Learning to Breathe Again: Navigating Academic "Weather," Grief, Microaggressions, and Misogynoir as a Black Woman on the Tenure Track

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ABSTRACT

This article uses Black feminist and critical race theories to foreground an autoethnographic account of grief, microaggressions, and misogynoir faced by a Black woman on the tenure track. This autoethnographic project seeks to highlight how the positionality of Black women faculty must be contextualized by larger social forces such as a global pandemic, misogynoir, and the prevalence of microaggressions in the face of personal experiences of grief. Research on Black women's experiences in higher education is gaining more attention; work that focuses specifically on issues of grief remains limited, however. The goal of this article is to emphasize the ways in which the personal is political for Black women on the tenure track by providing an in-depth look at one Black woman's personal trajectory.

Keywords: Academia, autoethnography, Black feminism, Black girl magic, grief

INTRODUCTION

> I wasn't there when my sister died.
>
> —Christina Sharpe, 2016

On January 12, 2018, five days after my thirty-first birthday, I was confronted by the loss of my thirteen-year-old cousin, who was like another younger sister, to suicide. Like Sharpe, I was not there when she died. I was in Texas working to finish my

dissertation while applying for academic jobs, dealing with the built-in stress of the graduate school process, and hoping that my eight-year journey from my BA to my PhD was worth the struggle and sacrifice. My graduate school experience was impacted by tremendous grief due to the death of close loved ones from start to finish, as well as the general anxieties that come from being a young Black woman in a predominantly White-serving institution (PWI), and the first in my family to pursue a PhD. Nevertheless, in the face of misogynoir, microaggressions, and grief, I persisted. In the end, I wound up accepting a postdoctoral teaching fellowship offer at a land-grant, research-intensive university in southwest Virginia that would begin a month after my dissertation defense. My memories about my interview process, however, are shrouded in the fog of the grief I was experiencing due to the loss of my sister-cousin only months before I received my interview invitation and flew out.

The postdoctoral teaching fellowship that I accepted was intended to bring in a diverse group of recent PhD graduates to this PWI and provide us the opportunity to teach for two years with a possibility of being moved to the tenure track in our postdoctoral department homes. Four positions were created the year I accepted my postdoc; the four, across the college of liberal arts and human sciences, became a cohort of sorts. Ten months into my postdoc in the department of sociology I was granted the opportunity to be moved to the tenure track and I accepted, the only one in my cohort of four to get this offer after only one postdoc year.

My academic transitions have been marked by grief at every step of the way. Loss upon loss due to the passing of those I loved seemed to be part and parcel of my journey, then COVID-19 hit, and all that I was negotiating became further complicated. Being a Black woman on the tenure track at a Research-1 institution is a privilege, as there are so few of us within these spaces, making our absence hypervisible while simultaneously rendering us invisible in several ways (Patton and Catching 2009). Black women faculty on college campuses and universities across the country, in PWIs

and in historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), to an extent, occupy a space of second-class citizenship, due largely to the patriarchal nature of academic environments (Esnard and Cobb-Roberts, 2018).

Colleges and universities across the country are continuously boasting their commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, though with limited definitions of each; these efforts tend to have the impact of oppressing those they are intended to serve (Ahmed 2012; Baldwin, Brown, & Brantuo 2023; Baldwin 2021). As noted by Ahmed (2012), colleges and universities are more concerned with issues of perception and generating the "right image" when it comes to efforts to diversifying college campuses in terms of race. Therefore, diversity "become[s] about *changing perceptions of whiteness rather than changing the whiteness of organizations*" (81). This manifests via initiatives and efforts around diversity, inclusion, and equity concerned with generating statistics of increased enrollments of racially marginalized students and faculty, as well as recruitment and retention data that meet a quota (Baldwin et al. 2023). The embedded racism and sexism that exists within academic spaces places Black women faculty in often precarious positions (Baldwin et al. 2023) making our experiences on the tenure track difficult, to say the least.

