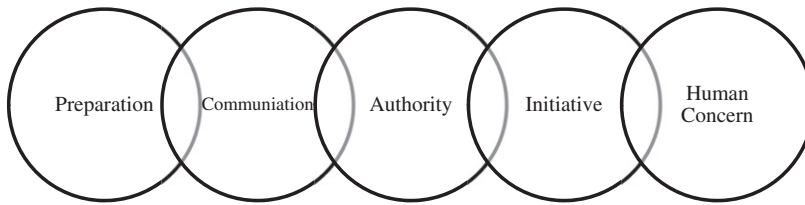
Figure 2. Five pillars of resource readiness.

educational leadership (2015); and McCluney et al.'s assessment of institutional responses to racially traumatic incidents (2017) (Figure 2).

Pillar 1: Preparation

Resource readiness means preparation in advance of crisis, rather than simply crisis response. The latter is an as-needed approach. The former recognizes that, just as the experience of racial trauma is on-going (Miller & Wang, 2018), the work of ameliorating that trauma must also be ongoing (Capper, 2015).

Investigation and dissemination of up-to-date information on racial trauma should be prioritized in institutions of higher education. Units across campus should engage multiple stakeholders in creating and regularly updating racial trauma toolkits. Guidelines should be created for a variety of scenarios, including response to racially traumatic incidents that occur at different levels (i.e., campus vs. city vs. nation). Additionally, these guidelines should include, at a minimum: how to craft a statement to notify the community of institutional response to an event, how to craft an accountability statement, how to craft a meaningful apology, a guide to campus and community resources, and a list of specific community-care and self-care suggestions (Lowe, Okubo & Reilly, 2012).

Callenbach observes: 'It's uncanny when we come to the failure of the levees because it happened in bright, sticky, hot weather and from a storm-induced surge, not from the worst of the storm' (Callenbach, 2006, p. 8). Preparation makes for a timely response to immediate effects as well as unexpected aftereffects of racial trauma. '[T]he most important thing for campuses to do is to be proactive rather than waiting to react to these incidents when the occur' (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015, p. 63).

Pillar 2: Communication

Resource readiness requires clarity of purpose, specificity of goals, regular evaluation, and meaningful accountability. These elements should be codified through communication among stakeholders across the institution. Additionally, there must be ongoing honest conversations about race, racism, and racial trauma, including conversations about the specific harm associated with 'color-blind' institutional practices and policies (Capper, 2015, p. 816). While the presence of People of Color in these conversations is essential, the burden of organization and facilitation should lie elsewhere, ideally with white administrators in collaboration with other white people and People of Color who specialize in anti-racism work. Creating a norm of courageous conversations (Tuitt, 2012) and radical honesty (Williams, 2016) means that there will be an existing mode of discourse for addressing racially traumatic events when they occur. Closely related to the recommendation for clear and appropriate communication is the necessity for leveraging institutional authority.

Pillar 3: Authority

Institutional authority should be leveraged both to model appropriate response to racial trauma (Capper, 2015), and to make appropriate response to racial trauma an institutional expectation (McCluney et al., 2017). Performance goals and annual reviews for employees at every level should include evidence of investment toward that end. Specific goals will vary within units and among individuals, but the general expectation should be universal.

Pillar 4: Initiative

If recruitment, retention, and a welcoming campus climate are institutional priorities, those goals should be reflected in institutional initiatives with clear guidelines and obvious impact (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015). Academic faculty should receive training in designing culturally competent course content, regardless of subject area, as well as training for responding to racial microaggressions and racial trauma in and beyond the classroom. 'Instead of being caught off guard, [a person] who finds a swastika, racial slur, or other graffiti … might react in ways that are more productive to coping, healing, and educating others rather than just being shocked and dismayed' (Garcia & Johnston-Guerrero, 2015, p. 63).

Furthermore, power, privilege and oppression should be addressed across the curriculum, and in non-academic staff development programs (Capper, 2015; Franklin, 2016).

Pillar 5: Human Concern

Robert Reece (2018), reminds us that 'There is a homelessness among black academics … neither our old spaces nor our new ones can truly offer us the sense of belonging that we desire' (n.p.) This sentiment is reminiscent of the experience of Hurricane Katrina evacuees: displaced in the aftermath of the storm, their homes destroyed, American citizens relocating to American cities were labeled by the media as refugees (Harris-Perry & Perry, 2015; Lee, 2006; Masquelier, 2006; Pesca, 2005), treated as outsiders rather than fellow citizens. Black academics and other scholars performing critical race and related work recognize that their efforts are marginalized in a similar fashion (see Anzaldúa, 1987; Berry et al., 2017; Collins, 1986; Hooks, 2000; Pollard & Welch, 2006; Rusert, 2017).

