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# Navigating the Academy in the Post-Diaspora: #Afro-Caribbean Feminism and the Intellectual and Emotional Labour Needed to Transgress

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## Abstract

Black women are less likely to be retained in tenure-track faculty positions than any other gender and racial/ethnic group in higher education. We encounter "dual acts of race and sex discrimination" from the academic community, arguably leading to disparities in the number of tenure-track Black women faculty (Holmes, Danley Land, and Hinton-Hudson 2007, 107). As an expat in my "foreign homeland" (Stewart 2016), I am often reminded of how I must navigate power and privilege in the university as forms of resistance and subversion in a hetero-patriarchal hegemony. These various experiences of navigating the Caribbean academy while young, Black, and female serve as an ideal backdrop for understanding the impact of colonial patriarchy and what can be done to dismantle it. Accordingly, in this paper, I employ an Afro-Caribbean feminist autoethnographic frame to deconstruct everyday derogatory acts, comments, and behaviour in the academy that devalue female academics by persons of professional hierarchy (known as hierarchical microaggressions). This work builds on Young, Anderson and Stewart's (2015) framework on hierarchical microaggressions by applying it to Afro-Caribbean feminist thought. To transgress some of these academic spaces, I illustrate some of the conditions needed to create agency and a strong sense of the emancipatory self.

**Keywords:** Afro-Caribbean feminist thought, hierarchical microaggressions, higher education, Black female faculty

## The Multiplicity of a Woman – Part 1

This morning was riddled with the usual exhaustion and as I rolled over to look at the clock, I saw it was 6:36 a.m. Realizing I had overslept by 26 minutes meant this would be another late morning. But I couldn't be late, it was Friday and I had two sets of data collection: the first at 9:00 a.m. and the second at 2:00 p.m. Crap! The night before, I should have just gone to bed as soon as Nina closed her eyes but instead I tried to meet my thirty-minutes daily writing goal. More so, I had to teach tonight from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. and it was my student's funeral. My mind was on pace with the day ahead, quickly mapping my to-do list alongside compartmentalizing my emotions. I didn't check Alexis's homework last night. Did Andre do it? As I quickly stirred the oats for both girls and cut the watermelon for Nina's lunch snack, I remembered Alexis only wanted banana chips for her snack. Were their school bags packed? I continued to stir the cooling oats on the table, foreshadowing *I am definitely going to be late*. Then I looked at Alexis barely eating her oats and I knew I needed to pick my battles. At one week short of her ninth birthday, her attitude ranged from delightfully happy to a sour orange. It was a sour orange type of morning. Trying to rush the breakfast process as my husband got dressed and ready to drive the girls to school, I consciously strategized about picking my argument with Alexis. I looked at her and saw that she was disinterested in breakfast but more so murmuring under her breath, *I am going to forget the spelling words*. I decided to give the empowerment argument. At this point, I remind her that she is brilliant and created for excellence, and that she will be a better scientist than I was as she outshined my younger eight-year old self by ten-fold.  She smiled at me and in that moment, I knew I had picked the right battle. I finally got both girls and husband loaded in the car, handed Andre his morning coffee and wished them a safe drive. It was 7:46 a.m. – *I knew I was late*. I rushed to get ready and paused to think about the funeral I would attend. I lingered for a moment recounting the last conversation I had with my student a month before she passed. The familiar pain from her loss paralyzed me and in a breath I exhaled and remembered, *I am late*.

An article in Huffington Post stated "moms who juggle kids with paid jobs end up working 98 hours per week!" (Khoo 2017, para 2). I would argue that that number may be short of an additional ten hours during exams or grading periods for academic moms. The assumptions surrounding the life of an academic mom is layered with the realities of perpetual exhaustion, watching the clock and being constantly late. The pressure to perform, and in some cases outperform peers, is especially attributed to well documented studies on Black women being viewed as intruders in the academy (see hooks 2010; Gabriel and Tate 2017; Gibbs Grey and  Williams-Farrier 2017; Griffin 2012, 2016). These studies explain in varying detail how "Black female faculty … are at once at home (i.e., deserving of our positions) and homeless (i.e., Othered by, at a minimum, racism and sexism) in the academy" (Griffin 2016, 366). While these studies speak to Black women in UK and US contexts, this essay will provide a Caribbean-based context to describe Black female faculty resilience and grit through the experiences of a new tenure-track, junior-faculty.

## The More Things Change, the More They Remain the Same

This year (2018) marks the seventieth anniversary of the Caribbean region's most prestigious research university. During this time, the flagship campus has only had one woman appointed as head and Principal of the campus. Moreover, for the past seventy years there have been only a few female deans appointed within the Campus and roughly ten women in the last decade were promoted to the rank of full professor (The UWI, Mona Principal's Report 1996-2000, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008; The UWI, Mona Annual Report 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, 2011-2012, 2015-2016). As displayed in Figure 1, in 2010, female academic staff across the institution's campuses made up less than 40% of the senior lecturer pool and less than 30% of the professorial pool, but more than 50% of the lecturer and assistant lecturer teaching population.