In this article I grapple with my lived experiences of grief as a Black woman on the tenure track as tied to microaggressions, misogynoir, and the COVID-19 global pandemic to highlight the struggles that Black women writ large must contend with. Grief is a term that many associate with experiences of trauma and loss, usually due to the death of someone close (Wade 2021). According to Merriam-Webster grief is a "deep and poignant distress caused by or as if by bereavement," and in this article I do focus on my experiences of grief as those tied to the death of loved ones as well as acquittances. I also focus on the specific experiences of anti-Black sexism, or *misogynoir*, to which Black women are subject (Bailey 2021), and racial microaggressions as the subtle (seemingly innocuous) verbal, nonverbal, or visual insults experienced by Black faculty and other faculty of color,

often committed unconsciously and unintentionally (Andrews 2015; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000). Anti-Blackness is foundational to the structure of the United States and her social institutions, including higher education (Sexton 2010; Bonner et al. 2015). Anti-Black racism and anti-Blackness are not only contextualized by "White-on-Black" racial oppression; they also include the relationship that exist between non-Black non-White folx and Black people in the U.S.

Black women's experiences in higher education are constricted by the imperialist, White-supremacist, sexist, heterosexist, capitalist, patriarchal system that makes up the foundation of our nation (hooks 1984). However, even as we struggle within the *ivory tower* due to our subordinated social location at the intersections of race, gender, class, and often sexuality as well, we find ways to survive and even thrive. This reality is what Cashawn Thompson meant when she popularized the notion of Black girls being magical. Thompson reflected that Black girls, and by extension Black women, are *magic* insofar as "our accomplishments might seem to come out of thin air, because a lot of times, the only people supporting us are other Black women" (Thomas 2015 n. p.). Thus, while this autoethnographic project is primarily concerned with grief, and the racialized and gendered systems of oppression that are existent within the academy, it is also a reflection of Black girl magic in progress.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My academic training began in earnest once I joined the Africana Studies department as an undergraduate student at the University of Northern Colorado, following two years of academic and personal struggle at the University of Pittsburgh. My successful transition to the PhD program in sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, months after finishing my bachelor's degree, placed me in a program that helped to further my knowledge and understanding of critical theories and forms of analysis. To situate my personal narrative within a larger context of

the struggles faced by Black women in the academy, particularly those of us who pursue a career on the tenure track, I draw on Black feminist and critical race theory to analyze my lived experiences. Black feminism and critical race theory as critical social theories provide necessary tools that seek the liberation of individuals from systemic forms of oppression (marbley et al. 2015). Critical race theory incorporates "transdisciplinary methodologies drawing upon theory, experiential knowledge and critical consciousness to illuminate and combat … institutional racism" (marbley et al. 2015, 56) and is being used more and more within work that critically examines the structures of the academy. Critical race theory has been used to highlight the continued prevalence of institutional racism within higher education, as well as bringing attention to the power differentials within the academy that marginalize people of color, women, and specifically Black women. Born out of radical theorist traditions, critical race theory learned from Black feminism the importance of examining marginalization not as single issues of race, gender, or class, but rather as cumulative forces.

Black feminist theory highlights the ways in which Black women faculty like me live within a double oppression of race and gender (Harris 2007) that often marks us as "outsiders-within" PWI higher educational spaces (Collins 2000). My lived experiences of racial microaggressions are tied to the gendered stereotypes attached to Black womanhood, including that of "the angry Black woman," and modern "Jezebel" (Collins 2000). As a Black woman faculty member whose work centers issues of race/racism as well as gender and sexuality within sports, higher education, and Black girlhoods, I have often felt others' doubt of my ability and position as an "expert" (Andrews 2015). "Real scholars" remain those who are perceived as White and male, adopting an "oppressive epistemological approach to research, teaching, and service" (Andrews 2015, 80): everything that I am not. Black feminist thought accounts for these experiences, allowing me to reflect on my life as a means of highlighting my right to produce

knowledge as a Black woman (Collins 2000). Black feminism and critical race theory provide frameworks through which I can explore my lived realities as part of a larger social context. So, while my autoethnographic project is a personal one, it too is political in its relationship to the broader social world.

