

September 2019

## Tales from the Ivory Tower: Women of Color's Resistance to Whiteness in Academia

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### Recommended Citation

Matias, C., Walker, D., & del Hierro, M. (2019). Tales from the Ivory Tower: Women of Color's Resistance to Whiteness in Academia. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education, 18* (1). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.18.1.04>

## Tales from the Ivory Tower

### Women of Color's Resistance to Whiteness in Academia

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#### Abstract

Whiteness in the academy has so impacted the lives of women of color such that the stories, identities, and experiences of women of color are often silenced, minimized, and chastised. Notwithstanding the deliberate erasure and marginalization of these stories, this article pays homage to critical auto ethnography by boldly presenting the stories of women of color in the academy. Particularly, this article draws from the stories of three women of color in the academy: a Pinay/Filipina assistant professor, a Black female doctoral student, and a Mexican American female researcher. These stories reveal how whiteness in the academy continues to wreak havoc in the lives of those most marginalized while also presenting how women of color resist. In the end we present some recommendations that institutions of higher education can apply to truly honor diversity and inclusivity.

Keywords: Racism, Whiteness, Higher Education, Women, Race, Feminism, Stories, Auto ethnography, Critical Auto-Ethnography

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## Introduction

“F.U.B.U.”

By Solange

When you know you gotta pay the cost  
 Play the game just to play the boss  
 So you thinking what you gained, you lost  
 But you know your shit is taking off, oh  
 When you driving in your tinted car  
 And you're criminal, just who you are  
 But you know you're gonna make it far, oh

When you feeling all alone  
 And you can't even be you up in your home  
 When you even feeling it from your own  
 When you got it figured out  
 When a nigga tryna board the plane  
 And they ask you, “What's your name again?”  
 Cause they thinking, “Yeah, you're all the same.”  
 Oh, it's for us

All my niggas in the whole wide world  
 Made this song to make it all y'all's turn  
 For us, this shit is for us  
 Some shit is a must  
 This shit is for us

Solange's song, F.U.B.U.—for us, by us—is a prophetic mantra that reminds women of color in the academy that although we exist within the intoxication of whiteness within the ivory towers (see Schick, 2000) we are never to be defined by anyone else other than us, regardless to the onslaught of attempts to control our minds, body, and identities. Too often are women of color in the academy expected to placate whiteness with “Yessums” and head nods, as if our role in the academy is nothing more than strategically pimping out our Black and Brown bodies to glitter their brochures as proof of diversity on campus, all while using our intellect and forced complicity to stroke their egos of whiteness (see Berry & Mizelle, 2006; Gutierrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Villalpando & Delgado Bernal, 2002). Additionally, whiteness in the academy works by presuming their forced and make believe friendships with women of color are sincere when they are simply a fictive network to cosign their white agendas (Matias, 2016). *We ain't your friend. We're your employee and you remind us of this relationship EVERY SINGLE DAY.* Notwithstanding how Beckys (well-intentioned white women who nonetheless reek of whiteness in ways that oppress women of color) parade us like Black and Brown “besties,” otherwise known as house slaves, we, the authors, take this opportunity to divulge just how whiteness attempts to control our work, bodies, and sense of self.

Yancy (2017) argues that the white gaze “replicates the history of whiteness as terror” because it is used to reduce the Black body to “an eater of shit, and a drinker of urine...a monster, something freakish, abnormal, and capable of the most disgraceful acts” (p. xxxi). Just as Yancy posits how the white gaze is used to demoralize the humanity of Black bodies, so too does it break down the humanity of women of color in the academy. That women of color in the academy are hired because of their expertise—often more qualified than many of their white counterparts—but once captured within the confines of the ivory towers is relegated to some subservient status, forever reminds us that “white women have assumed positions of power that enables them to reproduce the servant-served paradigm in a radically different context” (hooks, 1994, p. 103). This is especially true within a field like education, whereby a majority of K-12 teachers, teacher candidates, teachers obtaining a masters degree in education, professors of education, collaborating teachers and administrators are all white, and particularly, middle class white females. Per Yancy’s argument, not only does the white gaze exist, it can also mutate in such a perverse way that it becomes specifically focused on women of color. That is to say, the white gaze can develop a specific tunnel vision, so to speak, that it produces a gendered white gaze that wreaks havoc and terror on the lives of women of color.

For white men (and other men of color who internalize whiteness), their gendered white gaze upon the Black and Brown female body—we strategically use the word “body” instead of “woman” because such a process reduces our humanity to sexual objects—exists to serve “the ends of white male desires” and not that of mutual professional respect (hooks, 2006, p. 368). These men’s false pleasantries and seemingly kind behaviors are still motivated by ulterior motives that it become, as hooks so bluntly puts it, “fucking [as] a way to confront the Other” (p. 368). Yet, although there is a litany of literature that clearly detail how men fetishizes women of color—*always the sancha never the wife* (Paz, 2008)—we, like Davis (1981) so posits, will focus on white women, especially those who consider themselves to be an “ally” or “liberal.” The purpose of this fixation is primarily because the field of education has historically produced a unique context whereby white women, particularly educators, have been promoted into power or has been upheld as morally astute above that of women of color in the same field (see Hudson & Holmes, 1994).

We, the authors, are primarily concerned with this context because we are women of color (Filipina/Pinay, Black, and Mexican American, respectively) in the academy (faculty, doctoral student, and research staff, respectively) and our Brown and Black lived experiences matter, especially within spaces that claim to be committed to cultural diversity. Furthermore, as administrators, professors, students, and staff members claim to be working towards educational equity, inclusive practices, and/or social justice we often do so from different social locations. And these social locations are essential to recognize because if the structural context, wherein these social locations reside, already upholds whiteness in order to maintain institution-

alization of white supremacy, then those social locations that advance whiteness will be preferred over others. That is, although many diversity workshops claim that we all have perspectives to bring to the table, hence the need for diversity and inclusion, white perspectives will continue to dominate the space precisely because the space is already upholding whiteness. As such, the perspectives of women of color are often marginalized, rendered biased, ignored, or minimized as “just your story” when, in truth, such stories are routinely expressed from women of color all over academia.

