

Othermothering: A Personal Narrative Exploring Relationships between Black Female Faculty and Students

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Abstract

As a Black female faculty member with teaching experience at a historically Black university, I describe through personal narrative methodology my experience with othermothering, student-teacher relationships, and unwritten institutional policy. I focus on expectations that students have regarding faculty and institutional support and those that Black female faculty members impose on themselves. I also question the value and impact of othermothering as a practice.

Introduction

I was a new faculty member at a predominantly White university (PWI) after having taught for three years at a historically Black university (HBCU). At this PWI I was invited to a party celebrating the new Women's and Gender Studies Department at my new institution. One of my fellow colleagues who recently learned that I previously taught at the HBCU asked me: "What's it like teaching at an HBCU?"

At this point, I found myself talking about the passion and dedication of my former students, my still, close relationships with my students, and their recent accomplishments. When I talked about my former students and institution, I still referred to them as "we," although I am at a different university. My colleague leaned forward, intently listening to my rendition of being a Black, female faculty member teaching at an HBCU. She then commented after my detailed story, "See, that's why I couldn't teach at an HBCU. They [the students] are too much like me. I am afraid that I would not be able to set boundaries, and

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I will be fielding calls at night.” I laughed at this immediate reaction because my fellow Black colleague was right. I had, and still do, receive calls at night from my former students needing assistance on assignments or advice about situations occurring at home.

There is an identity shift when teaching at an HBCU, as their general make-up and overall mission are very different from predominantly White institutions (PWIs). HBCUs are rooted deep within the Black African American experience for the plight of educational attainment. The notion of education as a racial “uplift” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Guiffrida, 2005; Perkins, 1989; Stanford, 1997) was and still is the current concept for many Black institutions such as HBCUs. Jean-Marie (2006) explains that HBCUs were established under a three-fold mission:

First, they provided education to newly freed slaves that, was in Black history and tradition. Second, they delivered educational experiences that were consistent with the experiences and values of many Black families. Thirdly, they provided a service to the Black community and the country by aiding in the development of leadership, racial pride, and return service to the community (p. 87).

These traditions of the HBCU mission are predicated upon the concept of care. Historically, the emphasis on care in Black American run schools (St. John & Cadray, 2004) was that care is a form of social justice to empower Black people through education (Roseboro & Ross, 2009; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004). Siddle Walker and Tompkins (2004) explain that schools, prior to desegregation, had an institutionally engrained concept that the principals and teachers act as caregivers. In essence, “caring thus was not focused on one area of the child’s life only, but was a type of caring in which the one who cared was willing to explore the plethora of concerns that could affect the child’s performance” (p. 90). Schools that are centered in the Black experience are focused on the whole development of the child through the ethic of care, where the teacher was concerned about the cognitive, physical, and psychological needs of the student (Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004). Noddings (1988, 2005) argues that the ethic of care is maternal in nature, can be connected to the “mother-child prototype” (p. 219), and that the responsibility as caregiver often falls onto the teacher. This parable is a suitable connection to Black feminist concepts.

In the Black community, the ethic of care is generated from a historical and theoretical framework of "othermothering" (Collins, 2000). The community, in this case the educators, act as extended family (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999) and take on mothering responsibilities (Collins, 2000). The concept of othermothering grew out of a survival mechanism during slavery when children and biological parents were separated at auction, and "fictive kin" would take on mothering responsibilities for the orphaned children (Case, 1997; Guiffrida, 2005; Hirt, Amelink, McFeeters, & Strayhorn, 2008). Collins (2000) explains that Black teachers often continue this tradition of othermothering with "mothering the minds" of their Black students (p. 191), and the educators take on familial roles (Foster, 1993; Loder, 2005). Moreover, research has shown that, "The notion of the ethic of care based in the othermothering framework permeates the atmosphere of HBCUs" (Hirt, et al., 2008, p. 228).

Using this theoretical framework, I examine my othermothering role as a Black tenure-track Assistant Professor at an HBCU. Specifically, I describe how my relationships with Black students were familial in nature and explore how the framework of othermothering led me to acknowledge a feeling of guilt based on my perception that no matter how much attention I gave to students, that attention was not enough; I seemed unable to work hard enough to provide support my students needed to succeed in college. Ultimately, the guilt associated with the deep ethic of care and othermothering took a financial and emotional toll on my personal life, which generated the question: When does caring as a teacher become too much?

