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# Visibilizing our Pain and Wounds as Resistance and Activist Pedagogy to Heal and Hope: Reflections of 2 Racialized Professors

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## ABSTRACT

This article reflects experiences of two racialized professors from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) paradigm teaching in Canadian teacher preparation and educational leadership programs across multiple universities. The analysis of their lived experiences as counter-stories through storytelling focuses on how their identities, bodies, course content, and activist pedagogies are read and received teaching predominantly white students and working with non-racialized colleagues. The authors situate the microaggressions they experienced from administrators, colleagues, students, and larger community members, while teaching about anti-black racism, white supremacy, and other equity topics in education that challenge normalized metanarratives which at times make others uncomfortable. The authors seek to disrupt and challenge these normalized policies and practices within teacher education programs and within publication processes that privilege whiteness, and disadvantage Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and other minoritized identities. The sharing of counter-stories embedded with pain serve two purposes: to heal from traumatic experiences via sharing in solidarity with other brave voices, and simultaneously to disrupt and promote an activist pedagogy that calls-out inequities as a form of resistance, even within spaces and departments whose identity is shaped by their support for equity and social justice. The objective is to challenge the incongruencies and paradoxes between theory and practice within the enactment of equity in teacher education programs rooted in tokenism, color-blind/neutral policies, and performance politics. A series of recommendations are outlined to work toward centering non-dominant bodies, histories, voices, and cultural capital to prepare teacher candidates who can constructively engage in equity work by understanding interconnections between power and privilege, instead of remaining stagnant in deficit thinking rooted in fear and weaponization of bodies unknown to their cultural identities and lived experiences.

## Introduction

*Throughout the article we write in first person using I and We with intentionality. This is done to give voice to our own thoughts and experiences while challenging colonizing practices affiliated with publication and its normalized parameters. Often lived experience is judged as an inferior form of knowledge or not academic enough when peer reviewed journals evaluate submissions for publication.*

This article reflects experiences of two racialized professors from a Critical Race Theory (CRT) paradigm teaching in Canadian teacher preparation and educational leadership programs across multiple universities. The analysis of their lived experiences as counter-stories (Matias, 2013) through storytelling focuses on how their identities, bodies, course content, and activist pedagogies are read and received teaching predominantly white students and working with non-racialized colleagues. The authors situate the microaggressions they experienced from administrators, colleagues, students, and

larger community members, while teaching about anti-black racism, white supremacy, and other equity topics in education that challenge normalized metanarratives which at times make others uncomfortable. The authors seek to disrupt and challenge these normalized policies and practices within teacher education programs and within publication processes that privilege whiteness (Ahmed, 2007), and disadvantage Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC), and other minoritized identities (Henry & Tator, 2012; Samuel & Wane, 2005). The sharing of counter-stories embedded with pain serve two purposes: to heal from traumatic experiences via sharing in solidarity with other brave voices, and simultaneously to disrupt and promote an activist pedagogy that calls-out inequities as a form of resistance, even within spaces and departments whose identity is shaped by their support for equity and social justice (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Yancy, 2016). The objective is to challenge the incongruencies and paradoxes between theory and practice within the enactment of equity in teacher education programs rooted in tokenism, color-blind/neutral policies, and performance politics. A series of recommendations are outlined to work toward centering non-dominant bodies, histories, voices, and cultural capital to prepare teacher candidates who can constructively engage in equity work by understanding interconnections between power and privilege, instead of remaining stagnant in deficit thinking rooted in fear and weaponization of bodies unknown to their cultural identities and lived experiences.