In fact, this argument that “it’s just your story” recently happened to one of the authors. During Matias’ tenure case despite six glowing external letters, she received one scathing letter from one administrator who attempted to liken Matias’ stories from her research on whiteness to Adichie’s<sup>1</sup> cautionary TedTalk of “a danger of a single story.” Two things were wrong with this pairing. First, Adichie is talking about her story as a Nigerian in a British colonial empire and how Black stories are rarely heard amidst the whitening of stories. Therefore, Matias’ stories are not the danger here. As the only brown-skinned Pinay who grew up in public schools in urban Los Angeles her stories of teacher education in the very white field of teacher education are the stories that are silenced in the academy due to whiteness. Therefore, to use Adichie’s TedTalk against Matias was a gross manipulation of Adichie’s entire point. Secondly, what the administrator did not consider is that Matias’ stories are not a single story<sup>2</sup> because they echo the same screams of many women of color in the academy before her—some at the same institution (e.g., Allen, Orbe, Olivas, 1999; Berry & Mizelle, 2006; deJesus & Ma, 2004; Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Gutierrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). The only difference here or, more accurately stated, what is sadly the same-o-same-o business is that, that administrator like the many before her, refused to listen. Therefore, in our pursuit to bring to the academy different perspectives that truly honors the stories of those most marginalized in the hopes to provide a more educationally equitable setting we share with our readers our tales from the ivory tower.

### Theoretical Framework

This article theoretically employs several theories to best capture the meanings behind our experiences in the academy.<sup>3</sup> For one, we use critical whiteness studies (CWS) because such a platform provides an overarching theory of that which marginalizes our lives: whiteness. By calling out/exposing, characterizing, and critiquing whiteness we do not seek to demonize individuals, precisely because whiteness “reproduces itself regardless of intention” (Dryer, 2008, p.12). Be it as it may, whiteness will occur whether or not whites, or those people of color who are indoctrinated by whiteness ideology, believe themselves to be intentionally malicious. Hence, we do not investigate one’s intent nor do we expose them for

the sake of humiliation. Instead, we identify how whiteness is operating so that (1) we fully understand its impact, (2) honor those stories, voices, and identities most oppressed by whiteness, and (3) begin to dismantle the stronghold of institutional white supremacy together. In fact, Scheurich & Young (1997) prophetically wrote, “One of the worst racisms...for any generation or group is the one that we do not see, that is invisible to our lens—the one we participate in without consciously knowing or intending it” (p. 12). Knowing that whiteness, and its subsidiary element, white privilege, “is not visible to its holder” (Wildman & Davis, 2008, p. 114), proves the necessity as to why women of color, and other marginalized identities must speak out about their lived experiences with whiteness. Upon identifying acts of whiteness, the hope then is that those who are enacting whiteness will acknowledge their own behaviors, emotions, and speech that continues to racially microaggress people, and in particular, women of color. Although this is often the goal of critical whiteness studies, we operationally employ it differently. In her book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, hooks (1995) argues the following:

Black people still feel the terror, still associate it with whiteness, but are rarely able to articulate the varied ways we are terrorized because it is too easy to silence accusations of reverse racism or by suggesting that black folks who talk about the ways we are terrorized by whites are merely evoking victimization to demand special treatment. (p. 47)

Knowing that Blacks, moreover women of color, have not had to opportunity to speak against the violence of whiteness for fear of being silenced, as demonstrated in Matias’ tenure case, we take this moment to unapologetically share our stories of how whiteness terrorizes us. That is, this is not, as Solange’s lyrics so eloquently reminds us, about teaching them as is the usual application of CWS. Instead, this is about us speaking our Truths in response to enactments of whiteness.

Hence, in order to speak our truths against whiteness, we also employ Black feminism, Chicana feminism, and Asian Pacific American feminism in our stories to best capture our response to whiteness. Black feminism, for instance, is one such theoretical field that recognizes the need for Black women to speak out their truths especially since silence will not protect them. Lorde (2007) warns us of this when she states the following:

Even within the women’s movement, we [Black women] have had to fight, and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our Blackness. For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive, not as human beings...And that visibility that makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the sources of our greatest strength. Because the machine will grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners must as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid. (p. 42)

As Lorde (2007) recognizes, silencing *our* stories is not an option, especially when whiteness strategically and manipulatively attempts to mute us. Whilst Black feminisms cautions us about silencing our stories, Chicana feminism, as Castillo (1997) asserts, “recognizes the worth and potentials of all women” (p. 47). In these revelation women of color, particularly Latinas or Chicanas who “traditionally have been [maimed as] tortilla-makers, baby producers, to be touched but not heard” (Chavez, 1997, p. 37) are speaking out against racism and sexism so that they “shall never live on our knees again” (Anita Sarah Duarte, 2007, p. 195). The focus on the community, family, and *la raza* become vital components for Chicana liberation. Adding onto Black and Chicana feminism, Pinayism (Filipina/Pilipina Feminism) is “a process, place, and production that aims to connect the global and local to the personal issues and stories of Pinay struggle, survival, service, sisterhood, and strength” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009, p. 179-180). As Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento (2009) argue, “Pinayism in academia is not just about theory production” (p. 185), rather, it’s about Pinay educators “bring[ing] forth their Pinay perspective by sharing personal narratives. These stories illustrate the communal nature of teaching that they bring into the classroom, which provides a process of humanization for both the teacher and the student” (p. 185). As such, the demands for stories from women of color are not just for the sake of spreading *chisme/tsismis*. Indeed, sharing our stories is a deeply personal act of revolution.

If the underlying purpose of studying race is about recognizing our humanity and the processes that seek to help others recognize that, then the focus of our struggle in response to whiteness, just as Bell (1992) captures in his story of “Afrolantic hope,” becomes the symbolic reminder of our humanity. Returning to Solange’s lyrics, if they don’t understand these stories then so what. “This shit is for us.”