Cultivating human concern as a pillar of resource readiness helps minoritized faculty and staff to heal from trauma (Lowe, Okubo, & Reilly, 2012; McCluney et al., 2017), reminds them of their value to the institution, and helps them develop self-worth (Hardy, 2013). This can be accomplished, in part, by creating opportunities for People of Color to share their lived experiences through counter-narrative storytelling. An attitude of genuine human concern means that counter-narratives will not be treated as an end in themselves: the goal of sharing these stories is transformation (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Tuck and Yang (2014) criticize the academy, and social science research in particular, for 'eliciting pain stories from people who are not White, not wealthy, and not straight' (p. 226–227) without the necessary commitment to changing the status quo. 'Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform' (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). In the realm of education, counter-stories can provide vivid illustrations of racism embedded in systems and policies that purport neutrality (Capper, 2015). It is essential to keep those goals in mind, lest counter-stories become another means of commodifying Black life (Hiraldo, 2010; Tate, 2003).

Finally, it is essential that universities invest in the mental health of their Black faculty, staff, and students, by employing mental health professionals who demonstrate racial consciousness and cultural humility (Franklin, 2016; McGee & Stovall, 2015). Crowell et al. (2017) describe a natural fit between the aims of counseling psychology and Black Lives Matter: 'Counseling psychologists and Black Lives Matter activists alike seek to *intervene* against the oppression Black people

face at the collective, relational, and personal levels' (p. 874) [emphasis added]. Intervention is evidence of human concern.

Storm watch, storm warning

The history of Black life in the United States is a history of oppression and resistance, violence and victory, 'free at last' and 'hands up don't shoot,' Barack Obama and Michael Brown. It is a story of making a way out of no way, a story of weathering a storm. Critical Race Theory reminds us of the importance of placing contemporary racial oppression in proper historical context (Aymer, 2016; Bell, 1992). While Alicia Garza, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, and Opal Tometi launched Black Lives Matter as a political project after the murder of Trayvon Martin (Black Lives Matter, n.d.), the antecedents of the movement stretch backwards in time to the first Black body buried at sea at the inception of the transatlantic slave trade, when 'the name of the people we came from … ceased to matter' (Brand, 2001, p. 4). Since that time, every Black voice raised in song, every Black fist raised in protest, has been a defiant assertion of the value of Black life.

Reflecting on Hurricane Katrina 10 years after the storm, Harris-Perry and Perry declared 'Black Lives Matter began as a public movement … on August 29, 2005' (Harris-Perry & Perry, 2015, p. 7). The broken levees were evidence of a broken contract: 'In America, a levee defends a foundational moral intuition: all lives are worth protecting and, since this is America, worth protecting at the highest standard' (Ignatieff, 2005, n.p.). If all lives mattered, Ignatieff argues, then the Army Corps of Engineers, state and local officials, the United States Congress and the President would have invested in levee repair and renewal. The lack of investment in levees revealed a general lack of investment in Black life (for additional resources on Hurricane Katrina, see Appendix B). Hurricane Katrina is a reminder and a warning 'that the fate of Black lives cannot be separated from that of whole communities' (Harris-Perry & Perry, 2015, p. 7). This is as true in the academy as in New Orleans. Ultimately, all lives do not matter unless Black Lives Matter.

The vulnerability of the Black community and the marginalization of Black life were writ large in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. That vulnerability has been underscored in myriad ways in the years since, most vividly in the deaths of unarmed Black people killed at the hands of law enforcement. But not only our bodies are vulnerable. Our hearts, our minds, our spirits are vulnerable too.

Epilogue: We need mardi gras

It is the annual end-of-year Faculty of Color Cookout. Final grades have been submitted, commencement speeches given, books brought back to the library. Summer jams are turned up on the portable speakers, he's halfway through his second cooler-cold IPA, and his plate is piled high with potato salad, deviled eggs, and unpretentious pieces of fried chicken: wings and thighs. Some of his colleagues are crowded around somebody's iPad, laughing loud at a video of a Saturday Night Live sketch of *Black Jeopardy* (2018). For a change, no one has to explain the joke.

Black joy is part of his narrative too; Black joy is part of Black resistance (Bennet, 2017; Hamilton, 2018).

Someone sends around greeting cards to sign: Get-Well for a sister scholar recovering from another surgery, and Good-Bye-and-Good-Luck for a brother academic-activist who is leaving Mountain West University for the maybe-greener grasses of an HBCU.

He wonders, briefly, whether their conditions are connected, if in some ways, the cards are saying slightly different versions of the exact same thing.

Notes

1. Vignettes are titled with quotations from the documentary film *When the Levees Broke* (Lee, 2006).
2. The seven-point Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale (National Hurricane Center, 2018) describes storms according to wind speed, from tropical depression to tropical storm, then up through hurricane Categories 1 through 5.

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Appendix A

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Appendix B

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