## Methodology and Methods

*All writing in italics throughout the paper represent our thoughts and interactions as coauthors as we engaged in writing the paper. We are thinking out loud as part of a collective experience with you as the reader. This is a spiritual approach to writing and sharing a paper which contextualizes how our ideas were formulated and expressed through dialogues with one another.*

*We did not outline our research questions in the introduction of this article. A reviewer will definitely point this out. Remember this is a peer-reviewed journal. You have to play by the rules if you want to be published. It is time to describe the methodology, theoretical framework, and methods for this article to “validate” its worth.*

The idea for this article originated from informal conversations between Ardavan and Andrew, who self-identify as racialized professors, when they met at a Canadian university to teach a course titled “Anti-Discriminatory Education” for teacher candidates within a teacher education program. Through further dialogues and interactions, we got to know each other, and identify many commonalities and intersectionalities in our identities, pedagogies, and lived experiences. Some commonalities include being racialized, immigrants, having a passion for community advocacy, K to 12 teachers who have taught internationally prior to teaching at post-secondary institutions, having accents, teaching at multiple universities simultaneously, and being persons who utilize activist pedagogies with intentionality to promote and challenge inequities. *Sounds good, but did we describe what we mean by key words such as racialized and activist pedagogies?*

Our definition of activist pedagogy is rooted in ways in which we are intentional and critically conscious (Freire, 1970; Matias, 2016) of who are, the voices that are being cited as part of course content, pedagogies we engage with, how we facilitate discussions about topics that may trigger people to feel angry, upset, or uncomfortable, how we show up as individuals within the space of the university and within our classrooms, and how our bodies as racialized professors are read and received. Preston and Aslett (2014) define activist pedagogy as,

a complicating approach to education that exposes, acknowledges and unpacks social injustices, implicates personal and structural histories and currencies, and is founded in a commitment to personal and social change both inside and outside the classroom and the academy. It recognizes the historical material context but avoids reification of such context through fluid explorations of power, subjectivity and social relations . . . To practise teaching from a stance rooted in social action and not simply social critique, an activist pedagogy urges both students and faculty to think of the classroom as a site for ‘doing’ as well as ‘thinking about doing.’ (pp. 514–515)

We expand on this definition by pointing out we need to be subversive (Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018) at times when “doing” activist work navigating hierarchical power dynamics that can feel foreign and threatening. This translates to working as a collective and within communities, with allies and others in solidarity, to mobilize and be strategic in how to enact activism. This allows for healing and support as part of the process of doing the work, as resistance is emotionally and spiritually laborious given that at the core of racialization and being a racialized person is navigating inequitable power dynamics at the institutional level, resulting in disparities in outcomes between social groups often disadvantaging Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) (Colour of Poverty, 2019; Karumanchery, 2005; Kumashiro, 2004).

As racialized professors, we theorize and share through storytelling how we navigate the complexities and nuances in bringing our authentic self into our daily practices teaching predominantly white students and surrounded with non-racialized faculty and administrators. *They must think we hate white people and we are racist. We hope by end of the paper they understand we are talking about whiteness as a system entrenched in institutional policies and practices that privilege whiteness as a form of currency rooted in power relations and the criteria for inclusion/exclusion.* How do we navigate, negotiate, and disrupt hierarchical power dynamics that pressurize us as racialized professors to conform to normalizing practices and ways of being or risk being excluded (e.g., not being re-hired or given the opportunity to teach a course again)? How do we respond to the microaggressions and push-back we receive from other faculty at meetings and/or students via course evaluations and class discussions questioning our authenticity and legitimacy? How do we heal in community and as a collective by sharing our struggles with other racialized faculty?

We present our lived experiences as counter-stories (Matias, 2013) through storytelling rooted in Critical Race Theory (Knoester & Au, 2017; Lopez, 2003). A key characteristic of CRT,

is the privileging of stories and counterstories particularly the stories that are told by people of color. CRT scholars believe there are two differing accounts of reality: the dominant reality that “looks ordinary and natural” to most individuals, and a racial reality that has been filtered out, suppressed, and censored.” (Lopez, 2003, p. 84)

We share our experiences strategically and with intentionality dictating how we share it, when we share it, and why we share it. While there is not a lot of literature written on the enactment of activist pedagogy within the Canadian higher education, specifically within teacher education programs, there is some literature outlining the experiences of racialized professors in higher education (Henry & Tator, 2012; James, 2012; Matias, 2013; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Samuel & Wane, 2005). We seek to contribute to filling in the gap in the literature, particularly what it means to work in resistance and through activist pedagogy in higher education. Based on our community work and our experiences as educators across numerous spaces beyond the university setting, we use storytelling as an impactful medium to enact our activist pedagogy and challenge hegemonic policies and practices that disadvantage BIPOC identities.