## Method

### *Methodology Behind Critical Autoethnography*

Whiteness works in ways that deliberately attempts to silence our stories by claiming “it’s just your story.” This minimizing maneuver is beautifully captured in Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva’s (2008) argument of white methods, white logic. That certain white researchers can lay claim to objectivity while denouncing other scholars’, mainly those scholars of color’s, work as biased, subjective, or that their stories as just “too narrow of a dataset” based upon that scholar’s race, is essentially “arguing that race is a proxy for an individual’s biological makeup (p. 6-7).” And, when acknowledging that “when whiteness becomes normative, it works like God” those white researchers who, many of whom are full professor, deans, and/or presidents of universities, render research by scholars of color as biased, also act as if they are God, determining what is and is not biased research (p. 13). This is all determined while those gatekeeping researchers have the privilege to ignore, overlook, or assume they have no own biases, especially as they sit in their corner offices holding

full titles ignorantly wondering why a majority of corner office holders look, think, and speak just like them. Therefore, we acknowledge that white methods and white logic hegemonically dictates the research world by deciphering what is and is not biased methods.

In fact, we again refer to Matias' tenure case for a concrete example of methodological bias. Although studies of whiteness are not a monolith for it draws from a variety of research methods such as qualitative interviews, theoretical hermeneutic interpretations, or critical race theory's counterstorytelling, Matias' administrative letter included a phrases that alluded to her lack of "empirical research" and how she should engage in more "traditional research methods of whiteness." Frankly speaking, *who did leading scholars of whiteness like Peggy McIntosh interview?* For that matter, *who did leading educational scholars, John Dewey and Paulo Freire interview?* There are two things wrong with this critique. One, as Mills (1959) argues, researchers limit their own sociological imagination when they too narrowly fixate on the precisions of qualitative and quantitative techniques of research, a process which he coins abstracted empiricism, instead of opening their minds to new ways of researching. Mills decries this narrow approach to research methods when he states:

I wonder how much exactitude, or pseudo-precision, is here confused with 'truth'; and how much abstracted empiricism is taken as the only 'empirical' manner of work... (p. 72)

Two, Mills (1959) clearly problematizes how gatekeepers of research pervert the nature of empirical research, opting only for a narrow definition that indicates techniques of qualitative and quantitative methods without giving credence to other methods such as theoretical methods. Mills argues further that those—what we, coin here—*empiricists* are more committed to techniques than doing the investigative work of social science and thus self-aggrandize their own importance in research. He states:

Moreover, as for 'importance,' surely it is important when some of the most energetic minds among us use themselves up in the study of details because The Method to which they are dogmatically committed does not allow them to study anything else. Much of such work, I am now convinced, has become the mere following of a ritual—which happens to have gained commercial and foundational value—rather than, in the words of its spokesman, a 'commitment to the hard demands of science.' (p 72)

### ***Research Method***

Therefore, in order to move away from research methods that too narrowly fixate on empiricists definitions of what constitutes research methods, we opt to include critical autoethnography, because it "is a research method where authors can link their personal selves to their cultural selves" (Jones, Taylor, & Coward, 2013.



p. 3). In fact, with regards to critical race pedagogy, the use of autoethnography can provide a more “promising connections that can move graduate level teachers and teacher educators toward becoming more transformative caring agents” (p. Hughes, 2008, p. 81). That our stories are actually accepted as a formidable process of understanding race and gender in a racist and sexist society is what attracts us most to critical autoethnography. Too often does whiteness in academia render our stories as nothing more than stories used to denigrate white folks. Not only is this thinking defensive, it is also a blatant refusal to acknowledge that the lives, experiences, and intellectualism that women of color offer to the university is exactly what they claim to want—diversity. In the end their blatant refusal to learn from the stories of women of color in the academy clearly indicates how white supremacy operates. Meaning, regardless to whether or not they want to admit it, these gatekeepers deeply believe whites are superior beings who can learn nothing from inferior beings like women of color and will do anything to strategically denounce their expertise. In order to move away from the self-censoring our stories we strategically operationalize them here through critical autoethnography and capturing our stories and experiences in the academy.

By critical autoethnography we first shared our experiences together and captured key experiences. Then we engaged in the literature of CWS, Black Feminism, Chicana Feminist, and Pinayism to analyze such experiences. Finally, we captured our experiences in the academy and share them in story form to illuminate to our readers how we make sense of our experiences. We do not do so to generalize the experience for all women of color in the academy. Instead we seek to offer a small piece of interpretation of how we, as women of color, experience the academy using the existing literature of whiteness. We hope that by offering our stories and our analytic lens to these stories others will feel empowered to come out and share their stories. In doing so, we ultimately hope to gain a better picture of what academy life is like for more women of color.

### Our Stories

#### *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty: The Vitriol of Whiteness on this Pinay*

*Colorblanco*<sup>4</sup> is a vast land where ideologies like rugged individualism, cowboy attitudes, and fake Midwest politeness run feral amidst the wild, wild, whiteness. In this space not only is there a large presence of white folks, but there is also a large presence of whiteness. Whiteness here is like Aspen trees, all stemming from a single seed but sprouts up everywhere, and in this case, in everyone regardless to whether a person has white skin. Here, whiteness operates in the minds of both whites and people of color especially when they Bogart identity proudly displaying their “Colorado Native” bumper stickers, which blatantly disregards the Native Americans who were slaughtered before them. Also, each year our university’s presidential commencement speech relays the story of how Denver’s first mayor

was a Klu Klux Klansman and how the university—embodied as the white savior—stood up to racism by allowing Jews onto their campus; yet, no mention of Blacks. Therefore one can understand how driving around Denver is as surreal as a Salvador Dali painting because as they pontificate liberalness in sayings such as “I voted for Obama” they do so amidst historically racist communities still proudly displaying “Covenant Community” and refusing to rename parts of town that were named after Klansmen like the town of Stapleton.

