

Chapter 4

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PROFESSOR

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In what the media refers to as a *post*-racial and *post*-feminist Obama America, questions of prejudice and discrimination can often be treated with ambivalence, if they are treated at all. In a recent interview with CNN's John King, President Obama himself suggests that racism exists, but more so in our imaginations than our intentions ("Race Not 'Overriding Issue,'" 2009). Others, like Faludi (1992), comment that making "a fuss about sexual injustice is...now uncool" (p. 95). One reason for this ambivalence is the argument that the United States has reached a *post*-racial and *post*-feminist moment in which basic rights for all have been won. Constituents who support this perspective remind mainstream society that multiracialism and gender equality are not only our destiny but our reality. They refer to our current generation as "Generation Mix" and celebrate the Obamas' success as the latest in a growing trend of multiracial-, gender-, and diversity-oriented milestones (Mavin Foundation, 2009). Because everyone can be successful and independent, not to mention an "empowered consumer," our society is now said to have transcended our culture wars (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 1).

Despite this peaceful ethos, culture wars are always lurking. Such has been the case since May 26, 2009, when President Obama announced Federal Ap-

peals Court Judge Sonia Sotomayor as his nominee for filling the vacancy left by outgoing federal judge, Justice Souter, on the United States Supreme Court. Almost immediately, conservatives branded Sotomayor a racist because of remarks she made at a 2001 address to the “Raising the Bar” symposium at the University of California Berkeley School of Law. The remarks in question are the final 32 words of the following statement:

Whether born from experience or inherent physiological or cultural differences ...our gender and national origins may and will make a difference in our judging. Justice O’Connor has often been cited as saying that a wise old man and wise old woman will reach the same conclusion in deciding cases....I am also not so sure that I agree with the statement. First,...there can never be a universal definition of wise. Second, I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn’t lived that life. (Sotomayor, 2001, para. 21)

While many conservatives were up in arms over these “reverse racist” words and busied themselves making pointed *ad hominem* attacks via Twitter, I began to realize that what they were really objecting to was Sotomayor’s standpoint, or expression of her powerful and legitimate voice as a “wise Latina judge.” According to *Time Magazine*, this is a standpoint Sotomayor has articulated at least seven times between 1993 and 2003 (Rosen, 2009). Thus, the “challenge” Sotomayor poses to her opponents “is in the critical constitution of the-self-in-the-world that does not undermine or forego the societal structures that exceed the self” (Bow, 2004, p. 134). In other words, her critics were unwilling to acknowledge that members of certain groups may have special insights into particular lives and issues. More to the point, critics were unwilling to acknowledge that Sotomayor’s membership in these groups comes with privileges that can be considered a form of epistemological expertise, especially in a national context in which the racial majority is changing. At the same time, critics used the articulation of her standpoint to discount her ability to appeal to the law as the ultimate authority when exercising her profession, thus pitting her ethnic or “folk” knowledge against official judiciary objectivity.

The discursive struggle over Sotomayor’s identity, legitimacy, power, and voice dovetail with the ways in which I am experiencing my multiracial and gendered identity on a day-to-day basis in the academy—as a historical, rhetorical, institutional, intersectional, and personal set of communication relations that require some working through. I have been working my way through these relations since I was an undergraduate student at a majority institution. Coming from a diverse public high school in New York City, my undergraduate years at a suburban private institution on the East Coast of the United States that was over 90 percent white can best be described as an experiment in cognitive dissonance, leaving me as one of the *isolani*, known only to myself, knowing only myself. As an Assistant Professor at a public institution on the West Coast,

however, I now see two major differences. I realize that the identity of the nation's racial majority is changing, bringing with it the need for newer and more realistic models of communication and identification, and that there is often an unwillingness to relinquish ideals from the past. I also realize that by mobilizing my identity and standpoint I can harness the power of change as a communication device and a creative emotional experience that inspires others to dream, struggle, and achieve.