*Ardavan: I immigrated to Toronto in October 1998 from Iran on a cold snowy day. I self-identify as male, Muslim, immigrant, urban, and an English Language Learner. I grew up in Scarborough, a geographical neighborhood in east end of Toronto. I became a K to 12 public school board educator, then adjunct college professor in child and youth care programs, and finally a sessional professor at multiple universities in teacher preparation and early childhood educational programs. It took me a long time to embrace these lived experiences and open up and share them with my students as part of my activist pedagogy.*

*Andrew: I was born in Kingston, Jamaica. I immigrated to Canada in 2008 from Bahamas after living and teaching there for 8 years. I self-identify as male, Christian, immigrant, Black, tall, gay, Caribbean, and urban. I became a K to 12 public school board educator, then adjunct college professor, and finally a sessional professor at multiple universities in teacher preparation and educational leaderships programs.*

Too often systemic oppression and microaggressions experienced by racialized and minoritized identities working in higher education settings has been dismissed as invalid or an exceptional incident, which in fact contributes to causing more harm. Henry and Tator (2012) conducted 89 interviews with racialized faculty at ten Canadian universities as part of a larger study examining racialization at the university and found that many white identities “do not see racism in their own words and actions” and many racialized faculty “especially Black women, expressed their loneliness and alienation from the university, their departments, and their colleagues” (p. 75). This is why it is significant to question who is telling a narrative, how is it told, when is it told, and for what purposes, particularly how institutions respond to concerns raised by racialized faculty.

Baszile (2009) situates the importance of listening to counter-stories from a CRT lens by emphasizing,

They are told from the perspective of the marginalized and are intended to challenge the universality and often the efficacy of the majoritarian story, not simply in its context but also in its very structure. The story-counterstory frame not only works to uncover subjugated knowledge but it also allows one to see and examine the relationship between the stories and the role race and other subjectivities play in shaping their differences. (pp. 10–11)

The academy and its regulatory policies and practices, from what is valued in job applications to qualify to teach courses to processes involved in publication and promotion, seeks to regulate how we can share our pain, suffering, and wounds as racialized professors (Henry & Tator, 2012; James, 2012). *What was that thing, publish or perish? You should have a minimum a Masters or PhD or do not bother applying for the job. Who does this exclude?* Is there room for sharing our emotions, pain, and moments of happiness and struggles as we engaged in meaningful conversations as part of writing this paper while being hypervisibilized by the institution for diversity being present on campus?

We argue that sometimes meaningful learning and resistance takes place by asking more questions, instead of being silent or pretending to have all the answers. This is a key characteristic of our resistance and activist pedagogies rooted in questioning the norm and whose interests it serves (Campbell & Watson, 2021; Hooks, 2003; Kumashiro, 2004; Steinberg, 2005). With intentionality, we raise many questions throughout this paper, for us as authors and for you as readers to ponder and discuss to spark dialogue and actions about equity, both within higher education and in the larger community at the grassroots level. We explore how do we, as racialized professors, work to radically disrupt, challenge, and subvert educational policies and practices from within post-secondary institutions by visibilizing our pain, suffering, and wounds via activist pedagogies. We discuss how disruption in our activist pedagogy is an intentional strategy, but also a self-sustaining and therapeutic coping mechanism, which centers our vulnerability at the core of who we are, how we teach, and for what purposes.

In the discussion that follows we situate who we are in a more intimate manner and discuss how we navigate the academia as racialized professors where our value and worth is often judged and assessed from a white gaze (James, 2012). How do we engage with the systemic oppression enacted on our bodies as marked racialized professors (Ahmed, 2007), while simultaneously maximizing our agency from within the educational institutions to advance equitable outcomes (Matias, 2013; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019)? We respond to these questions by discussing two themes at the core of our activist pedagogies: stepping away and disrupting the normalized criteria for judging and assessing success, and centering non-hegemonic pedagogies and practices.