I present this *Colorblanco* landscape so that one best understands the level of shock my mere presence had upon this whitened space, let alone the radical, resistant or, as some say, unapologetic scholarship I brought with me. I was young, proud of my Brownness, and fierce in my objective for racially just education when I first arrived. Similar to *The Wizard of Oz*'s Dorothy's well-known motto, I, with my petite, voluptuous frame, long dark hair, brown skin, almond-shaped eyes, and Spanish surname was clearly reminded that I was *not* in LA anymore. I was stiletto. They were Crocs and Birkenstocks. I was the first ever tenure-lined faculty of color, specifically hired into an urban teacher education program after teaching in LA and NYC and earning a doctorate degree in race and ethnic studies in education. They were white educators, claiming to be experts of teaching my kind—some of who did not earn doctorates or have taught beyond Denver city proper, let alone have any meaningful relationships with woke folks of Color. Their white gaze was multifaceted, complete with wonder and awe of how I, the student of color they presumed to be helping, became their equal. I was exotic and different to their plain vanilla and my boisterous and passionately in-your-face attempts to bring in radical education was offsetting to them. Clearly, like Cho's (2003) assertion that Asian Pacific American (APA) female stereotypes impact APA women in the academy, my mere presence could not escape the stereotypes as “politically passive and sexually exotic and compliant” (p. 358). Essentially, I was as DeBord (2003) so encapsulates, a spectacle or *weltanschauung* that “has become objectified” (p. 118). *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

To clarify for those who are unfamiliar with Pinays we are often racially ambiguous causing one to question whether “she is Asian or Latina” especially when our phenotypes often suggest Asian, yet our Spanish cultural norms and surnames suggest another (see Ocampo, 2016). Eyes turned and I felt the white gaze (Yancy, 2006) in a variety of ways. *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.* First, one of my older white colleagues assumed I was Latina and said to me, “I've had several Latina doctoral students, you know” as a way to develop some sad fictitious relationship with me (see Matias, 2016). Such a racialized and sexualized maneuver mirrors the dating behavior of white men who tell Asian Pacific American women they have dated an Asian girl before as a lame justification to date more Asian American women. Others stopped by my office feeling obliged to instruct me to wear more lotion because of the dry Coloradoan climate, justifying it with “my nephew is an adopted Korean.” WTF?! Others pointed out how “shapely” I was, how high my heels were,

how I was such a “pretty little thing” or how shocked they were to see my hair in its naturally curly state. The audacity to assert labels on my Filipina body, subjecting it to racial and gender microaggressions, is not only disgusting, it was telling. Because amidst their need to racially identify or characterize my gendered body they were trying to control it. Clearly, they were actively racializing and sexualizing my Filipina-ness. *Speak when told. Move when directed. But be pretty for my fetish of you. Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

After a year of careful observation, per the advice of my own professors, I started asserting my presence beyond their submissive imagery of me. In these assertions I highlighted where aspects of curricula, pedagogies, and philosophies were imbued with whiteness, cautioning them that in its usage it replicates the same racist educational system they *claim* to want to dismantle. Shocked, however this time beyond the mere presence of my body, and directly at the boldness of my intelligence, they retaliated with immense vitriol. There were times they took turns screaming at me. Some were so emotionally unstable that they ended up periodically standing and sitting atop tables while others pounded their fists on the table or waved their arms in the air. All of these behaviors eerily reminded me of some kind of over-the-top snake wielding church revival whereby bodies are convulsing and contorting. But beyond recognizing their own behaviors in response to my Browned<sup>5</sup> mind, body, and willed spirit, they projected onto me, gaslighting me to believe that I was the problem—a sad emotionally manipulative maneuver used by emotional abusers. In the end, they knew I was a single motherscholar of color who had no connections in Colorblanco and “punished” me with night courses, leaving me frantic to find childcare for my twin toddlers. Luckily, my then associate dean, a Black woman, helped by othermothering my twins at night (Case, 1997). Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.

It wasn't only this incident. There were several. One time a self-proclaimed liberal, attractive-looking white female<sup>6</sup> student—herein typified as Becky—was so perturbed about me teaching about race that she sought me out during office hours to scream at me. Another Becky was so bothered that I was her professor that she went to my office hours, refused to sit down, and while verbally berating me with stupid questions such as “Do you know what the course description for this course is supposed to be” opted to stand above me with her arms crossed. It was almost as if she was screaming down at a woman who had wronged her. That student eventually dropped my course and re-registered when the course was taught by an older, white female professor, despite the fact that we had similar readings. Another time, upon hosting one 45-minute lecture on race, another group of sorority Beckys took it upon themselves to circulate a petition behind my back in a futile campaign to get me fired. Although the litany of literature acknowledges whitelash to studying race, the kind of vitriol of these young, attractive, white female students strangely reminded me of the rage behind a jealous girlfriend, especially one who just found out her white man was canoodling with an attractive woman of color.

Essentially, I felt as if they were actively racializing and sexualizing my body with APA stereotypes, while responding with extreme hate to that same hypersexualization. *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

Wanting to test my gut feeling, I had my students read Yen Le Espiritu's (2001) chapter, "Ideological Racism and Cultural Resistance: Constructing Our Own Images." Espiritu describes how Asian Pacific American women are either characterized as "cunning Dragon Lady or the servile Lotus Blossom Baby" (p. 196). Regardless to which characterization is employed on APA women they "both exoticize Asian women as exotic 'others'—sensuous, promiscuous, but untrustworthy" (p. 196). *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

Quite telling from their responses to the reading is that my Beckys were not only aware of such stereotypes they already had intimate knowledge of it and even developed feelings about it! One white woman shared a story about how her own white male friends often talked about "banging" APA women—a phenomenon previously described by bell hooks' (2009) as *eating the other*. Another described her deep disgust for "their" men's fetish over APA women. And yes, many of them used the word "our" to describe white men, which implies a certain sense of possessiveness towards white men—a possessiveness that would generate a sense of loss if one believed something was taken away from them. Never once in this exercise did the Beckys comment on how "their" men's sexual fetishization towards APA women made them feel or how that might impact how they view or relate to APA women. In fact, they deflected at every turn focusing on how white men are lame, too easily manipulated by APA women, or straight disgusting. According to them, this racial fetishization and hypersexualization of APA women only impacts white men, yet they say this with such vitriol towards white men *and* APA women that it clearly impacts them too. *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

In the end this fetish pits white women against APA women, as if young, strong, attractive women of color, in and of itself, are a latent threat to white women's sense of security or sense of home. And, since white women have established a sense of place or home within the academy, especially in a field like education where a majority of educators are white females, my entrance into what they perceive to be their home becomes a threat, making them hold more tightly onto their whiteness and lashing out more boldly.

Interlude: This Moment

By Solange

If you don't understand us and understand what we've been through,  
then you probably wouldn't understand what this moment is about.