LITERATURE: NAVIGATING ACADEMIC "WEATHER"

> Many African-American faculty members see themselves caught in a never-ending cycle of having to prove their competence as intellectuals. The literature on experience of minority professors shows that many believe that they must work twice as hard as other faculty to get half.
>
> —Fred A. Bonner II, 2004

Black faculty are underrepresented on college campuses across the country, making up 6.4% of assistant professors, 5.4% of associate professors, and 3.4% of full professors, despite being 13% of the U.S. population (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2010). While university and college campuses continue to champion notions of diversity, equity, and inclusion with respect to the hiring and retention of faculty of color in general, and Black faculty in particular, the increase in Black faculty has stagnated (Overstreet 2019). The academy remains a space that caters to the norms of Whiteness, such that university structures, policies, and procedures have not yet acclimated to an environment that supports a more heterogenous population (Overstreet, 2019). Among Black women who do gain entry to the professorate, we tend to experience environments that are hostile or "chilly" (Giles 2015) toward us, wherein we are subject to pay disparities and face barriers around tenure and promotion, ultimately contributing to high rates of attrition (Overstreet 2019).

More and more scholarship on the experiences of women of color and Black women within the professorate is bringing atten-

tion to these barriers (Harris, 2007; Overstreet 2019). There is still so much left to explore, however. Existing research speaks of *gendered racial battle fatigue* experienced by Black women faculty on the tenure track that result from our experiences of institutional and systemic (macro) and individual and classroom (micro) forms of aggression meant to put us "in our place," reminding us that we are not "real scholars" (Andrews 2015). The daily impact of these forms of raced-gendered oppression come at an emotional, physical, and psychological cost (Andrews 2015). This raced-gendered oppression that is a manifestation of deep-seated anti-Blackness manifests as "misogynoir" (Bailey 2021), making our time in the academy draining. Raced and gendered microaggressions have been broken down into micro- assaults, insults, and invalidations. *Micro-assaults* refer to the explicit racial verbal or nonverbal or environmental attacks; *micro-insults* occur when a verbal comment or action is rude, insensitive, or demeaning to one's racial heritage; while *micro-invalidations* are the acts that occur to degrade or exclude the perceptions, thoughts, and experiences of people of color (Moore 2015; Sue et al. 2007). Ultimately, all three work together for the purpose of attacking folks of color (Moore 2015).

In addition to the burden of these assaults, grief too can arise to make for a more difficult tenure-track experience. Research on the impact of grief because of bereavement remains limited, but the experience of grief due to the death of loved ones is a known facet of racial inequality (Umberson 2017; Umberson 2018). Black people in America encounter the death of a loved one at higher rates than our White peers, as we are three times more likely to experience the death of one or more family members by age 30, and 90% more likely to live through more loss due to the death of loved ones by age 60 (Umberson 2017). Familial loss undermines individual health and overall well-being via a complex interplay of social, psychological, and biological mechanisms (Umberson 2018). Specifically, the death of a loved one often contributes to psychological distress and anxiety which can negatively impact one's health and contribute to the creation of strain in remaining

social relationships (Umberson 2018). Social relationships remain a form of social capital and directly impact health and overall well-being (Umberson 2018), making research on grief from loss a necessary avenue of further study.

While a lack of close social relationship can take its toll on the emotional, physical, and psychological well-being of Black women in the academy, we cultivated ways of navigating this space through the creation of counter-spaces such as "sister-circles" (Barnette et al. 2011). Sister-circles offer support networks for Black women faculty built upon existing friendships, fictive kinship, and a sense of comradery that stems from being in close connection to other Black women navigating similar experiences (Barnett et al. 2011). The cultivation of sister-circles and other spaces that counter that dominant structures of racism and sexism within the academy, of Black women and other people of color, opportunities to find emotional and mental rest—a chance to breathe again. Without the kinship I discovered in sister-circles as a Black woman faculty member at a PWI, navigating grief within the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic along with experiences of microaggressions would not have been unbearable. What follows is a descriptive account of my autoethnographic approach to the examination of my personal navigation of microaggression, misogynoir, and grief within the academy as a tenure-track Black woman faculty member during a global pandemic.