GENDER DIFFERENTIALS OF ACADEMIC STAFF BY LEVELS OF APPOINTMENT

■ MALE  ■ FEMALE

| | MALE | FEMALE |
|---|---|---|
| ASSISTANT LECTURER | 42.6% | 57.4% |
| LECTURER | 48.2% | 51.8% |
| SENIOR LECTURER | 63.6% | 36.4% |
| PROFESSORIAL | 72.2% | 27.8% |
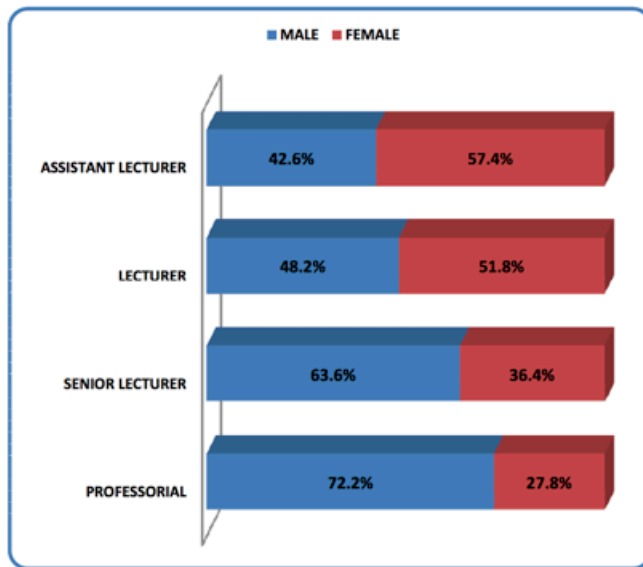
CHART 14

**ACADEMIC STAFF BY LEVEL AND SEX: 2009-10**

| LEVEL OF APPOINTMENT | MALE | FEMALE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|
| PROFESSORIAL | 72.2% | 27.8% | 169 |
| SENIOR LECTURER | 63.6% | 36.4% | 332 |
| LECTURER | 48.2% | 51.8% | 966 |
| ASSISTANT LECTURER | 42.6% | 57.4% | 162 |
| OTHER | 47.8% | 52.2% | 67 |
| TOTAL | 53.1% | 46.9% | 1696 |

*Figure 1.* Charts reflecting the gender differentials of academic staff by levels of appointment. Taken from The UWI, Statistical Review (2009/2010).

What the data illuminate is the disproportionate number of women, (in particular, I would argue Afro-Caribbean women) who are overlooked and/or denied tenure and promotion. This data supports what Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) have called the glass ceiling effects, which denote a range of impediments that women and people of colour encounter in their quest for senior-level academic positions. These impediments refer to conscious and unconscious acts of discriminatory practices that often result in gender inequities and racial disparities. Practices such as lower salaries albeit similar qualifications, sexual harassment in the workplace, poor maternity leave policies, and numerous appointments to service committees continue to impede Black female faculty's accession to senior-level academic positions (Jackson and O'Callaghan 2009).

Although Black women are receiving more doctoral degrees and entering the academy as lecturers, they are still viewed as interlopers and intellectual intruders. Globally, Black women faculty are viewed as "intruders in the academic world who do not really belong" (hooks 2010, 101). More so, in the United States, Black women are less likely to be retained in tenure-track faculty positions than any

other gender and racial/ethnic group in higher education (Holmes 2003). Further too, "African American women are under-represented in full-time faculty teaching positions" (Holmes 2003, 103). Black women encounter "dual acts of race and sex discrimination" from the academic community, arguably leading to disparities in the number of tenure-track Black women faculty (Holmes, Danley Land, and Hinton-Hudson 2007, 107). It is further noted that "Black women must understand how to navigate the volatile history of White academic spaces that may fly under the radar of White male understanding" (Gibbs Grey and Williams-Farrier 2017, 520). This argument reinforces other scholars' findings of the "systemically orchestrated misrecognition of Black femininity as deviant bereft, and anti-intellectual" (Griffin 2016, 366).

## Foreign Homeland

After 14 years living outside Jamaica, I returned home feeling like an expat in my "foreign homeland" (Stewart 2016). Upon my return, the similarity of experiences outside and within Jamaica was reminiscent of feelings of dislocation, home/lessness and exclusion, allowing for an expansion of concepts of diaspora, as proposed by Laguerre (2017). "While in the diaspora condition, an immigrant longs for emancipation from the hostland and equal citizen status from the homeland, in the postdiaspora condition, the struggle is fought for equal status in the hostland" (19). I had returned home within a postdiaspora condition, where home was foreign and I was reminded of how I must navigate power and privilege at home and in the university as forms of resistance and subversion in a hetero-patriarchal hegemony. These various experiences of navigating the neo-colonial Caribbean academy while young, Black and female serve as an ideal backdrop for understanding the impact of colonial patriarchy and what can be done to traverse it. Accordingly, in this paper, I employ an Afro-Caribbean feminist autoethnographic frame to deconstruct everyday derogatory acts, comments and behaviour in the academy that devalue female academics by persons of professional hierarchy (known as hierarchical microaggressions). This work builds on Young, Anderson and Stewart's (2015) framework on hierarchical microaggressions by applying it to Afro-Caribbean feminist thought. To traverse some of these

academic spaces, I illustrate some of the conditions needed to create agency and a strong sense of the emancipatory self.