## Discussion

### Theme #1: Stepping Away and Disrupting the Normalized Criteria for Judging and Assessing Success

## Theme #2: Centering Non-Hegemonic Pedagogies and Practices

*Typically themes are presented in order one after the other, but we strongly feel we have to represent and discuss them as a collective so readers can more holistically understand how they are interconnected and influence one another in a dynamic symbiotic manner, pushing and pulling in multiple directions simultaneously across numerous settings.*

## Theme #1: Stepping Away and Disrupting the Normalized Criteria for Judging and Assessing Success

Writing can be an act of self-expression for healing, but it can also be an act of resistance. The same can be said about teaching from how you present yourself to what you implement pedagogically: you can either reinforce normalizing practices or challenge the dominant hegemonic way things have been implemented (Campbell & Watson, 2021; Weiner, 2014; Yancy, 2005). *This article is being written for a peer reviewed academic journal. How many members of our communities who are not in the academia will get to read this? How can we share these ideas through other mediums and platforms to engage in important conversations about equity and inclusion? We engage in these conversations and community work via other platforms that are much more accessible to the public such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, blogs, and having our own websites.* As part of our activist pedagogies, we are passionate about discussing equity and inclusion issues in our courses related to the intersection of anti-Black racism, anti-Muslim hate, and white supremacy and how such ideologies as a system intersect and are perpetuated via normalizing practices. With intentionality, in our classes, we deconstruct examples related to how students dress, speak, and embody themselves with critical analysis about power and privilege. This often makes many white identities feel uncomfortable and at times resistant and oppositional (Matias, 2016; Yancy, 2016), as they feel they are being blamed for systemic issues and inequities (*#whitefragility*).

As racialized professors, we begin our first classes by building rapport with our students, encouraging them to share their lived experiences through storytelling. We encourage them to reflect various aspects of their identity, historically from an intersectional lens, and how who they are and their social location impacts access to power and privilege at micro and macro levels. We model this behavior by how we bring our identities into the educator role and share our own vulnerabilities using storytelling. We strive to create a brave space that disrupts the criteria that is normalized for judgment: a place where we can take up differences in opinion and stances on social issues from various positionalities. The goal is not to arrive at a single answer, but rather understand why we take a stance and what it is rooted in with respect to values and ideologies it reinforces. As we embark on reflection and dialogical discussions (Freire, 1970) with intentionality, we situate these topics around the power and privilege framework with reference to the works of racialized authors such as Edward Said, Paulo Freire, Sherene Razack, George Dei, Carl James, Marie Battiste, Linda Smith, Kimberle Crenshaw, Franz Fanon, bell hooks, Sandy Grande, Eve Tuck, Walter D. Mignolo, and others. Engaging in these important conversations with our predominantly nonwhite students and colleagues, through centering the works of racialized scholars as part of course content, is part of our activist pedagogy to disrupt the historical citational practices of white scholars. For example, when discussing white privilege, we ensure we center voices of racialized scholars who write about the topic, but also include white scholars who have written on the topic as allies and activists in solidarity with oppressed social groups. This is part of disrupting the normalized practice of racialized voices being presented on the periphery versus being centered when discussing equity and social justice issues in teacher education programs. Also, as part of disrupting citational practices, we include various types of texts as part of our course content including TedTalks, podcasts, documentaries, and visual posters. Students have expressed how these alternative texts have facilitated their learning by making connections to their lived experiences and



making it easier to understand big ideas typically presented through peer-reviewed sources lacking relatable cultural responsiveness (Battiste, 2013; Campbell & Watson, 2021).