PLACING MYSELF AT THE CENTER: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AS METHOD

Autoethnography foregrounds the personal experiences of the research to provide a deeper understanding and critical analysis of social contexts and constructs (Buggs 2017). Autoethnography makes possible the deconstruction of barriers that exist between researcher and subject, making it an ideal method for those who have lived through marginalization to be able to give voice to our stories (Buggs 2017). My approach to autoethnography as method

is tied to previous research done via scholarly personal narratives that allow for the articulation of my dual experiences of my personal and professional (academic) selves (Bonner et al. 2015). To do so, I attend to matters of positionality as both my worldview and the positions I adopt about research on the academy within its social and political context. My worldview is shaped by my beliefs about the nature of the social world as well as what we can know about it, and the ways that we interact with and relate to our environments. My positionality is shaped by my lived experiences as a Black woman from a precarious class background on the tenure track, and as the first to pursue a PhD in my immediate family. My positionality at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and (dis)ability all shape how I have approached this project and others I have conducted in the past. Autoethnography as method, grounded in Black feminist and critical race theories, allows for a reflexive and critical reading of my experiences on the tenure track that extol the reality of the personal as political. Thus, this autoethnographic project aims to build upon previous research conducted by Black women faculty navigating the tenure track (Andrews 2015; Overstreet 2019).

I place myself at the center of study, via Black feminist reflexive praxis, to offer a critical examination of journal entries, emails and other conversational exchanges with colleagues, friends, and acquittances, as well as comments made on my university's system of course evaluations—student's perceptions of teaching (SPOT) surveys. I have kept a journal since about the age of twelve, and in the past four years since my sister-cousin's suicide in January 2018, I have collected five journals, including free-form examples as well as more structured journals such as the Michelle Obama "Becoming Journal" that contain daily prompts. Using this material as data, I offer a personal account of my experiences with grief, microaggressions, and misogynoir as I have moved along the tenure track.

NAVIGATING THE TENURE TRACK: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section I focus on the themes of grief, microaggressions and misogynoir, and the global pandemic COVID-19 as aspects of my tenure-track journey. Being a Black woman at a PWI on the tenure track has been challenging to say the least. Revisiting old wounds, my reading and reflecting on my data has revived feelings of distress and anxiety in the face of multiple traumas; this process has also provided me a sense of catharsis, however. It is my hope that through my personal account other Black women on the tenure track will find affirmation of their lived experiences also.

Moving through the Fog: On Grief

My experiences of grief have been cyclical. My earliest memories of the death of a loved one come from witnessing my maternal grandfather's slow decline following a stroke when I was twelve years old. His death happened first slowly, then all at once, and left an imprint of death on memory. Death has been a visceral part of my life since that moment. The epigraph at the beginning of this article, "I wasn't there when my sister died," is a reality that has haunted me since my sister-cousin committed suicide in January 2018, just shy of what would have been her fourteenth birthday on February 13 of that year. I wasn't there. I was in the last few months of my doctoral journey in Texas, she was in North Carolina living under the weight of anxiety and depression that I was unaware of at the time; I have been navigating both conditions since my adolescence as well. The weight of her suicide was and remains heavy. My memory constantly returns to the drive from the Waffle House to the funeral home parking lot, where I promptly expelled my breakfast less than five hundred feet from where my sister-cousin's body lay in a casket. I still can no longer eat at the Waffle House.

Two months later in March 2018, I found myself in front of a room of students and faculty giving a teaching demo as part of

the application process for what would become my postdoctoral teaching fellowship position. I was in a haze of grief, a fog, my body operating on autopilot. Nevertheless, the interview process went well enough to land me the postdoc with a teaching load of two courses per semester, and a salary of $45,000 (before taxes), the most money that I had made in my life up until that point. Even with the salary, benefits, and security of a position, after defending my dissertation, grief remained my constant companion, lingering just below the surface. Ten months into my postdoc, an opportunity came for me to become part of the department of sociology as a tenure-track assistant professor. I accepted immediately. At paternal aunts passed in her sleep unexpectedly, cracking open my already fragile heart once again. Grief upon grief.

Then, in 2020, while navigating the COVID-19 global pandemic along with the rest of the world, still reeling from the sudden losses of my sister-cousin and aunt, more death and more grief followed. On September 13, 2020, I learned of the sudden death of a high school friend from a Facebook group page. She had died suddenly in a car crash, and memories of our friendship and my time in Pullman, Washington came flooding back. Though we had lost touch after high school, she and I had been close. The suddenness of her death hit me like a ton of bricks, reminding me of the fragility of life. One moment we are in and of the world, living, breathing, and dreaming of our futures; then in an instant we become memories (if we are lucky enough to be remembered). My grief continued and was compounded by recurring experiences of death and loss. Only a month after the death of my high school friend, another good friend from undergrad had his world rocked when his infant son—a twin—died suddenly in his sleep in October 2020. My journal entries from that time are sporadic, disjointed ramblings that highlight the extent of my grief and feelings of anxiety and depression. I ached for my friend, for his wife, for the twin girl and older sister that remained. The funeral for my friend's son was my first via Zoom. It would not, however, be my last.