## Framing the Discourse: Microaggressions and Afro-Caribbean Women Faculty in Higher Education

### Writing Myself within the Discourse: Afro-Caribbean Feminist Thought

While working on another collaborative manuscript aimed at theorizing intersectionality (Crenshaw 1993) as both a method and methodology, my co-authors and I analysed six hundred and eighty refereed journal articles written for and by Black women scholars and activists in US higher education institutions. Building on the theoretical frames of intersectionality and Collins' (2009) Black Feminist Thought, I was triggered by the naming of Black women's resistance and oppressions within the academy. Those triggers jolted a call to action to write myself into the narrative and discourse for and by Afro-Caribbean women academics. My identity as an academic is privileged and one I have negotiated and debated as oftentimes politically oppressive (Stewart 2016). My ability to voice critical discourse reflects my  agency and responsibility, knowing that my silence is equally as loud as my written thoughts. As a novice to Caribbean feminism, I relied heavily on the teachings and critical scholarship of Barriteau (2003), Mohammed (2000) and Reddock (1994, 2001, 2007), noting that Reddock defines feminism as "the awareness of the oppression, exploitation and/or subordination of women within society, and the conscious action to change and transform the situation" (1988, 53). Located within the Caribbean, feminism then "privileges the subaltern voices of a people marginalized by both gender and race, in a region which itself is increasingly marginalized in the global economy" (Momsen 2000, 51-52), the result of the colonial legacies of European imperialism. Although seemingly monolithic, Caribbean feminism has branched into Indo-Caribbean feminism (Hosein and Outar 2016) and Afro-Caribbean feminism, allowing for more intersectionality-driven classifications of feminism.

Afro-Caribbean feminism acknowledges the intersecting privileged and oppressed identities of Black Caribbean women, simultaneously recognizing the

contribution of Caribbean feminism to critical scholarship but also its monolithic limitations of Caribbean identity. Furthermore, Afro-Caribbean feminism recognizes the continued legacies of colonialism on the commodification of Black women's bodies. In this respect, Afro-Caribbean feminism is linked to the colonial history of the Caribbean and its implications on current neo-colonial societies within the Caribbean and the diaspora. Afro-Caribbean feminism further disrupts the neo-colonial appropriations of race, gender and class and the current hierarchies of colourism within the Caribbean and the diaspora. Reddock (2007) provocatively disturbs the meaning of race and its intersection with gender and class within the Caribbean, noting how colonial history created stereotypical differences within and between Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean women. She illuminates the distinction as "Afro-Caribbean women, for example, were constructed as loose, immoral, loud, independent and sexually available; In contrast Indo-Caribbean women were constructed as chaste, pure, controlled and sexually unavailable" (Reddock 2007, 4-5). Barriteau (2003) presents the analytical prowess of feminist epistemologies by examining how "conceptual tools and methodologies [to] yield additional insights into women's persistent but differing experiences of asymmetrical power relations in societies" (59-60) .

Afro-Caribbean Feminist Thought extends from Reddock (2007) and Barriteau's (2003) earlier writings by reclaiming and recognizing the experiential knowledge and intersecting identities of Black Caribbean women as powerful and critical embodiments of consciousness. From a socio-historical and political vantage point, Afro-Caribbean Feminist Thought confronts the oppressed legacies of colonial definitions of womanhood and femininity, noting for example that Black female slaves were regarded as "enchained wombs" and vestiges of reproduction but were neither women nor feminine because of "her alleged muscular capabilities, physical strength, aggressive carriage, and sturdiness" (Beckles 1999,10). Beckles further acknowledges pro-slavery historians' role in the defeminisation of enslaved Black women and the characterisation of femininity within the embodiment of white women. These colonial mis-appropriations of race, class and gender over time have led to the stratification of class-colourisim within the Caribbean.      Afro-Caribbean Feminist Thought

problematizes the role of race, gender, class, heteronormativity, femininity and patriarchy in society, and provides a framework for Black feminists regardless of gender-orientation to socio-historically and politically understand and deconstruct the experiences of Afro-Caribbean women.    Within this study, I attempt to use Afro-Caribbean Feminist Thought as a framework for the construction of autoethnographic narratives of my experiences as an Afro-Caribbean, junior female faculty on the tenure track.