But what does that mean exactly? First, it means recognizing that I have a standpoint. And, like Sotomayor's, my standpoint allows me to reach "better conclusions" about how to view and exercise my profession among a changing majority than those who do not share my background and experiences. Second, it means recognizing that up until now I have been part of an endangered species. As in many other fields, in a world where gender and racial inequalities still prevail, multiracial women have been given a real chance only during the last decade to check "all that apply" and show what we can do. Many have profited from those opportunities, sharing their multi-faceted and dynamic experiences in classrooms and scholarly writing. But we still face preconceptions growing out of the longstanding mystique of the professor as a mainstream authority figure. To hear many colleagues tell it, they continue to confront barriers and discrimination in forms ranging from the blatant, including lower salaries and difficulties with tenure approval, to the latent, including an expectation to address exigencies of marginalized on- and off-campus communities that hamper traditional scholarly productivity.

In the pages that follow, I will discuss my professional experiences through the lens of Standpoint Theory and articulate my vision for a different kind of professor, as an agent of change with others instead of merely for others. I will explain the development and expression of my own standpoint along with some blatant and latent forms of discrimination that have contributed to my status as part of the endangered species of young, multiracial, and female tenure-track professors. These contributing factors include predators inside and outside of the classroom, exploitation, a small network of identifiable peers, and unique vulnerability to heavy traffic at intersections of racial and gender discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989). I will then address ways in which young, multiracial, and female tenure-track professors can fight extinction by questioning our environments. I will conclude by focusing on change, the power of changing demographics, and ways in which my own creative spark thrives by transforming today's discrimination into tomorrow's opportunity. In so doing, I hope to make the most of my opportunity to educate, emancipate, and stir a "critical consciousness," as Paolo Freire (Freire & Ramos, 2002) would say. I will conclude with my vision for a different kind of professor as one who proclaims a standpoint and practices it by learning from the past and present, replacing existing dichotomies with new possibilities for teaching and researching, and connecting

these new possibilities to academic and non-academic audiences in meaningful and innovative ways.

STANDPOINT THEORY

Introduced in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory and methodology, Standpoint Theory describes the “relations between the production of knowledge and the practice of power” as they relate to women’s lives (Harding, 2004, p. 1). Theorists such as Hartsock (2003) combined and extended Hegelian and Marxian thought for feminist ends. Specifically, Hartsock linked the development of women’s intellectual and political positions to their social locations in day-to-day life. These locations are called “standpoints,” which lend an interpretive aspect to a person’s life that would, for instance, allow “a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences...[to]...more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn’t lived that life” (Sotomayor, 2001, para. 21). In this respect, Standpoint Theory can be considered a philosophical statement, a research and analytical tool, a way of knowing and living, a cultural tactic, and a communication theory.

It is important to note several assumptions that underlie this approach. First, a standpoint is not a perspective. A standpoint recognizes subjectivity and partiality and is always under construction, whereas a perspective is a fully formulated “attitude towards or way of regarding something” (“Perspective,” n.d.). Consequently, a standpoint emphasizes context and circumstance and may not be fully formed, asserting that all knowledge is “situated” (Haraway, 1988). Therefore, those who wish to discover their standpoints must recognize their social privileges and understand their social locations. This means a person may have some insights, but is also limited in some of his or her views.

Second, Standpoint Theory puts essentialism and dualism in conversation with vision and liminality. The theory assumes that when material life is structured in opposing ways for different groups, the understanding of each will be an inversion of the other. However, since the vision of the ruling group structures the material relations in which all groups are forced to participate, choices are removed from subordinates. Thus, the vision available to members of an oppressed/subordinate group represents both a struggle and an achievement. This leads to the assumption that understanding visions of the oppressed exposes the inhumanity of existing intergroup relations and creates a move toward a more just world. Yet, the theory maintains that the reverse does not hold true for the ruling group. Why? Because it is rare that members of the ruling group are able to shrug off their power positions to achieve an “outsider within” standpoint. According to Collins (1998), an “outsider within” standpoint reflects a plural identity formation developed through engagement with positioning among communities. Outsiders within, like Sotomayor, can access the knowledge of the ruling group but are questioned when they claim that knowledge and seek the full power given to members of that group. Insiders fear that because Sotomayor

may not share all of the assumptions traditionally held by members of the Court and may find some of these assumptions inaccurate or even implausible, she may advocate on behalf of new issues that require a new type of decision-making process that they cannot master.