This is home. This is where we from.

This is where we belong.

***Bold. Brown. Brains.*** Solange's lyrics forever reminds me that despite how unwelcomed or estranged I am made to feel in this academic space this *is* my

home—‘tis where I belong. Because within the vastness of *Colorblanco*’s whiteness, exists an academy whose stereotypical characterizations of me sadly defines them more so than it does me. Refusing to feel like a forever foreigner (Park, 2011) inside my own academic home and refusing to withstand their vitriol, rage, and vehemence when I don’t perform submissiveness, docility, and servility I stand. Appalled and, at the same time, threatened that I am bold enough to assert my humanity and expertise—while they attempt to control my body, mind, and spirit with their racialization and sexualization of me—I again stand.

I stand tall—all five feet of me—realizing that their awe of how unapologetic I am is a stereotypical presumption that women of color should be apologetic for asserting themselves. In the end this is not my issue. Rather, this is *their* issue with me being at home with the boldness, Brownness, and beautifulness of my mind, body, and soul. Instead of identifying, realizing, let alone be cognizant enough to welcome it, their vitriolic projections becomes a sad display of their own white insecurities. Even amidst that, I stand.

#### *All Skinfolk, Ain’t Kinfolk*

One of the most insidious components of whiteness is how it infects the minds of people of color that transforms into plantation politics. Baldwin (1963) has described this as an illness that eats away the souls of people of color. Upon entering my PhD program I have grown accustomed to people of color still believing that ‘massa tools will dismantle the massa’s house’ (Lorde, 2007). These people of color earned some sort of financial success but in moving up the hierarchy ladder as a non-threatening token person of color, meant never talking about race. Yet, my firm sense of solidarity with all people of color stems from my activism in student protests in Ferguson, Missouri. This firm solidarity made me give other people of color the benefit of a doubt. Upon the acceptance to my doctoral program I was initially slated to work with two women of color. Since I was a woke, critically conscious person I, like hooks (1994) also attests in her experiences with white teachers post desegregation, knew that whiteness, in all its pervasiveness (see Leonardo, 2009), is everywhere. In fact, after years of educational trauma with white women teachers and professors who never believed in my potential to earn any advanced degrees, one can understand why working with women of color was so liberating. As such, I fantasized about the bold fierce women of color that will encourage and nurture me throughout my PhD experience. And then there she was.

Having read her work on whiteness, I knew instantly I wanted to study under a particular female professor of color (herein called Doktora). She was the epitome of the magically manifestation of my academic hopes and dreams. She was a woman of color, a motherscholar, and was “unapologetic” in her attack on whiteness. Once accepted, I was elated. To add to my joy, another female professor of color then contacted me. I shall call her Professor X. Professor X’s research agenda was creating a high school program that teach social justice to high school students

who come from urban backgrounds like myself. Such a program made me even more ecstatic. I was not only accepted to the program to work under Doktora, but also received a research assistantship with this other female professor of color. I recall telling my partner that this is almost too good to be true. I soon realized I was right. The events that followed accepting my assistantship with this other woman of color has solidified within me that *all skinfofolk ain't kinfolk*.

Whiteness is like any other abusive relationship. The signs of abuse were not as obvious at first but I was financially dependent on this research assistantship and therefore like those who are often abused are also forced to endure terrorism of whiteness (hooks, 1994). In the beginning Professor X gave responses to diversity and inclusion in ways that never attacked white supremacy. *Warning sign number one*. The avoidance of talking about larger structural issues of race at first troubled me, but since I was so enamored by having a female professor of color I initially chose to overlook it. I was in disbelief and thus I chose to be willful ignorant of some of this professor's problematic ideologies. It was not until I realized, as Matias (2016) posits, that whiteness can infiltrate the mindsets of people of Color that I recognized the problem. Whiteness does indeed impact people of color in ways that replicate the same dynamics as the field slave and house slave during plantation times. This "house nigga" mentality is described in hooks (1994) work.

One mark of oppression was that Black folks were compelled to assume the mantle of invisibility, to erase all traces of their subjectivity during slavery and the long years of racial apartheid, so that they could be better, less threatening servants. (p. 30)

Another aspect that made me wary was that the teachers chosen to lead these courses on social justice embodied all factors of a white saviorism (Matias, 2016). To not acknowledge how whiteness can impact the delivery of culturally responsive teaching only furthers the agenda of whiteness (Matias, 2013). Hence, I was horrified at these white women replicating the same racist behaviors I had experienced when I was a kid. Yet, because whiteness works in emotionally manipulative ways I simply began doubting myself, ignoring my gut feeling that something was awry or, better yet something was (a)white. So I decided to wait until I was in the classrooms to observe for myself if my assumptions were true. Sadly, I was not disappointed.

One of the first classrooms I entered was a white female nonnative Spanish-speaking teacher telling her class filled with Latino students how she "gets them" because she learned Spanish and lived in Mexico for a summer. I watched as these Latinx students rolled their eyes. I further listened as she stated that color does not matter because we all bleed the same. After expressing my concerns about colorblind racism to Professor X she immediately rebuffed my claims telling me that I have not been a part of the program long enough to question the astuteness of the teachers she had chosen. She further invalidated me by stating as a woman of color she would "know" if her white teachers were not able to teach the course she designed. I im-

mediately thought two things. One, why is she so defensive? Two, her invalidation of my claims made it clear how deep her investment in whiteness ran.

The final installment of the whiteness tale of horror came when addressing student experiences. Because I am adamant to eradicate the suffering of Black and Brown students I endured this research assistantship. In my mind I thought if I were not there then who would fight for these students? Professor X became very perturbed with my insistent claims that the teachers of her program were incompetent to teach such topics. I tried offering a suggestion that native Spanish speaking students should be afforded an opportunity to present their end of the year projects in Spanish. To this suggestion, she was repulsed claiming students needed to learn English because it was their best chance to success. And this was coming from a self-identified Latina. For me this was a marker of whiteness because to decry one's own language feels like hating oneself. In fact, I learned that adopting whiteness, which is in and of itself, adopting self-hate, exacts a toll, regardless to whether or not that person is white. According to Thandeka (2001), the cost of adopting whiteness is one's self esteem. And when someone loses their self-esteem and develop increased self-hate they lash out with rage. This rage was then projected onto me when I merely suggested the importance of Spanish language in education. The rage was fierce in its abuse towards me that I started doubting my own life experiences. Instead of identifying whiteness as a problem I was erroneously deemed the problem for simply bringing it up. She knew I was interested in studying whiteness, yet upon ever uttering the word she claimed that studying whiteness was not real scholarship!