**Afro-Caribbean mothering**.

Embedded within Afro-Caribbean feminism are examinations of mothering and the roles women play as the primary nurturers and caregivers.  Within pervasive patriarchal societies such as many of the Caribbean nations, mothers are expected to be the primary caregivers of the home and children (Beatson 2013). Within a higher education framing, mothers who are also academics often struggle with the balance of sustaining themselves on the tenure-track while caring for the family (DePouw and Matias 2016). Additionally, mothering transcends the home into the classroom especially within the context of Black students and Black female academics. That relationship is considered as *othermothering*, which refers to a "relationship [that] goes far beyond that of providing students with either technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts" (Collins 2000, 191). More so at the primary and secondary school level, "the practice of othermothering allowed Black women to educate and socialize children in their own ways and traditions in order to uplift the Black community" (Douglas 2005,  715). Black women, especially in the US, who enter the academy prior to becoming a mother, often pay a "baby penalty" by foregoing motherhood until they are further along or have received tenure (Mason, Wolfinger and Goulden 2013). As such, Black women in the US tend to delay the tenure track and take up more adjunct positions to raise a family without the demands of the tenure requirements. However, in the Caribbean, there is little research on Afro-Caribbean, academic mothers' experiences. This auto ethnographic reflection will shed light on the constant struggle to strike a balance between the demands of the academy and the demands of the home, while *othermothering* in the classroom.

## Hierarchical Microaggressions

While othermothering in higher education classrooms, Black female academics embody multiple roles as nurturers and caregivers which often contradicts the intellectual presence and position of knowing and subjects them to a range of microaggressions. These contradictions are further highlighted from an Afro-Caribbean feminist analysis and an examination of hierarchical microaggressions. The term hierarchical microaggressions (Young, Anderson and Stewart 2014) derives from racial microaggressions, and provides an expansive view of everyday derogatory acts, comments or behaviour in the workplace that devalues a person by someone of professional hierarchy, such as a supervisor. The residual effects of feeling isolated, experiencing lower satisfaction with the job, and resigning from a post are some of the outcomes of enduring hierarchical microaggressions. The term microaggressions stems from Sue et al's. (2007) seminal work for developing the typology for racialized derogatory acts, which includes three types: microinsult, microinvalidation and microassault.

According to Young, Anderson and Stewart (2014) hierarchical microaggression refers to four salient themes: actions related to role, change accepted behaviour, terminology related to work position, and valuing/devaluing opinion (see Appendix for model). *Valuing/Devaluing based on role/credential* accounted for the highest occurrence or 52% of the examples of hierarchical microaggressions. This theme pertains to the way in which employees in higher education describe how they experience privilege and oppression based on their job role. *Actions related to role—ignoring/excluding/surprise/interrupting* accounted for 36% of the examples of hierarchical microaggressions. This theme refers to "actions people experience from others that are related to roles held at the university. These actions include ignoring, excluding, surprise, and interrupting" (Young, Anderson and Stewart 2014, 68). *Changing accepted behaviour based on role* occurs when "a person changes how s/he acts depending on the role … of the person they are interacting with, this shows how institutional hierarchy matters in these interactions" (Young, Anderson and Stewart 2014, 67). This theme accounted for 10% of the examples of hierarchical microaggressions and specifically included

the example of junior faculty feeling invisible to tenured faculty when providing suggestions or contributing to meetings. The final theme, *terminology related to work position* accounted for 2% of the examples of hierarchical microaggressions and related to the labelling of job titles. This theme draws attention to levels of ability and skills and refers to employees as objects of their job function rather than the subject of their responsibilities. Given that Young, Anderson and Stewart's (2014) study was conducted in the United States, applying the framework to a Jamaican context requires a framing of the context and a cultural adaptation of the themes. The institution's context will therefore be described and similar to the three levels of data analysis completed in Young, Anderson and Stewart's (2014) study, the procedure for data analysis will detail theory-based coding (Saldana 2009). Coupled with Afro-Caribbean Feminist Thought, hierarchical microaggressions provides a framework in which to analyse data and a theoretical lens to deconstruct the *isms* experienced as a young, Afro-Caribbean, female, junior academic in a predominantly heteronormative and patriarchal-constructed higher education institution.

## Methodology: Toward an Afro-Caribbean Feminist Autoethnography

Critical Black feminist scholars have argued for more representative theories and methodologies that centre the experiences of Black women in general but specifically Black women in academia. Whether it is critical race feminism (Patton and Ward 2016), Black womanist storytelling (Baker-Bell 2017), Black feminist autoethnography (Griffin 2012), or scholarly rearing (Edwards and Baszile 2016), these methodologies address the movement of theories to praxis by "becoming an integral part of the research process" (Patton and Ward 2016, 332). The call for an Afro-Caribbean feminist autoethnography bridges the principles of Afro-Caribbean feminist thought and autoethnography to robustly document and analyse the lived experiences of Black women as, for and by the *self*. Specifically drawing on some of Ellis' (2004) iconic work on the ethnographic *I*, she explains autoethnography as, "research, writing, and methods that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social" (Ellis 2004, xix). Further, auto-ethnography is a practice of reflexivity where the self is the unit of measure. The dichotomous process of internally and externally critiquing the self is to

juxtapose and project the political, cultural, and decolonized constructs of self in society. Coupled with an Afro-Caribbean feminist perspective, this methodology or form of autoethnography (for this study) grapples with what Mohammed (2000) describes as gendered realities and with Parry's (2000) work on gendered methodologies, noting that "the starting point of feminist analyses is patriarchal society" (91). Parry further looks at how socialist feminists grapple with the intersections of class and race to completely transform the social system. Acknowledging the importance of women's experiences at the centre of research, Parry (2000) states that "this position reflects the feminist programme of celebrating the subjective experience of women and the rejection of rationality as an agent or pillar of patriarchy" (93). This approach is about truth telling, forms of radical honesty (Williams 2016) and framing knowledge within a decolonizing frame. The tensions experienced in writing this article centre on some of the difficulties of this approach; 1) exposing your vulnerability at the discretion of others to critique; 2) revealing what was once hidden for others to judge, deny and negate as subjective and feminine (thereby weak and not robust or critical of research); and 3) revealing a form of decolonizing methodology within a colonized space.