A dialogical approach (Freire, 1970) to discussing equity issues and how it impacts social groups takes effort, energy, risk-taking, and emotions affiliated with willing to be vulnerable. We encourage and welcome emotions of joy, anger, sadness, happiness, feelings of uncomfortableness, and a range of other emotions to be expressed throughout our classes. We model this as professors, acknowledging emotions and our spiritual selves are key part of transformative teaching and learning. We push for students to question “common sense” (Kumashiro, 2004; Weiner, 2014) as socially constructed hegemonic values and practices which privilege whiteness as a form of being and currency at the expense of marginalization and exclusion to racialized and minoritized identities. Becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable is a key aspect of our activist pedagogies rooted in going from a safe space to a brave space. As Battiste (2013) points out,

In order to effect change, educators must help students understand the Eurocentric assumptions of superiority within the context of history and to recognize the continued dominance of these assumptions in all forms of contemporary knowledge. (p. 186)

Situating how inequitable power dynamics create conditions for inaccessibility to opportunities leading to institutional disparities is at the core of getting students from dominant groups to understand what is normalized, who it gives power to, and in what ways. *What is normalized and used as the criteria for measuring success and consequentially for accessing opportunities?*

Who can enter the academy? What is the requirement to get access to teacher programs to be a student or an instructor or adjunct professor? Who is it easier for? Who has more systemic challenges along the way and what are those barriers? Why is there a lack of representation from minoritized groups in both student body and faculty at most universities across the country, even though the departments proudly claim they are diverse and in support of equity? Do all social groups feel valued for their identities and contributions? Whose discomfort matters? How is racism embedded in performative institutional policies and practices where even when racialized and minoritized identities get access to a space by being the token representative, they do not feel safe or empowered in belonging to that space? What is the emotional labor required by minoritized students, staff, and faculty to teach and (un)learn within such spaces deemed neutral in appearance but contaminated with subtle microaggressions in everyday interactions? Grappling with these questions holds potential for engaging in constructive and meaningful conversations and actions to better address the needs of minoritized and racialized students and communities, instead of remaining stagnant in deficit thinking rooted in fear and weaponization of bodies unknown to one’s cultural identity and lived experiences. As Steinberg (2005) articulates,

This ability to sanitize and camouflage oppression is, in fact, one of the most powerful tools at the oppressor’s disposal in that it allows him to minimize his relationship to the mechanisms of power, even while actively employing those mechanisms to nurture and solidify his position along the top rungs of the social hierarchy. (p. 13)

As part of disrupting the sanitization and camouflaging of oppression, we share our lived experiences as counter-stories and discuss how it is a mobilizing force in reinforcing activist pedagogies, facilitate healing from traumatic experiences, and disrupt and promote equitable outcomes working from within the academia. This process is therapeutic as we reflect on our struggles and indulge in our pain and suffering as a means of processing it and sharing it to ignite hope with the larger community of minoritized educators. Simultaneously, this sharing is meant to spark discussions for white educators and others belonging to dominant groups in society to better recognize and understand with critical consciousness (Freire, 1970; Karumanchery, 2005; Shahjahan, 2005) how inequality of opportunity is created, enacted, and perpetuated via institutional policies and practices that regulate access to power via what is privileged as the norm.

It is important to distinguish there is a difference between showing our wounds, pain, and vulnerabilities as strength versus it being interpreted as being weak. This is at the core of stepping

away and disrupting the normalized criteria for judging and assessing success, which includes the value we attach to emotions and spirituality as part of teaching and learning. We ask ourselves how to we exit our classes and department interviews feeling we have stayed authentic to ourselves without compromising our values as a means of conforming (#keepingitreal)? Mohamed and Beagan (2019) conducted semi-structured interviews grounded in critical theory with 13 racialized and Indigenous academics at Canadian universities exploring their everyday experiences of belonging and marginality, inclusion, and exclusion. They found that “many participants reflected on the Eurocentric culture of academia, describing intentional shifts and sacrifices they have made to ‘fit’ within it, learning academic cultural norms and sometimes relinquishing elements of their own culture” (p. 343). Similarly, we have been criticized in our course evaluations from students and received comments from colleagues in meetings and interviews about the use of such non-hegemonic approaches to teaching as less legitimate. Yet, we feel confident to push back against such opposition, acknowledging that there are multiple ways of knowing and teaching aside from normalized dominant practices. Our minoritized students in our courses have validated this, sharing that they felt they were valued for who they are and their contributions due to our approach, course content presented, and activist pedagogies reinforced. *We have reached this stage of confidence and maturity gradually as part of dealing with our own suffering, emotions, and failures along the journey. A large part of this maturity is contributed to recognizing our own self-worth and contributions with continuous reflection and brave conversations within ourselves, supplemented with finding hope in mentors, friendships in allies, and solitude in various communities we belong, knowing that we are not alone in such experiences which inspires us to keep striving to disrupt and create change from within.*