In the end her adoption of whiteness ideology and refusal to acknowledge her association to it clashed with who I was and it was time to part ways. Here I was an "unapologetic" Black woman with a big Afro committed to stopping the patronizing educational experience of Black and Brown high school students. In my refusal to ever be complicit in inflicting the same terrorizing pain of whiteness on these students I quitted the program and the assistantship. I never felt so free.

I could not help but be in disbelief. Why would a woman of color who I looked up to adopt whiteness? What did she get out of it? I soon realized she had institutional backing for her project. Many of the white administrators favored her and her work. It was almost as if she became their good house nigga to be paraded around other field slaves to keep others in order on the academic neo-plantation (see Matias, 2015). Like Thandeka (2001) argues whiteness is all about conditional love. If you do not comply with whiteness it will work against you. That is exactly what happened to me. Once I finally broke away from her abuse she told me "I don't think you're Ph.D. material." This hurt me deeply because she was someone who initially embodied everything I thought I wanted to be. To this, I was deeply offended. I, like James Baldwin so eloquently puts it, was not her Negro. I was not interested in playing house and field slave politico-tactics. Instead, I am proud of Blackness. My Black Power fist pik is just a symbol of my commitment to racial



justice. And, in that commitment I will never make the mistake of assuming that whiteness only impacts white people again. Although I am rightfully angry of losing a relationship with a woman of color I had initially admired I am forever reminded that *all skinfolk ain't kinfolk*. And I, as a Black woman committed to empowering my people refuse to replicate this. It stops here.

### *La Malinche in Academic Research*

In Mexican folklore, there is not one character who is as revered and defiled as that of La Malinche, Malintzin Tenapal, otherwise, Doña Marina. Regarded as the mother of Mexico her motherhood was earned by way of her prostitution to Spanish conquistador, Hernan Cortes. Having been sold into slavery by her mother, La Malinche met her fate when Cortes purchased her. To Cortes, La Malinche gave her invaluable knowledge of the native peoples, her body, and her position in her land. The historical stories of La Malinche, portrays Mexican American women as only good on their backs, legs splayed. *Mute. Passive. Hollow*. Despite this, La Malinche was also a translator, gateway to the Americas, and the womb for a new people (the mestizo). La Malinche, both mother and whore, both essential and disposable, both producer and exploited. Loved and loathed. Monarrez Fragoso (2010) explores this commodification and exploitation of Mexican women's bodies in her analysis of the *feminicides* of Ciudad Juarez. She writes, "The capitalist patriarchal system has changed [Mexican women's bodies] into a subjected object with a new use and exchange value" (p. 67). Essentially, Mexican American women became no longer human, but instead a disposable means of production.

As a female Mexican-American researcher occupying a space in the white male patriarchy promoting academy, this dichotomy of both producer (mother) and exploited (whore) is far too familiar. As a Brown body in the academy hired to "build relationships" and manage projects involving the Latino community I too have been positioned to serve as an interpreter, gateway, and womb, minus the professional recognition or basic humanity similar to La Malinche. As Lugo Lugo (2014) explains of the Latino/a imagination, "These archetypal images are... superimposed on the bodies of flesh-and-blood Latinos/as, like a cloak of expectations" (p. 43). On my body I wear the loved and loathed history of La Malinche like a cloak. And much like the mischaracterization of La Malinche's abilities and labor and the commodification of contemporary Mexican women's bodies, my labor within academic research has been reduced to how well I serve with statements such as "*She did not bring water to a meeting,*" "*she did not make copies,*" and "*she is not a team player.*" Or, comments such as *interpersonal issues*, which is code for not allowing myself to be dominated. These are a few examples of what was included in my professional review instead of what should be included in a competent researchers review. That is, there were no report on my ability to conduct research in a competent, or even exceptional, manner.

Since the research center is rather small my white female supervisor and my



white-enacting<sup>7</sup> director informed me that the office operated like a family, expressing that they hope I would conform to their family values. Known for having a caring disposition, one can understand how I was initially relieved to think this was a space where my coworkers also believed in a supportive environment such that they referred to each other as family. Yet, I soon realized their idea of family was not my idea of *familia*. As time passed, I soon learned that this office “family” meant that I was expected to share with them the intimate details of my life without it being reciprocated. I was expected to give them office *chisme* about my life—a tactic I later learned was used to control my time in and out of the office, my body as docile servant, and my mind by intellectually hijacking my work. As Frankenburg (1997) asserts of the desire for whiteness to create its own culture, “whiteness *does* have content inasmuch as it generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and even ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself” (p. 632). Both my supervisor and director had indeed created a culture of whiteness, one that was ahistorical (Mills, 2007), narcissistic (see Matias, 2016), and oppressive (hooks, 1992). Their culture of *family* had a clear definition that only they knew and they benefitted from, a definition that allowed them to successfully dominate my body while not having to assume any malice or culpability. Much like Ross’s (1997) analysis of whiteness and how it projects as “innocence in affirmative action discourse” both my supervisor and director’s refusal to admit their culpability in racist practice allowed them to commodify my Brown body purely for their ends, while claiming innocence (p. 28-29). This was shown during one interaction with my director. Trying to control my weekend time she passive aggressively mocks, “Mariana, now I know you like your free time on the weekends, but we need you to respond to emails and continue working.” Clearly, this “family” culture so discussed in this space was simply reproducing an oppressive hierarchy whereby I was relegated to servant-like status, subjugated and controlled. As Cortes purchased La Malinche, my body and my abilities were also purchased via my salary and what they expected in return was my servitude. I knew then that despite my boundaries and rights to privacy the culture of whiteness within my office saw my Brown body as nothing more than a laborer to be used at the master’s call. In a sad replication of La Malinche, I was not seen or valued as one of the family members. Instead I was a means of production, a commodity, a slave, a prostitute who could be exploited inside and outside of regular work hours. Because my Brown body was seen as such, both my supervisor and director felt well within their place—which was above me—to regulate, discipline, and classify my body, both in and out of the office (Monarrez Fragoso, 2010).