## Setting the Context

As mentioned earlier, the Caribbean University flagship campus in which this study is based celebrates seventy years of establishment. Considered a flagship, research-based regional institution, the university has four campuses; three are considered residential campuses located in Jamaica, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago, and one is considered a virtual campus providing online and distance education. The oldest campus is situated in Jamaica and makes up the largest population of students with an approximate enrolment of 18,000 students and just under 750 full-time academic staff members. The continued British colonial legacies of "inherited customs of higher education practice reflect conflicting power dynamics aimed at continuing colonial traditions" (Stewart 2016, 10). The institution, I would argue, is in a constant search for its identity. Its location, in close proximity to the United States, allows for the economic benefits of US exchange students but the incorporation of US-like accreditation standards. Being

emancipated from British ownership, the institution's organizational culture, examination protocols, conferral of degrees, guild of students, and examination-driven culture remains a mirrored image of the colonial past. The very location of the Jamaican campus on a former plantation, led today by a Black, male, economic historian, speaks to the challenge of what Howe (2000) describes as the "political and ideological struggle for the soul of the university" (15).

## Data Collection and Analysis

Back in August 2013, my sistah scholar and I started at the academy as newly-minted tenure-track faculty and our first weeks in the academy were met with similar microaggressions. Although she was in Colorado, we shared similar frames of devaluing comments, disregard and distrust. Having been trained together as social justice and critical pedagogical scholars, we committed to documenting our journeys through self-reflexive journals, video, emails and free writes. Data was also analysed from nine staff meeting minutes and four end-of year review reports. Theory-based coding was used to analyse the data against Young, Anderson and Stewart's (2014) findings. Below is a reflection of the codes found and mapped to the themes of the hierarchical mircroaggressions framework: valuing/devaluing based on role/credential; actions related to role; and changing accepted behaviour.

## The Homelander versus Hostlander

As Laguerre argues, "postdiaspora is an emancipatory move refuting not the connection with one's place of origin but rather one's unequal status vis-a-vis homelanders and hostlanders" (2017, 22).    For me, I was an outlander in the United States, "standing" in an imaginary 14-year line to rectify my immigrant status. By the time I arrived at the front of the line, it was time to return "home". I had finally become a naturalized citizen of the United States but I could not reconcile my feeling of alienation in the hostland and returned to what I termed my foreign-homeland (Stewart 2016). Foreign in terms of my returning positionality and the elusive nostalgia of familial culture, music and old stomping grounds. My entry into the academy was met with much distrust and disdain, mostly by the

very women I wanted to learn from. There were layers of internalized oppression where female lecturers in particular were overlooked for promotion, were bogged down with administrative duties and assigned to many committees, resulting in low research output. The men, albeit few, were more senior in rank and capacity with arguably less committees to serve on.  I would later learn that the "old boy's club" in the academy was not solely an American saying but was present in the department and throughout the university. During my first week of classes, having not met all the staff, I sat behind my desk with my door open and heard…

## Surprise! Surprise! (Actions related to role (36%)—ignoring/excluding/surprise/interrupting)

…"What are you doing!" shouted the woman outside my door. "This is Dr Stewart's office, why are you sitting in her chair?" she continued. I smiled cautiously, waved hello and pointed to my chest, "I am Dr Stewart. Nice to meet you."

"OH my goodness, look what I have lived to see" beckoning to other persons on the floor to come see the spectacle, she then said, "You could be my daughter – You sure you have a PhD?"   As a lecturer, who was noticeably older than I, she was in shock that I could possess a PhD. Shock soon turned into doubt as other lecturers met me and questioned how I assumed my role, in other words how did I get hired into a post that was reserved for more senior scholars. During the first staff meeting of the semester, the seemingly reasonable explanation came that I was hired as a part of the junior-faculty scheme, alongside assistant lecturers; it then became more plausible to accept my presence in the department. Even though I had earned a PhD, had already presented at multiple international conferences, published refereed articles and was hired as a full-time lecturer, I was considered an assistant lecturer to my colleagues. During that same staff meeting…