The third assumption is that standpoints and communication are reciprocal. In other words, those with similar standpoints adopt similar communication styles. This belies the notion that those with differing standpoints will adopt different communication styles. As Sotomayor's comments suggest, (Latina) women's experiences and perspectives differ from (white) men's, thus producing different communication and identification styles. This is why the communication of Sotomayor's standpoint can be named "reverse racism" from the perspective of Newt Gingrich, even if he would later state that his critique was "perhaps too strong and direct" (Amato, 2009, para. 2; Cillizza, 2009, para. 1). Sotomayor's and Gingrich's public miscommunication reveals that we can best understand a person's experiences by paying attention to that person's own interpretations and articulations of these experiences. It also forces us to ask ourselves the questions that guide the remainder of my discussion: For whom do I speak? As whom do I speak? From where do I speak? I will answer these questions in the next section by articulating clearly what I offer and the value of my identity, social location, privileges, praxis, and goals.

FINDING AND EXPRESSING MY STANDPOINT

As a young, multiracial, female tenure-track professor at a majority institution, I often wonder if anyone can hear the sound of my voice. Though the transition from life as a graduate student to life as a new professor has been exhilarating, I am disillusioned. Some of my disillusionments are fiscal, leading me to ask if I can really afford to work as a public educator amidst the twin realities of extensive budget cuts and increasing living and professional expenses. Rejections from academic journals make me doubt the scholarliness and importance of my research. These concerns extend to my teaching, leading me to speculate whether I assign my students enough texts about marginalized groups. Obvious resistance from male students, as they insist on addressing me by my first name and challenging my intellectual authority along with those of the theorists I present during lectures, causes me to rethink my classroom management strategies. This feeling of inferiority is reinforced as my elder colleagues, though generally supportive of my professional efforts and innovations, refer to me as a "kid." Discussions with colleagues and students behind closed doors make me wonder whether I am seen as a person of color, and if so, what color. In addition, hearing the personal sacrifices many have made to achieve academic success makes me wonder how I will get tenure while maintaining healthy relationships with my partner, family, and friends. These questions and doubts guide my attempts

to adjust to, what Taliaferro Baszile (2006) called, “the realm of academic abstraction” (p. 196).

After much introspection I reached an epiphany. I realize that all of the questions I am asking center around an important concept—identity, or lack thereof. I do not use the term identity for the sake of categorization or data collection, though those are important ways in which to measure and mobilize. Rather, I realize that what I am dealing with in classrooms, in faculty meetings, and in my own head, is a lack of identity so great that it hinders human potential. I realize that the ancient Greeks were right when they inscribed “know thyself” on the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. They understood that when we truly know ourselves and our capabilities, we can impact and transform our communities and environments in powerful ways. Later theorists such as Habermas (1973) echoed this theme, explaining that self-reflection is the key to liberation. These questions, doubts, and realizations also connect to the first assumption of Standpoint Theory: understanding my social location and recognizing my social privileges.

I am beginning to realize that while my social location is one of an “outsider-within,” I am the beneficiary of many social privileges. First, I have an education that has taught me how to think critically for myself and communicate my thoughts ethically and persuasively. Second, as a teacher and scholar with my own experiences and standpoint, I have the opportunity to engage the academy differently. I have begun initiatives to teach innovative classes incorporating multiple communication contexts, such as Communication and Culture, New Rhetoric and New Media, and Racial Rhetoric and Representations in online and on ground settings (Babb & Mirabella, 2007). I also have the opportunity to develop new paradigms by researching and writing critical accounts of social relations, human nature, and the changing nature of human communication. By modeling this behavior, thereby engaging with my institution as a place laden with possibilities for generating change instead of stifling change, I am also investing in the identity formation and mobilization of students for campus, local, national, and even global change. By finding their purposes and goals, and understanding who they are, I believe that students will be empowered to accomplish great things. The wonderful reward is that I continue to develop my own identity and standpoint in the process and get closer to my goal of becoming a different kind of professor.