Given the restrictions on travel due to the global pandemic, funerals and other occasions become virtual experiences for many of us, a new way of navigating a shared grieving experience. For me, the Zoom experience of funerals felt somewhat hollow, reminding me of my distance physically and emotionally from those who were grieving as I was grieving, unable to reach out to them for physical comfort. This lack of contact became heightened for me on December 8, 2020, when I found that my paternal grandfather had died in his sleep. At 84 years old, and with health concerns, his passing was something that had lingered in the back of my mind. The moment of his passing, however, still hit me as suddenly as the other losses I had experienced. My heart was ripped wide open. I was unable to attend his funeral in person in Colorado due to the pandemic and my status as COVID-positive, so Zoom was how I watched his memorial. Watching via Zoom, with an unsteady connection, and technical difficulties on my end and in the church where his funeral was held, created a new form of grief that I had yet to experience. Virtual grieving is complex; it left me feeling disconnected and out of breath. In the years to come, research on grief and mourning should take into consideration how the global pandemic shifted the ways in which we have been able to grieve and mourn.

You Don't Look Like a Professor: Microaggressions and Misogynoir.

Microaggressions are the everyday encounters of belittlement experienced by racially marginalized groups (Sue et al. 2007) including Black women faculty. While these encounters are often subtle, including disparaging looks and comments that on the surface appear innocuous, they accumulate over time and can contribute to feelings of social isolation and an overall lack of support (Clark et al. 2012). For Black women, microaggressions must be contextualized by the raced, gendered, and classed tropes associated with Black womanhood. Patricia Hill Collins termed stereotypes such as the modern Jezebel and angry Black woman

"controlling images," highlighting the power of representational politics in shaping the lived experiences of Black women (Crenshaw 1991). Microaggressions experienced due to controlling images are reflective of what Moya Bailey (2021) calls "misogynoir," or the specific form of anti-Black sexism experienced by Black women. My experiences of microaggressions occurred in various ways. I have encountered subtle (and not so subtle) remarks about my hair, my intellectual ability, and ultimately my right to occupy the space of "expert" and "scholar."

The singular phrase that has continuously followed me as I navigate the tenure track is one that I'm sure has been shared by other Black women faculty: "You don't look like a professor." Even with the changing race and gender dynamics of colleagues and universities through programs aimed at increasing faculty of color, the image of "the professor" remains one that is White and male. Even a quick Google search of "What does a professor look like?" pulls up images of White men in jackets with elbow patches. For Black women in the academy, the refrain "you don't look like a professor" drips with the venom of misogynoir, as it seeks to undermine our credentials and right to occupy space within the professorate. I have experienced first-hand through face-to-face encounters as well as anonymous comments made on my SPOT surveys this form of misogynoir. Students' perceptions of teaching have consistently been shown to benefit faculty who are perceived as normative to the structure of the academy: cis White men fare better than Black women, women, and other faculty of color (Bawso, Codos, and Martin 2013).

In addition to comments about my physical appearance as existing outside of the normative idea of what a professor looks like, my experiences of microaggressions include the failure of people to acknowledge my credentials and expertise. Conversations on social media platforms such as Twitter bring up the ways in which Black women faculty are not acknowledged as holding the status of "doctor" even when we hold doctorates. Students and others call Black women faculty by first name rather than "Dr." in

email correspondence and in face-to-face interactions. The failure to acknowledge Black women as "Dr." highlights the raced, gendered, and classed perceptions that individuals hold about what a "real scholar" looks like (Andrews 2015). My own experiences of being called by my first name or by Mrs./Ms. in email correspondence as well as face-to-face, rather than by my earned title, has been a continuous micro-assault, a constant reminder that I am an "outsider-within" the White space of the academy (Collins 2000).

Troubled Waters: Navigating the Academy in the Wake of COIVD-19.