## Theme #2: Centering Non-Hegemonic Pedagogies and Practices

As racialized professors our very presence is uniquely read and constantly interpreted physically, emotionally, and intellectually as we enter and navigate different settings in post-secondary institutions within teacher education programs (Matias, 2016; Yancy, 2016). As James (2012) points out,

racialized faculty members—are likely to be occasionally showcased to highlight the institution’s public image. In this regard, minorities will become hyper-visible in any organization that purports to value diversity; and such visibility, as well as their status, tends to generate a higher degree of self-consciousness about their presence and the decisions they make. (p. 134)

We navigate power dynamics across numerous settings such as within our classes and staff meetings, intentionally deciding when to amplify our presence and when to minimize it: our agency is rooted in how we dress and present ourselves, when we speak up and remain silent, and how and where we speak up, challenge, subvert, and resist from within.

*Andrew: For me this involves how I intentionally use my Jamaican accent and dialect, the way I dress as part of vocalizing my identity, and how and when I choose to share my vulnerabilities such as my intersectional identity of being gay and Christian. As I grew up, I struggled with understanding why I was being taught to conform to certain ways of being as it applied to talking, dressing, and behaving often being told that conforming to normalized practices and expectations is how one demonstrates worthiness and gains access to opportunities. I strive to disrupt such expectations by my very presence teaching at multiple universities. I am deliberate and determined to show up as my whole self!*

*Ardavan: For me this involves how I manage my use of slang vocabulary in professional settings, how I dress in a casual urban manner often in running shoes and fitted hats, and when I choose to share my vulnerabilities in relation to street violence and nearly being kicked out of high school.*

For both of us presence is very important and done with intentionality knowing that our mannerism is constantly interpreted and scrutinized in relation to the hegemonic white gaze and its affiliated



norms and expectations in our profession (James, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). This is part of disrupting through an activist pedagogy which emphasizes centering non-hegemonic ways of being within the academy.

*Andrew: I was at the place where I struggled to decide which part of my identity was allowed in a space. This is rooted in childhood trauma and shame about many parts of myself including growing up in Jamaica and being bullied for being an effeminate boy. This showed me what was considered acceptable and what was not. I learned from an early age the concepts of belonging, acceptance, and exclusion. You show up as what they want because if you do, you would be “safe” and “accepted” – well just for that moment. Inclusion is more than being part of the group: it is how safe you feel to be yourself and to what extent your contributions are valued. I remember coming to Canada in 2008 and as part of my first job training, I was coached on how to speak to students. I realize that the way in which they wanted me to speak to my students by hiding my accent made me feel powerless. I became so mindful of how I presented myself by conforming in some situations to the point that I did not even recognize myself in certain meetings. I would leave upset – not with them, but with myself for showing up in that way and conforming. This anger was transformative over time once I was able to understand what it was rooted in: it was me pushing back and not being satisfied and wanting to show up as my whole authentic self.*