## "Embodying Little Stewart" (Valuing/devaluing (52%))

…I was given a nickname of sorts – Little Stewart. Having two little girls, I am used to living betwixt the fantasy worlds of cartoon and animation. The Stuart Little movies were a favourite of my daughters, who often cheered on the adventures

of the little mouse and were in awe of his miniature clothes and constant outwitting of the family cat. When I was first called Little Stewart, I immediately thought of the character that played the white-haired, two-inch mouse and assumed it was a mistake, so I didn't respond as I wasn't sure who was being referred to. However, the second calling of the name was followed by laughter and snickers at the "originality" of my surname, not as Dr Stewart or even Little Dr Stewart (as if that would be better) but just Little Stewart as if I had not earned my doctorate. The rationale behind the naming was due to there being two Dr Stewarts in the department: the other being older was referred to with respect as Dr Stewart within and outside of her presence, however when outside of her presence, the reference to Little Stewart was made in several staff meetings by the Director and other coordinators. The feelings of being devalued echoed strongly when references to me as Little Stewart were made in departmental meetings. The name calling was extended outside of the department and at external examiners' board meetings when both Dr Stewarts' mark sheets were being reviewed. Even when I corrected my name callers, it did little to change things, so instead I would not respond unless my correct name was used. From an Afro-Caribbean feminist perspective, I recognize that my gendered embodiment as a woman played a role in my male supervisor thinking it appropriate to refer to me as "Little" Stewart. Had I been a man, there would be no distinction necessary based on my name or age. Having been trained in social justice work and delivered training on microagressions, I knew that the "nickname" (when first used) was not intended to be hurtful or disrespectful but it provided an opportunity for others to misuse and essentially belittle my qualifications.

## #MamaScholar: Caribbean Faculty and Mothering (Changing Accepted Behaviour (10%))

During my second academic year, at seven months pregnant, I was waddling up 3-flights of stairs to my office, when a senior academic, female staff stopped me to say, "Finally, this will slow you down"…

My first born was four-years old when I started my post as a lecturer. I started the post knowing that my identity as her mother and thereby my commitment to her

would always supersede the academy and my identity as a scholar. Fast-forward five years later, my daughter has sat inside the halls of more universities around the world than the average nine-year old. She also knows my absence as when I am physically present, my mind transcends to the overwhelming responsibilities of the university. As the primary bread-winner, the overwhelming burden to support a family on a daily-devaluating economy is riddled with oxymorons. Not wanting to complain or be overlooked for opportunities, I teach more courses for additional pay and take on consulting jobs to offset my student loans, all the while balancing the countless remarks, that *I should have more children while I'm young and fertile,* which often reify the negative stereotypes of being both a breeder and being in a weakened state, that reinforce "Black women's oppressions" (Lewis 2012, 35). The Black female body "always already represents deviant sexuality" due to historical narratives and images of "mammies, jezebels, [and] the breeder women of slavery" (Lewis 2012, 35). The pressure to be a good mother and wife, while supporting the household and being respected as a quality academic is a perpetual cycle of negotiating the perceived strength and fragility of my body and value of my intellect. The balance to be struck between motherhood, marriagehood and academic progress is ever elusive and one that deserves more attention. While I agree that I am not a *single mother with a husband,* which describes a mother who takes "primary responsibilities of childbearing and household management" (McWilliams-Henderson and Tindall 2013, 197), I am the primary breadwinner. That role in the Caribbean, although becoming more popular, is still socially taboo and met with much public scrutiny as to the husband's role and capacity.

The narratives reveal the varying acts of microaggressions experienced as an Afro-Caribbean, junior faculty. Specifically, these microaggressions ranged from discrediting actions related to perceived roles, the devaluing of prior experiences and qualifications, and the disregard of women as both academics and mothers. The commonality amongst those who would commit the acts of microaggressions were persons older in age and often women. These acts would often result in tensions in the work environment and lead to unresolved issues between colleagues.

## Multiplicity of a Woman – Part 2

Writing this article has been difficult given the tensions of working within an institution that only values parts of me but not me in its full entirety. Knowing that my value as a researcher and principal investigator outweighs my personhood as a mother and a woman, lets me know we are still colonized and in search of an identity that is decolonizing. I. AM. Burned out. I work for a large research flagship, regional institution where I teach three graduate courses per semester, coordinate two postgraduate programmes and lead a cluster of six postgraduate programmes. As the chief editor for a regional journal, I am also responsible for the editorial duties of the journal. I supervise five PhD students and three masters' students while writing countless recommendation letters per semester. Administratively, I sit on four committees: three are departmental and one is campus wide. Collectively they take up 40% of my time. However, my responsibility as a researcher counts for 80% of my promotion to tenure, 15% from teaching and roughly 5% towards service; however, most of my time is filled with teaching and service. Notwithstanding my role as a mother of young children (ages nine and three), I leave work to go home to a full-time job. Coupled with my philosophy and epistemology as a critical and inclusive pedagogue (Stewart 2013, 2016), educating students is not confined to the classroom nor within course outlines. I take with me the lived experiences of my students and use them to plan my lessons, change my assignments and fuel my understanding of transformative and engaged pedagogy within the Caribbean context. This becomes a form of emotional and intellectual labour– a labour often borne on Black women mimicking historical enslavement roles as mammies and caregivers.