January 2020 marked the beginning of my second semester on the tenure track. That semester also marked the beginning of the COVID-19 global pandemic. My university, like others across the country, extended breaks (spring break in our case) for courses to be transitioned from in-person to virtual, to try and combat the virus. Still relatively new to solo teaching in my tenure-track journey, the adjustment was a rocky one. We were launched into troubled waters. As a Black woman in the academy, my status as "other" places me in a constant struggle to prove my competence at every turn (Basow et al. 2013). In-class interactions often resulted in students' surprised faces when I introduced myself as "Dr. Brown," with someone always skeptical whether I had finished my doctorate or whether I was a graduate student instructor. The question was asked more than once. My Blackness, my "young face," and my womanhood challenged many students' dominant ideas of what a "real professor" looked like.

Though the mainstream rhetoric has sought to position the global pandemic as a great equalizer, it in fact has highlighted the preexisting inequalities felt by those of us outside of the dominant culture. Academic and lay studies confirmed that women, as well as minoritized racial and ethnic communities were among those to be hardest hit by the pandemic, many of us occupying the status of "essential workers," and thereby functioning on the front.

While my position as an assistant professor at a major university insulated me from some of the more devastating effects of the

pandemic—such as layoffs, loss of wages, loss of insurance, and other consequences—it could not insulate me from everything. As a Black woman, I experienced first-hand how COVID ravaged the Black community. I was personally exposed to COVID-19 and battled the effects for months. All the while, the world around me was in turmoil. The U.S. was witnessing more racial inequality in the form of state-sanctioned police violence in the wake of multiple deaths of unarmed Black victims, each of which took their toll on my psyche. I struggled to navigate feelings of stress, grief, sickness, and exposure to microaggressions all the while having to maintain a consistent level of productivity with respect to research, teaching, and service. The struggle was real.

On March 13, 2020, the prompt in my "Becoming Journal" read "how do you connect with your community," giving me the space to reflect on my experiences up to that point. I wrote,

> I feel so connected to my department community. We have a regular spot where we have meetings, and the serving staff knows my regular order and everything. However, now we're in the midst of a crisis, COVID-19. I'm supposed to teach online moving forward. I'm not going to have face-to-face interactions. I am better face-to-face [when teaching]…I would ask my colleague, X, but we are no longer on the best of terms…I will do my best to keep my student's community intact. I know that my race and ethnicity class has pre-arranged PowerPoints and quizzes which is helpful, but I'm less confident when it comes to my social inequality course.

With the sudden shift to online teaching and learning mid-semester, even with the extra week tacked on at the end of spring break to prepare, I felt inadequate. I'm sure this feeling was experienced by others. Nevertheless, to my surprise, my SPOT scores from that semester were not nearly as horrible as I had anticipated. I received a 5.23/6 for my race and ethnicity course and a 4.96/6 for social inequality, compared to the department average

score of 5.24 and the college average score of 5.38, with respect to my "overall teaching effectiveness." While course evaluations remain skewed measures for Black women faculty, they are what we have as reference to our performance and aptitude.

Teaching during that first semester of the pandemic was difficult. Not only that, the necessity of maintaining a rigorous research and service agenda added to my experiences of anxiety and depression. My mental health was in shambles. Nevertheless, another journal entry from my "Becoming Journal," dated March 25, 2020, prompted me to list five small victories that I had accomplished. Those victories included 1) I had finished a draft of a paper on Black men, faith, food, and health from my dissertation data that I intended to submit to a special call for papers in *The Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 2) a co-authored book chapter with a graduate student was accepted for inclusion in an edited volume, 3) I participated in a study to support a graduate student's research, 4) I attended a university virtual happy hour event in my role as Secretary of our university's Black Faculty and Staff Caucus, and 5) I had a virtual therapy session. That my "victories" were so heavily tied to collegiate productivity does not escape me. However, my heart is gladdened by the knowledge that I leaned into self-care in the form of therapy and virtual social events during such a difficult time.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Navigating the tenure track as a Black woman is no easy feat. We are faced with structural as well as interpersonal barriers related to our lived experiences at the intersections of race, class, and gender. My autoethnography has attempted to highlight various barriers and struggles to bring attention to some lived experiences of Black women faculty. This project has covered only four years of grief; that my cousin's son was murdered in October 2021, at eighteen, will have a lasting impact on my life for years to come. Grief is a part of my life, as much and often more than anything else. Yet the grief isn't the only thing that holds me. The magic that

exists within the shared spaces of my sister-circles, for instance, gives me moments of respite—opportunities, to breathe again.

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