*Ardavan: I remember coming to Canada at a young age from Iran and people making fun of my accent for being an English as Second Language Learner and the way I dressed. Sports became an avenue where people accepted me for who I was more so for the skills I had, and it allowed me to build rapport and friendships with others. Attending 3 different high schools in 4 years opened my eyes to equity issues and how each school had its own unique governing rules and power dynamics embedded in subtle ways of how teachers interacted with the students in relation to the school reputation. Going through it, I recognized that education is far from neutral. In some schools I was seen for who I was and encouraged to go against the grain, whereas in other schools I was reminded daily to conform or else face consequences through losing marks, being policed, etc. I remember vividly when the principal of a high school I was attending offered me a choice as a consequence for my actions: to take a 30-day suspension for a theft incident I was indirectly involved with which was very damaging to the academic reputation of the school or voluntarily leave and transfer to another high school without a lengthy suspension being noted under my student record. In retrospect, I can understand how important statistics are in maintaining an image for a school. For a long time, I felt ashamed sharing and talking about these narratives: failing calculus class, nearly being kicked out of high school, looking in the eyes of my parents and seeing disappointment, seeing my friends die due to gun and gang violence, being told who to hang out with, jail visits to check in on my friends, etc. I am no longer ashamed of these experiences and instead now embrace them as transformative teachable moments that have impacted who I am, how I teach, and how it drives my passion for advocating for equity and social justice issues rooted in an activist pedagogy.*

We have gradually reached the stage where visibilizing our wounds rooted in our lived experiences and past traumas has become a proud process. We choose not to hide our pain and wounds but rather center it and embrace it as teachable moments about power and privilege as part of our activist pedagogies.

What is the baseline measure for greatness? What is the requirement to be an instructor or adjunct professor at a university? The requirement for a Masters, PhD, presentations at conferences, extensive publications in journals and books, and securing of research grants all serve as gate-keeping mechanisms to limit these opportunities to a selective few driven by market needs rather than needs of our students and local communities. Who is likely in a position to have these requirements on their resume? What alternative models can exist? Eurocentric expectations and norms, within institutional policies and practices in higher education, have become the gold standard in policing bodies and scholarships of racialized professors and assessing the legitimacy of their work (Battiste, 2013; Henry & Tator, 2012; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Steinberg, 2005). These expectations, policies, and practices

are further rooted in the white gaze which is formulated historically by seeds of colonialism, imperialism, sexism, racism, and market-driven capitalism (Hooks, 2003; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The white gaze (Yancy, 2016) functions as a gatekeeper, which outlines the criteria for inclusion and exclusion for how mannerisms and experiences are measured, judged, and ranked granting privilege in the form of currency to whiteness (Ahmed, 2007). It is important to ask how we feel as racialized professors who have made it to work within the academia having overcome many systemic barriers to students and colleagues within spaces which historically and by default value whiteness. This is the weight of entering an interview and being looked and stared at with the tight rope of the white gaze (Ahmed, 2007; Yancy, 2005), and us contemplating and strategizing how we share our story based on how we think the panel and the search committee will receive our response and consequentially interpret who we are and the worthiness of our experiences and accomplishments. *Keep in mind, we are not talking about whiteness as a descriptor of race but as a system rooted in how certain mannerisms, attitudes, and forms of scholarship are deemed superior while everything else is judged and ranked in relation to the normalized criteria.*

A great example of racial disparities in the workforce is outlined by Block and Galabuzi (2011) in their report titled *Canada's Color Coded Labor Market: The Gap for Racialized Workers*. Findings from the report indicate that, "Racialized Canadians earn only 81.4 cents for every dollar paid to non-racialized Canadians" (p. 11). These disparities have long existed and exasperated at the institutional level by the intersection of race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, and socio-economic status. As an extension, looking at the make-up of the full-time to part-time faculty at most Canadian higher education colleges and universities, there is a large disparity where tenured faculty are predominantly white, and majority of adjunct and part-time or sessional faculty are racialized and/or minoritized (Abawi & Eizadirad, 2020).