As a different kind of professor I am conscious of the fact that all the things I perceived as liabilities—my multiracial identity, youth, and gender—are my greatest assets. Consequently, my insider/outsider positionality is transformed. I realize that I do not have to carry the burden of speaking for all multiracial women under 35 years of age in the United States because no one person is capable of doing so. To quote Sotomayor (2001),

I accept that our experiences as women and people of color affect our decisions. The aspiration of impartiality is just that—it’s an aspiration because it

denies the fact that we are by our experiences making different choices than others. (para. 19)

I understand that my assets empower me with the ability to identify with my students in a way that few other professors at my institution are able. Because I can speak the language of my students and the languages of traditional (on ground) and changing (online) academics, I am able to link these seemingly disparate discourses. My youth gives me the time and energy to understand my own and others' experiences, as well as understand how some people's experiences limit their abilities to understand the experiences of others. My gender allows me to relate with the 60 percent majority of college students who are women. My racial identity allows me to identify with students from European, Hispanic, African American, Arab, and Asian backgrounds. This is, as U.S. Census Bureau (2000, 2001) statistics reveal, practically everyone.

As a professor, I am fortunate enough to have a self-selected audience that meets with me weekly in the communication classroom. Each day I have the privilege of learning something new with my students about how to identify and express ourselves in a world that all too often looks at us with doubt. I have learned that the results are best when I teach theory through identification—by reminding students that the tensions and ambiguities with which they are grappling also affect others concretely. For instance, many of my “millennial generation” students are struggling to communicate their vision of a post-racial society as liberating from the burdening of historical narratives. At the same time, I help them come to grips with the racial struggles and theoretical perspectives of prior generations through class discussion and readings. I endeavor, in my teaching, to express as clearly as possible my own “mental movie” of the complex phenomena that underlie human communication and affect daily life on both microscopic and macroscopic levels. I accomplish this by providing students with a variety of approaches to a given topic. For instance, we update McGee's (1980) take on social activism by using our cell phones for electronic civil disobedience. We interpret Bandura's (1989) Social Cognitive Theory through the model of behavior change presented in NBC's television series, *The Biggest Loser*. We understand Black's (1970) and Wander's (1984) rhetorical theories of the Second and Third Personae by watching President Obama's 2009 “A New Beginning” speech to Muslim audiences in Cairo on YouTube. Or, we seek our own standpoints through the example of a leader like Sotomayor.

These experiences underscore the privilege I have as a teacher and scholar of communication. Moreover, they allow my students and me to link our conversations to the second assumption of Standpoint Theory: to expose disparities in social relations that can affect access to information and power. Since my field is an inherently interdisciplinary one, I am able to utilize history, media, cultural studies, sociology, literature, psychology, political science, and law in my teaching to reflect today's social and cultural tensions and ambiguities. In addition to making connections between theory and life in my own ways, I un-

derstand that some students may identify with guest lecturers who provide new perspectives and expertise from which we all can benefit. It is my desire that through such encounters students begin to see the possibilities for their own lives—both inside and outside of the classroom. As a result, I have also begun to understand that as a different kind of professor I too have a certain degree of power both inside and outside of the classroom. It is not my goal to replicate myself or to further my own political agenda. Instead, my goal is to harness the power I do have to empower my students ethically. In so doing I encourage them to take as much responsibility for their learning as I take for their teaching. I encourage them to defend and debate their ideas and regard them as individuals with unique standpoints that are constantly under construction. Thus, I hold fast to the third assumption of Standpoint Theory: that standpoints and communication are reciprocal. As my standpoint evolves, so does my ability to communicate and teach effectively. As my students' standpoints evolve, so too will their communication skills. I remember that the classes in which I felt most comfortable contributing when I was a student were those in which I felt the safest. Unsurprisingly then, the learning environment that I strive to recreate as a different kind of professor is one that is mutually beneficial: where I learn as much as I teach and where my students and I become a learning community that sees the world differently enough to challenge assumptions and convention together. By requesting a clear and concise statement of expectations early on, I force students to think about what they hope to gain from our interactions, what they believe to be their roles in their learning, and how they might use what they hope to learn in their future endeavors. Moreover, I believe that education should be critical and dynamic. Rather than simply dole out answers that I believe to be true, I act as a facilitator with the expectation that asking provocative questions will lead to a discovery of interesting answers and new possibilities. Seeing new possibilities is a critical element in the process of identifying and expressing one's standpoint publicly.

This is why I believe that identification must be extended from theoretical models to students themselves. For instance, while pursuing my doctoral studies I noticed that the undergraduate curriculum at my institution was lacking a focus in African American rhetoric and media image. I proposed a class to fill this void and designed a course outline that gained curriculum committee approval. I successfully taught this class with a focus on exploring how African Americans have used symbols to discover, maintain, and mobilize their identities. Using a mixture of public address, music, and visual images, we studied the impact of racialized communication on individual, collective, and intercultural identity formation and its ability to catalyze social change in national and transnational contexts.