However, the true testament of how they viewed my body as nothing more than a Brown prostitute to be used at their demand, came when I announced my pregnancy to my supervisor and director. As with some pregnancies I was elated not only because I was pregnant and had a secure job for almost a year, but also because I just received news about my acceptance to a doctoral program within the

university. Though excited my colleagues were not as thrilled. For them, knowing that I was pregnant and recognized for my scholarship such that I was admitted into a doctoral program threatened them. One, their need to control my body was now being put to the test as my body took control over itself. Two, that others knew of my research and scholarship made them fearful of hijacking my ideas, projects, and connections whenever they so pleased. Their fear of losing control over my body and mind brought about mandated regularly scheduled meetings as a way to bully me into having an abortion. Although they never used those words they used gaslighting tactics to scare me with the struggles of being a mother in the academy and threatened me with my career claiming that it would be impossible to do the work needed for the research center with a newborn. One of them patronized me by saying, "Oh, Mariana. It's just we don't think you truly understand how demanding a newborn is." Tag teaming together, the other says, "You may want to consider going part-time or leaving work completely. No one will judge you for this." But the straw that broke the camel's back was when they asked in unison, "Was this planned?" as if they were so disgusted that I had the audacity to have a right over my own body. Notwithstanding their emotionally manipulative behaviors often associated with whiteness I pushed back and reminded both my supervisor and director that although I appreciate their concerns my life was outside of their jurisdiction. To this they simply responded, "As family, we just want to make sure you aren't biting off more than you can chew."

This constant need to establish their dominance over my commodified body, which we all knew was their means of production, eventually took its toll. At times, I suffered from depression during my pregnancy and even questioned my own desires for autonomy. These are the side effects of whiteness as gaslighting. Despite their venom, they claimed innocence, as whiteness often does, saying that their concerns were just a part of helping out the family. This is tantamount to the emotional manipulation that an abuser says to his abused as a way of continuing the abuse. In fact, it is as Matias (2016) so describes, "racially diminutive emotions are entrenched in whiteness ideology" (Matias, 2016, p. 26). Instead of opting for overt rage so often associated with whiteness my colleagues who were steeped in whiteness ideology opted to feign pity. Matias & Zembylas (2014) argue how emotional displays of pity are, at times, a way to mask deeper sentiments. In their study on white teachers they revealed that although these white teachers feigned pity for their Black and Brown students, they in fact, had deep rooted sentiments of disgust for African Americans and Latinos. Such an emotional dynamic was captured flawlessly in the behaviors of my colleagues at my research center. The honest truth was my pregnancy threatened their control over my body. That my body, like the stereotypes of Mexican women, should simply be used to extent the deeds of whiteness and not of my own volition, was not only dehumanizing it was terrorizing. And I refused it, resisted it, and challenged it at every turn. Because as I assert my Mexican American identity, body, and humanity, I do so not only

for myself but for my son who, after all this, is consequently named Salvador. My savior.

### Recommendations

The field of education, specifically, teaching, is replete with the understanding that educators must listen or draw from the funds of knowledge of students, meaning listen to and honor students' stories, experiences, and identities as a source of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Yet, this is only stated because there is an existing racial structure where the majority of teachers are white and when placed in an educational structure that upholds whiteness their ignoring of stories, identities, and experiences of students of color, maintains a white supremacist institution. As much as white teacher educators (professors and administrators) want to pretend that such a phenomenon only happens in the K-12 sector, the truth remains. It also happens in the academy. Suppressing, undermining, or ignoring the stories of women of color in the academy is just another attempt to uphold whiteness. In truly embracing social justice, educational equity, and diversity and inclusion, we then offer the ivory tower the following recommendations:

There is a marked difference between engaging in structural change and producing Band-Aid programming. The academy, with its forever initiatives in diversity and inclusion, often include Band-Aid programming like women of color luncheons or mentoring programs, which although are needed, will not overturn the existing hostile culture needed to attract and retain women of color in the academy. Clearly, more must be done to educate others about whiteness and patriarchy directly, which are indeed the main structural problems that oppress women of color. Avoiding such topics and providing Band Aid programming is tantamount to placing a Band-Aid on a skin lesion without ever addressing the issue of melanoma. Eventually, the lesion will return. As such there needs to be more infrastructure to support women of color in the academy beyond luncheons, mentoring sessions, and support groups. For example, those with dominant identities—in this case whites—need to go to whiteness workshops so that they can learn how their behaviors, attitudes, decisions, and ideologies are imbued with whiteness such that faculty, staff, and students of color are ostracized. It is not enough to just teach those who are abused the state of abuse. In order to stop it one must go directly to the abuser. In this case to stop the widespread of whiteness left unchecked whites and those indoctrinated with whiteness ideology need to be continuously (not one time) enrolled in whiteness workshops.

However, being aware of the abuse is not enough. Race research often over glorifies the need for awareness. Awareness is simply not enough.

There needs to be consequences to those who continue to engage in racially and gendered microaggressive ways. If the university leadership is predominantly white and has taken continuous whiteness workshops then the university should be held responsible for the behaviors of their leaders. That is, there must be punitive measure for white leaders who have many filed complaints against them just as there should be positive measures for white leaders who engage in racially promoting ways.

Instead of being allowed to engage in work harassment and bullying such as what was seen in Matias' administrative tenure letter there must be accountability for those who grossly abuse their power in their leadership role. Universities need to become more cautious of these tactics because by silently allowing such workplace bullying to happen they are complicit in the bullying. As such, they are subject to increased class action suits and litigation. To avoid these litigations the university must seriously consider all workplace discrimination complaints by faculty, staff, and students of color.