So this morning as I got dressed for both data collection and my student's funeral, I reminisced on the last meeting with her. We met in my office and she sat on the couch, noticeably distracted and uncomfortable but hopeful. We laid out a plan for her graduation; one that was manageable and considered all the moving variables she was experiencing of becoming a mother and wife within weeks of

our meeting. I spoke to her about the resilience of becoming a mother and the strength she did not know she already possessed.

As I walked passed her casket and sat in the pew to hear the tributes and eulogy, I thought what a mighty woman was she. Amidst my tears, anger and grief, were feelings of grit and resilience. I knew how she lived and therefore how much she was loved. Walking away from the church, I reminisced on my own strength as I had to collect myself and prepare for class at 4:00 p.m.

**Vibranium in the Academy: Strategies for *How* to Transgress**

Vibranium, Marvel comics' fictional super metal represents a collective of strategies I use to sustain me, and propel me to fight against the *isms* in the academy. When I walked away from the funeral, amongst the many thoughts flooding my mind were thoughts about from whom and how I was going to draw on strength. I called my research partner first and then my research assistant explaining I couldn't attend the second round of data collection, and to complete it in my absence. I then called my father for counsel; to reason through my emotions and ready myself for class. From my training as a doctoral student within a cohort model, I knew forming a community would be key to my tenure. My community includes a network of sistah scholars, and mentors within and outside the academy, both of which reinforce the continuous work of reclaiming power and the need for self-care.

Embedded systems of bureaucratic traditions rooted in colonial principles are difficult to dismantle and disrupt.  Acting as a tempered radical within the system affords for "more good by staying within the organization, and temper[ing] [the] activities and strategies to create change from the bottom up" (Kezar, Gallant, and Lester 2011, 130).  Even so, there are risks of being marginalized and labelled as an agitator. These risks can hinder the tenure process and place the lecturer in a vulnerable state. However, I believe strategies can be put in place to identify the critical changes needed and work within the system to make those changes systemic.

**Find a Sistah Network**

As a graduate student, I joined a sistah network, a collective of Black women postgraduate students, academic and administrative staff. This collective was headed by strong and resilient Black women academics and practitioners who provided a community of emerging scholars for writing, emotional, and at times financial support and networking (Joseph and Allen 2018). After graduation, I maintained my role in the sistah network and joined others globally. These networks sustain me, provide a space for me to thrive and edify my work as meaningful to the academy. These women become the iron that sharpen my iron and push me through. We write together, co-author and publish together, we present research together and co-chair on academic conferences. In my second year, I attempted to start a similar network at my institution, designed for junior-academic staff members but I soon learned that the labour and ownership became mine alone to bear. The culture to sustain such a network was not evident and I couldn't expend the additional labour to sustain one as a newly hired junior faculty with children. My plans to take up this charge once again are renewed in my drive to mentor and share best practices for transgressing the academy.

**Seek Mentorship**

Beyond seeking mentorship within the sistah networks, I seek out and retain mentors from within and outside the academy. My mentors are comprised of my former doctoral supervisor, former teacher, my father, husband, organizational leaders whom I affectionately term #BossLadies, ambassadors and former departmental heads, to name a few. These persons provide counsel, advice, review my research and suggest opportunities for me to thrive. I recognize that these persons serve different and overlapping roles, each of which is able to pinpoint different aspects of my strengths and weaknesses so that I continue to transgress.

**Reclaiming Power - Critical Self Work**

Having engaged in three years of intense training on critical self-work, deconstructing autobiographical educational journeys and analysing power, privilege and agency, I had a pretty good understanding of what the academy was and was not. I also wrestled with my accession to the ranks of knowledge elitism, and understood the political role of my presence as an oppressor in the classroom, and how I must consciously work to transform my classroom space to one of inclusion and not exclusion. Through my training I also understood that to dismantle the massa's narrative, I had to learn the master narrative. Most of my scholarship has been devoted to critically examining issues in decolonizing methodology, postcolonial theories, critical/inclusive pedagogy, and access and equity issues in higher education at the levels of the classroom (i.e. pedagogies) and the structural (i.e. climate and policies) in order to interrogate the status quo and hegemonic normativity regarding who has access to educational institutions, resources and opportunities. This is how I attempt to develop critical consciousness and wrestle with the art of becoming as I acknowledge myself as a *work-in-progress*.

**The Act of Self-Care**

In the U.S., women of colour academics have attributed psychological trauma, stress, and anxiety to unhealthy working environments in the academy due to "internalized unresolved experiences with racism; isolation and withdrawal from social network; weight problems; and overwhelming caretaking responsibilities" (Vakalahi and Starks 2011, 188). More importantly Vakalahi and Starks (2011) state that for the women of colour academics in their study, "their lives in the academy reflect a struggle to survive" (188). The authors go on to suggest prevention and intervention strategies that include self-care in order to find balance and cope with the stressors within the academy. To be transparent, this is the strategy I struggle with the most – acts of self-care. I define self-care as the mental, emotional and intellectual break and release to recharge and reset one's mind, passion, vision, and purpose within and outside the academy. Self-care is taking time away from the academy to treat the self; not just the mental

self but the physical, psycho-social and emotional self. It is the release and relief Black women need to recharge themselves for the home life, the work life, the societal life and global expectations. Historically, enslaved Black women were documented as "ideally suited for manual labour" and fitting for the (re) productive growth of slave societies (Beckles 1999, 10). Centuries later Afro-Caribbean women are demanding a seat at the senior level, decision-making table and making strides to command the respect of their intellectual labour.