I am proud to report that 50 students enrolled in that first section of African American Rhetoric and Image, and that they represented a variety of races, ethnicities, and countries of origin. It was a challenge to make African American

culture relevant to the diverse group and to also demonstrate the ways that all cultures have rhetorical strategies that are equally valid and important. It was critical for all of the students (regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, learning ability/style, or country of origin) to feel as if they could contribute to the conversation and provide needed perspectives on the materials. I borrowed the strategy detailed by Walker (1994) in the essay and book that inspired this edited volume, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*:

We must fearlessly pull out of ourselves and look at and identify with our lives the living creativity some of what our great-grandmothers knew...even without "knowing" it, the reality of their spirituality, even if they didn't recognize it beyond what happened in the singing at church—and they never had any intention of giving it up. (pp. 405-406)

Fearlessness. Identification. Creativity. Uncertainty. Spirituality. Walker's words helped me to discover that by finding the purposes and goals of those who have come before us, thereby understanding who we are and our own purposes and goals, we can also find empowerment. Though the class is officially over, a majority of students stay in touch to continue discussing certain issues raised in the class and in classes they are now taking. I consider this interaction a special honor as I watch them go on to graduate and professional schools, corporate America, the entertainment industry, and not-for-profit careers in media and political activism. I carry these successes with me as I make every effort to become a different kind of professor.

My first experience as a different kind of professor teaching African American Rhetoric and Image has spilled over into other classes I also teach such as Contemporary Communication, Rhetoric of Popular Culture, Rhetorical Criticism, Communication Theory, Fashion as Communication, and Argumentation and Advocacy. In these classes we focus on applying critical communication theories to real-world events and causes about which we are passionate, as well as to discovering the ways in which we are our own "walking arguments." As always, the primary focus remains teaching students how to connect the signs and symbols around them to their own identities and goals.

This focus is why the most important assignments in each of my classes, whether online or on ground, are weekly short essay responses to questions prompted by class discussion and material. For example, in my African American Rhetoric and Image course I ask students to compose responses to the following questions: When was the first time you realized you were a race? How, if at all, did it affect you? Engaging them in this way allows me to provide a space for introverted students to express themselves if they are uncomfortable speaking face to face in class. I also read a few of the responses aloud (anonymously) which makes the students more confident in their writing and critical thinking skills. And, perhaps most importantly, it provides a way to gauge whether the material is being understood fully. Sometimes I need to slow down or repeat part

of a previous lecture so that all the students have a firm grasp of the concepts presented. This approach is highly successful. The students engage with the materials and demonstrate their capacities for becoming more aware and compassionate citizens. A number of them have been inspired to go back into their own communities and abroad to help educate others and work actively for political, cultural, and social change.

Perhaps my standpoint is best expressed as an answer to the questions I have asked myself throughout these pages: What do I have to say in my scholarship? Why am I in the classroom? Put simply, I hope to inspire powerful people who will produce artful and influential ideas. True education begins a continuing experience in which ideas and information can be tested in action and communicated as standpoints. Through the development of critical thinking skills, written and oral communication, engagement with technology, and an appreciation for new and different ideas, students are prepared to engage in meaningful ways with the people and situations they encounter. My goal is that they leave the classroom with a better understanding of our society, of themselves, and of the power they each possess to create positive change in the world. Working toward this goal allows me to mobilize my identity and standpoint for the common good by fostering an understanding of learning as a communal activity where, as March and Coutu (2006) described it so eloquently, “no one comes first; and no one stands alone” (p. 148.).