For those staff, students, and faculty of color who are experience whiteness universities should have a very transparent reporting system. Yet reporting is not enough. For example, for faculty of color going to the Ombudsmen is not enough because Ombudsmen does not advocate. There must be advocating on behalf of inclusion, diversity, and equity. The lack of advocating for faculty of color renders such "support" processes a eunuch to the cause of diversity and inclusion because plainly state it has no balls to confront issues. What is needed is a university agency that has the ovaries to stand up to whiteness and enact change in order to actualize a better more diverse campus.

Those faculty and staff who engage in research that addresses racism should be given extra merit or credence for engaging in dangerous work that the universities claim they are in support of. If a university truly claims to be about social justice, equity, and racial inclusion then they should put their money where their mouth is. Pay for it. Merit or tenure cases should place an added value to researchers who engage in diverse and socially just research. Those added values should be pair with monetary compensation. It is not enough to pontificate a mission and vision of equity, diversity, and inclusive in the university is not going to pay for those who are engaging on the groundbreaking work to make that manifest.

Beyond white leadership in the academy there must be more leaders of color who not only promote diversity but also are fully aware of how whiteness operates in the academy. Filling leadership positive with Black and Brown bodies who are nonetheless operating in ways that still promote whiteness

is not sufficient. Basically, this is putting Black and Brown leaders in the same position as Black face did in minstrels of yesteryear. Just because a leader identifies as a person of color does not mean they will promote the radical racial equity needed to equalize the playing field for other people of color. As pointed above, not all skin folk are kinfolk.

Although there needs to be professional development that directly addressed the main problem of workplace hostility for women of color—whiteness and patriarchy—there still needs to be Band Aid programs such as Sista Circles, multicultural counseling, or—dare-we say—mediation/legal services for mitigating microaggressions. These spaces are often the only space where women of color in the academy feel safe to speak their stories, truths, and experiences. As such, there should not only be more of them, but if a university claims to be committed to diversity and inclusivity, then it should back its philosophy with its pocketbook. That is, create a line-item budget to ensure the longevity of these programs.

Women of color in the academy are too often chastised, ostracized, punished, or patronized when sharing their stories about the academy. If an institution is truly committed to listening to those most marginalized then it should remove all punitive measures used to control women of color and their stories. For example, when departments issue rubrics or memoranda that categorically situates stories of women of color as mere autobiography, they also deem their voices, experiences, and lives as unworthy of the recognition of research. Punitive measures, such as these, must be removed in order to women of color to investigate their own experiences in the academy.

Finally, listen and act, not react. Too often when women of color share their stories of whiteness and patriarchy in the academy, others refuse to listen. Instead, they emotionally react defensively, as if these stories threaten a core sense of the university, when in fact, they are remarkable tales of endurance, strength, and survival in the academy. If the academy truly seeks to be a place of learning, then those who have the corner offices in the academies should take a moment to learn from others. But learning is not enough. Accountability must be had. To ensure that the university adheres to doctrines of diversity, equity, and inclusion then those in corner offices need to be held accountable for complaints made against them for workplace discrimination.

## Conclusion

### **I Got So Much Magic, You Can Have it** By Nia Andrews and Kelly Rowland

You did it from the get go, get go  
 Let's go, let's go, let's go look for magic, yeah  
 They not gon' get it from the get go, get go, get go, get go  
 Don't let, don't let, don't let anybody steal your magic, yeah  
 But I got so much y'all  
 You can have it

Nia and Kelly sang this acapella interlude as a track in Solange's *A Seat at the Table* album. In it they talk about having magic, #Blackgirlmagic,<sup>8</sup> which is a testament to Black beauty, intelligence, and resilience. Appropriate it is then to apply this magic of loving thyself to women of color in the ivory towers whose stories, voices, and experiences have been strategically reduced to mere autobiography, unworthy of the status of scholarly research. Resisting by not letting them “steal your magic” we deliberately share our stories—ones that are too often silenced—so our identities, experiences, and voice can finally have a seat at the academic table. Some may project onto us claiming our stories are so unapologetic, yet, in their pomposity to lay claim to the intent of our stories, we argue, “What do we have to be apologetic about?” In fact, we magically resist such derogatory language by positing that perhaps the assumed nature of apology is just a deflection of someone who refuses to own up to her own culpability and complicity of how women of color are treated in the academy. And, in their confusion as to how to place, respect, or understand our stories we once again drawn from Solange's “F.U.B.U” track:

Don't feel bad if you can't sing along  
 Just be glad you got the whole wide world  
 This us  
 This shit is from us...  
 It's all for us baby

## Special Note

To women of color in the academy, you are loved because you are exceedingly intelligent, fiercely brave, and undeniably beautiful. You-are-unabashedly-you.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story)

<sup>2</sup> What the white administrator also does not recognize, or possibly does recognize but refuses to admit, is that Adichie—a Nigerian woman growing up amidst a British colonial context—produced this talk to caution people, in general, how recycling Eurocentric, or

hegemonically white, stories denigrates people of color. Therefore, when those in marginalized positions, such as people of color, or in Matias' tenure case, as a woman of color in a predominantly white institution offer counter-stories they, like Matias did, are countering the dangers of the single white story. Essentially, what this white administrator did was reappropriated Adichie's argument of the dangers of a single story by erroneously likening it to stories and experiences of women of color, as a way to, once again, marginalize the stories of those already most marginalized.

<sup>3</sup> Although we do not claim that our experiences in the academy are but another single story, generalizable to all women of color, we do claim that our participation in this special issue on women of color in the academy is just another contribution in the collective stories of our—all women of color in the academy—experiences.

<sup>4</sup> Based on personal communication with critical whiteness scholar, Naomi Nishi.

<sup>5</sup> I strategically employ this term to suggest a sense of wokeness in my racial identity.

<sup>6</sup> I strategically acknowledge this characterization because I feel as if it has something to do with the dynamics between attractive white women and attractive women of color.

<sup>7</sup> My director is a dark-skinned Latina from an affluent background who completed her university studies in the U.S. Acknowledging that she would otherwise be seen as the Brown body exploited by the academy, through her actions my director displays how people of color can adopt and replicate whiteness ideologies, behaviors, and discourse as a means to gain recognition and establish dominance.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-is-black-girl-magic-video\\_us\\_5694dad4e4b086bc1cd517f4](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-is-black-girl-magic-video_us_5694dad4e4b086bc1cd517f4)

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