What do we do in response to the criteria used to judge us? How do institutional policies and practices (or lack of them), and their interpretation and enactment, signify who belongs and who does not belong? Why are we told how we should feel instead of being asked and listened to? Overall, as part of our presence in the academia as racialized professors and as part of our activist pedagogies, we strive to amplify our visibility by centering non-dominant ways of being, pedagogies, and practices as resistance and subversion to disrupt the normalizing gaze. This is at the core of disrupting hegemonic policies and practices that historically and ongoingly disadvantage BIPOC identities. Hence, Ardavan makes sure he self-identifies as Muslim at the start of all his classes. Andrew proudly speaks with his Jamaican accent. We both ensure we acknowledge and pay attention to the needs of our minoritized students who are often surrounded by other faculty and students from dominant groups. We make ourselves approachable and available at critical times while teaching in-person and remotely, mentor racialized/minoritized students, rely on storytelling as a pedagogy, and encourage embracing emotions and spirituality as part of teaching and learning.

## Conclusion

The institutions we work within often remind us as racialized professors of our place within the hierarchy. We are told to be thankful for being given an opportunity, but to not rock the boat, as our labor is considered replaceable. Using an activist pedagogy to resist, while simultaneously seeking to change the system from within, is at the core of our being and how we teach while remaining authentic to our values and who we are within the larger community. As Weiner (2014) emphasizes,

Critical teaching is a pedagogical process that helps to release poisonous social toxins by kneading away at the points where the build-up of power, knowledge, and myth has made thinking critically and divergently about our social, emotional, and psychic relations if not impossible, then highly unlikely. (p. 25)

Our activist pedagogy is rooted in who we are, our past and current traumas, the vulnerabilities and emotions we share with our students and colleagues, and how we teach. This includes centering emotions, lived experiences, and oral culture and storytelling as legitimized knowledges, ensuring we

include scholars from non-dominant groups and alternative texts as part of our course readings and activities, and engaging in topics that make our students uncomfortable. We advocate that the problem is not being uncomfortable but how we choose to respond and embrace such emotions and feelings, and whether we can recognize what values and ideologies they are rooted in. This is an important emotional and spiritual journey to invest in to prepare teacher candidates who can constructively engage with diversity, equity, and social justice in a manner that reflects the needs of minoritized students and communities, instead of remaining stagnant in deficit thinking rooted in fear and weaponization of bodies unknown to their cultural identities and lived experiences (Hooks, 2003).

Activist pedagogies emphasize the socio-emotional and spiritual aspects of teaching and learning as integral components for transformative experiences. It involves working toward unlearning, and decolonizing not only our minds, but our hearts and emotions with a critical consciousness about how power and privilege intersect to create inequality of opportunity, and how we can mobilize and strategize to navigate unequal power relations (Ahmed, 2007; Campbell & Watson, 2021; Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018; Kumashiro, 2004). As part of this, it is important that we do not neglect our emotions, pain, and suffering, but rather embrace it, examine why it makes us feel that way, and share it with others to heal, hope, and inspire action against inequities and injustices. This is something we encourage other racialized and minoritized faculty to do both on an individual level as well as within communities. The goal is to change and disrupt the normalized conditions and processes rooted in institutional policies and practices that make so many racialized and minoritized identities feel oppressed and that they do not belong when working at universities or colleges. We must spiritually find nourishment in community and in acts of self-care. We can heal, hope, and initiate change not by hiding our vulnerabilities and avoid talking about our negative experiences out of fear, but by making it visible, being proud of our resiliency, and disrupt unapologetically and with intentionality. As Battiste (2013) reminds us, we can hold on to hope or hopelessness: “Every school is either a site of reproduction or a site of change. In other words, education can be liberating, or it can domesticate and maintain domination. It can sustain colonization in neo-colonial ways or it can decolonize” (p. 175). By visibilizing our pain and wounds we center resistance and subversion through activist pedagogies. This is not a linear process but often messy and complex. We continue to be brave even as we finish writing this paper, as with any act of resistance, we are prone to consequences. *Keep in mind as a reader, regardless of your positionality and identity, when you are done reading this article, the story might end for you, but it does not end for us. This is a snapshot of what we experience.* In community, we hope, heal, and thrive.

## Disclosure statement

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## Notes on contributor

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