FIGHTING EXTINCTION

While I facilitate learning in the classroom, my most valuable lessons have come from my experiences outside the classroom—in faculty meetings, in office hours, on committees, working with academic presses, and in informal interaction with colleagues. When I landed my first academic job I thought I had gained access to an environment that valued critical thinking and social justice over budgetary restrictions and interpersonal politics. I have learned that the latter prevails much too often over the former. My experiences thus far reveal several predatory presumptions and perceptions that endanger my survival and success. These include the presumption that because of my background I am less competent or objective than a white male peer; the underlying perception that I am an outsider, which brings with it emotional stress and intrapersonal fear that I am an imposter; the imposed visibility that comes from an institutional logic that declares “we finally have one,” and that one is sufficient, which means that I have unknowingly become either the fount of or repository for all things woman, multiracial, and under age 35; or the inability to check my own perceptions with mentors who may share my background, experiences, and communication styles. These kinds of presumptions and perceptions based on negative differences between people lead to nothing but paternalism. However, despite this state of affairs, I can say that hope is not lost. In learning to navigate these

choppy waters I am changing my environment and charting a different course, a course that will make me a different kind of professor.

My scholarship and service, in addition to my pedagogy, are formulated with the objective of becoming a different kind of professor and fighting the predatory presumptions that make me part of an endangered species. As I hope to have demonstrated thus far, I strive to make clear the processes by which I have obtained my knowledge and to communicate clearly the relevance of the questions I ask. Recently, I have been a part of planning and implementing a research and advocacy program involving students and using experiential learning models to help them connect research and advocacy efforts. As a part of this program, I have applied for a grant through my institution and proposed a series of events designed to explore issues of identity and diversity; these events will also demonstrate prominent models negotiating a tenuous identity and leveraging their intrinsic resources to create sustainable change. The grant will fund proposed events that will take the form of formal presentations and informal luncheons. The presentations will first focus on the speaker's public identity and related issues of concern, such as advocacy for balanced racial and gender representation in media and encouraging young women to pursue graduate study. Speakers will also touch on the role of research in addressing these issues, how advocacy is a part of their lives, and obstacles they have faced in creating change. Outstanding students from related schools and departments will be chosen by faculty to attend an informal luncheon featuring the speaker, faculty, and representatives from related non-profit or advocacy groups. The purpose of these sessions will be to highlight specific programs of interest, and to allow meaningful conversation to take place about identity mobilization for advocacy and change. Ultimately, students will be empowered to understand themselves through exploring their passions and engaging in activities of significant impact.

Based on the small-scale success of this endeavor in other contexts, I have already expanded the scope of my scholarly work to reach a larger population of readers. To this end, I write for a variety of newspapers and magazines in addition to traditional scholarly journals and academic presses. I have also begun two projects and proposed two classes on multiracial self-concept and representation to meet the needs of the changing majority population at my institution. My goal is to develop a communication theory about the interrelations between mixed race identification and passing as they pertain to the field of rhetoric and to multiracial identity formation in the United States. For instance, in my book manuscript I introduce the concept of *(bi)racial passing* to argue that passing is a form of rhetoric that identifies and represents passers intersectionally via synecdoche, or taking part of their racial identities for the whole. Some of the key questions I ask in my research and pedagogy concern how racial identity is constructed, enacted, and encountered. Questions include but are not limited to: Where/What are the labels for multiracial individuals? When did you first realize you were a race and how, if at all, did it affect you? What are the effects of

repeated exposure to the question: “So what are you anyway?” I am using this data to develop a model for communication that also accounts for the psychological violence and emotional responses such questions impose on the formation of a cohesive self. One emerging result is the reactionary identification strategies of mixed race individuals connected to Burke’s (1966) guilt-redemption cycle—martyrdom, denial, vigor, or transformation. Another is the location of labels for mixed race individuals using historiographical content analysis—media, family, census documents, legal cases, and self. I am also charting significant differences among responses from males and females and across varying age groups. This type of research is triangulated, blending qualitative and quantitative methods, in order to ask new kinds of questions about multiracial identification and the ways in which it shapes the nature of communication itself.