## Conclusion

Within the Caribbean, critical research regarding women academics (particularly Afro-Caribbean women) and their experiences within the academy is largely absent, especially as it pertains to their experiences with hierarchical microaggressions, prejudicial-trauma, and their resulting health and well-being. More targeted academic policies are needed to create inclusive work environments that better allow women to achieve tenure and promotion, have workload equity, and more strongly "support women's choices to have a family and a career" in the academy (Vakalahi and Starks 2011, 188). Until these research and policies are developed and acted on, the post-diasporic illusions of finding home betwixt the hostland and homeland remain elusive for the im/migrant.

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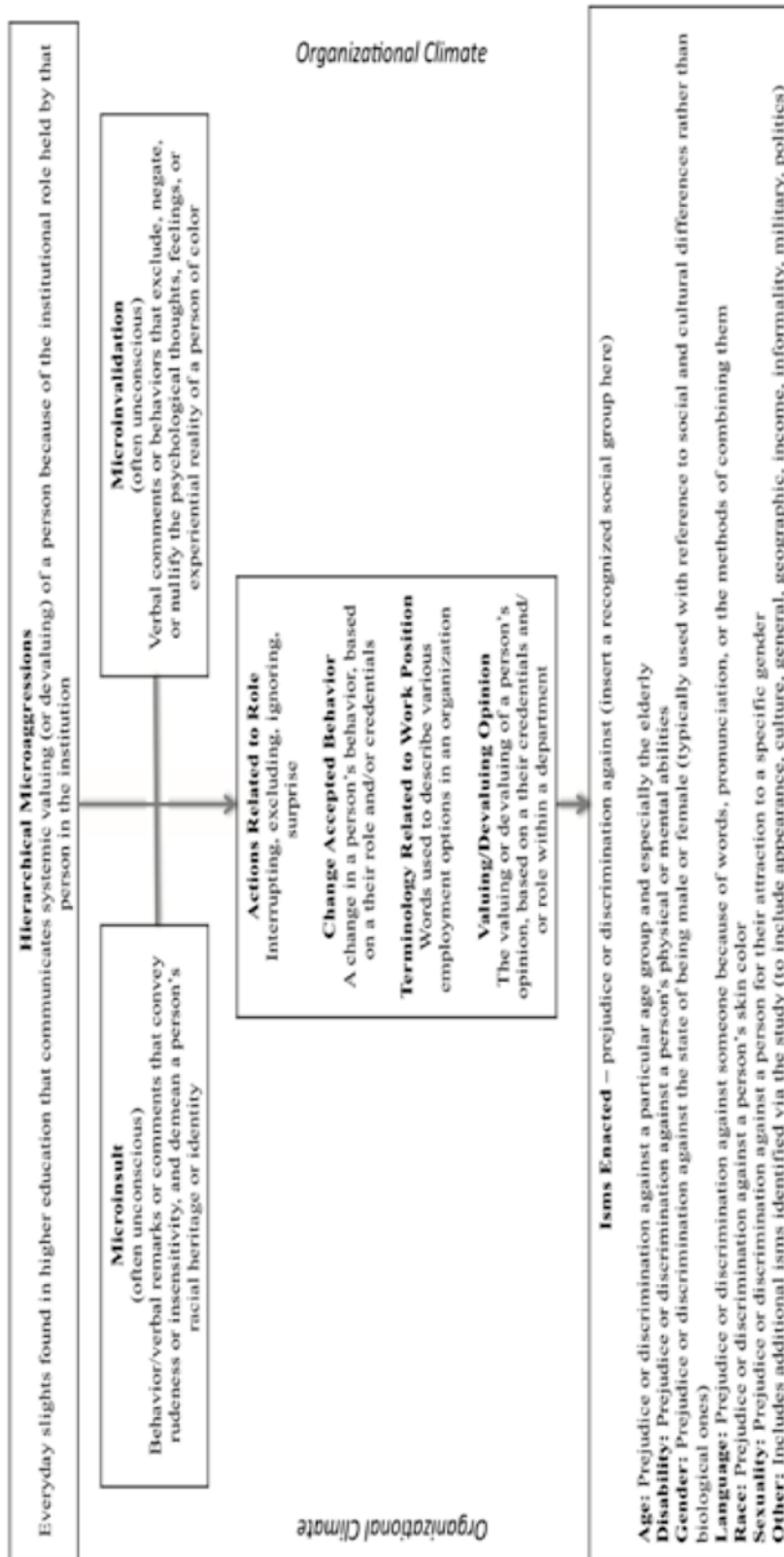
**Appendix**



*Figure 1*. Hierarchical microagressions framework by Young, Anderson and Stewart (2014)