Moreover, my service to the University seeks to offset past injustices by working to recruit more women of color to our departments, helping our faculty become more reflective of current demographics, and raising fiscal support and awareness for the needs of marginalized student communities. I currently serve on several departmental, college, and University committees in which I strive to enhance diversity outreach on the faculty and student levels. My service takes the form of guest lecturing, organizing events, and offering new ways of thinking about diversity and multiculturalism inside and outside of the classroom. I also make use of traditional networking tools such as national and international conferences for enhancing opportunities for recruiting and publication. However, in an environment of economic uncertainty I place an increased value on new media’s social networking tools such as LinkedIn, del.icio.us, Twitter, and Facebook to stay in touch with and identify other women of color and scholars who share my interests. By taking the time to interact with my academic environment in these old and new ways I am better able to approach my work with a sense of purpose endowed by a more complete understanding of who I am, what I have to say, and for whom I speak.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

What I have attempted to provide in these pages has been a narrative about my experiences within the academy as well as the ways in which I keep my creative spark from being extinguished by the discrimination I face. What I have provided is a set of questions that have helped me to make sense of the academy and my place within it. In addition to asking what my standpoint is, I have also questioned my own capability, competence, and communicative effectiveness inside and outside of the classroom. Questions posed have varied from, “How do I simultaneously encourage dreams, spark imagination, and convey the message that success is as much about the journey as it is about the destination?” to “How do I communicate to my students, who are on the precipice of that next

phase of life, how to find their passion or achieve success?” to “How do I communicate to the academic community that I am competent and that my methods are not chaotic but liberating?” The answer is simple. I rid myself of these anxieties and embrace my role as a different kind of professor.

What follows is my vision for this role. A different kind of professor is part of a paradigm shift that makes her decisive, responsible, and able to maintain her standpoint in an uncertain and anxiety-ridden environment. Her decisiveness allows her to understand that everything is done at the expense of something else, and that every choice to undertake a project or engage in a relationship will cost her in some way. Because of this, she manages her expectations and is not afraid to decline requests and opportunities that present themselves. Her sense of responsibility allows her to regulate the ways in which she reacts to her environment. She sees liabilities as assets, times of crisis as moments ripe for change, and focuses on the resources at her disposal rather than those she either does not have or has lost due to forces beyond her control. Since her standpoint is always under construction, she is more interested in asking new questions rather than answering old ones. Thus, she can rethink traditional dichotomies of academia such as logos-pathos, student-teacher, new-old, faculty-administration, online-offline, and intimacy-distance (not to mention majority-minority and woman-man). This kind of thinking demonstrates the playful resilience necessary for her imagination to flower in spite of the constraints she will face.

At the same time, a different kind of professor also demonstrates caring for, interest in, and love for others. This kind of professor understands that status and hierarchy are not as important as listening, learning, and teaching. She also finds real joy in serving her students, colleagues, institution, and world by finding her standpoint and connecting it to a vision larger than herself. In doing so she refuses to confuse self-interest with individualism or consensus with community. By communicating her standpoint and vision to others she foregoes intellectualism for its own sake and gives her knowledge away for the common good. By making herself available in these ways, both inside and outside of the classroom, she shuns selfish ambition and seeks to uncover the maximum of her own and others' potential. With a spirit of humility and relentlessness she addresses the emotional, physical, and intellectual needs of those she encounters. In so doing she addresses her own. The struggles she faces do not tempt her to retreat or quit. Rather, they inspire her to push forward, confident in the fact that she will make a difference and catalyze change.

Finally, a different kind of professor understands that personal experiences affect the facts that scholars, students, and laypeople choose to see. My hope is that I will borrow from my experiences and follow Sotomayor's (2001) lead in “extrapolating [the good] into areas with which I am unfamiliar” (para. 23). I also hope that I can harness the sense of adventure and imagination of those who have faced similar or worse constraints. From historical examples of my colleagues and scholars such as Alice Walker, I can learn to get over my need for

perfection and control, recognizing that I cannot will myself into a different situation. Instead, I can engage the role of a different kind of professor and create new possibilities for myself, my students, and my institution. And finally, I hope that by raising the questions of difference and of what difference I can make as a professor that you, the reader, will begin your own evaluation of these questions. What should being part of the changing majority mean to you in your profession? For the fledgling professor, what will you do to keep your nerve and find your purpose while avoiding, as much as possible, anxiety, fear, and doubt? For the more seasoned scholar, what experiences and beliefs will help you realize that social identities, and the new media through which they are transmitted, are and will continue to be relevant variables by which to categorize and distinguish interpretive processes? For all of us, how can we negotiate our social and communicative differences without ignoring our emotional and psychological similarities? In other words, are we willing to challenge and respond to each other in order to recognize, refine, and articulate our standpoints? If you are like me, meaning that you want to be a different kind of professor, then your answer will be yes. Thank you in advance.

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