Theoretical Framework

The historical notion of othermothering (Collins, 2000) has progressed into the school environment. There have been numerous studies that had looked at how Black teachers use the theoretical framework of othermothering and care toward Black students as a pedagogical practice within the classroom (Foster, 1993; Guiffrida, 2005; Loder, 2005; Roseboro & Ross, 2009; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004; St. John & Cadray, 2004) or HBCU institution (Hirt, et al., 2008). Roseboro and Ross (2009) explain the nature of the relationship of othermothering for Black women teachers: "They must do so in ways which complicate traditional perceptions of teaching and care; for Black women, 'othermothering' and transgressive teaching demand an ethic of care that is both defensive and proactive, embodied and performed, private and public" (p. 21). There is much fluidity that occurs in the relationship, which often blurs and complicates the boundaries of traditional teacher-student relationships. This evokes the question, "What are the expectations of each party in the teacher-

student relationship when the theory of othermothering and care is part of the pedagogical practice?"

On the other hand, relational expectations concerning othermothering and care have not been a main focus in the literature. The exception is Vogt's (2002) study that looked at thirty-two teachers in Switzerland and England and the ways that they demonstrated care in the classroom. Six ways of caring were identified: (a) caring as commitment; (b) caring as relatedness, which is defined as approachability and relationship building with the student; (c) caring as physical care, assisting when a child is physically sick; (d) caring as a cuddly teacher, providing a physical expression of care, such as a hug; (e) caring as parenting; and (f) caring as mothering.

Using some of Vogt's findings, coupled with my own implementation of othermothering, I argue that there are compartments of care that feed into the relational expectations between teacher and student. In my pedagogical practice of othermothering, there are various expectations of myself as teacher that are self-made but also produced out of student expectations (Guiffrida, 2005). There are five constant expectations I keep as a teacher:

1. **Pedagogical Commitment.** The teacher's role is to insure that learning is occurring in the classroom. There is a commitment to providing extended time and care in creating lessons, while also setting high and achievable academic standards.
2. **Relatedness.** Similar to Vogt's (2002) work, relatedness is the approachability of the teacher and providing time for building the relationship. In my case of othermothering, race plays an added role of relatability.
3. **Advocacy.** Often connected to relatedness, advocacy is the teacher being the voice for the student when needed.
4. **Expression of Care.** The teacher shows care of the student and the relationship through emotional and physical expression. Emotional expression is through providing genuine praise. Physical expression is through giving hugs when needed, connected to Vogt's (2002) definition of a cuddly teacher.
5. **Financial.** The teacher providing the resources needed for the student. This can be for support inside and outside the classroom.

I have only one expectation for students in my othermothering process—academic commitment. Students are expected to produce their best work and effort for all of their classes. This rule not only applies to my class, but to all

of their academic obligations. I often follow up to ensure that the student is meeting this expectation.

In my experience, the disproportionate number of commitments on the part of the teacher created an imbalance of expectations between the teacher and student that mirrored the imbalance often present in parent and child relationships. I believed that the more teacher expectations are placed on the student, the more assurance there is that the students' academic success will occur. Further, just as other researchers report, I continue to contribute to this imbalance of othermothering because I believed it provides needed educational racial uplift (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Guiffrida, 2005; Perkins, 1989; Stanford, 1997). James (2010) argues that the inequity in the relational expectations often makes othermothering and care in teaching self-sacrificing. She explains that the mothering aspect of teaching can take an emotional, physical, and I would add, financial toll on the teachers. Further, she reports that her research suggests that when teachers put their needs first, other colleagues would view that teacher as selfish.

The self-sacrificing nature of othermothering often brings in the elements of lack of self-care. Roseboro and Ross (2009) refer to this concept as "care-sickness" that can often occur with Black women educators when they are just tired from caring too much. I argue that the lack of self-care from care-sickness is fueled by the generation of guilt that occurs among teachers feeling as if they are not providing enough within the teacher-student relational expectations.

Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) identified a theoretical connection between care and guilt. They argued that there are four professional and motivational aspects of teaching that generate guilt, "the commitment to goals of care and nurturance, the open-ended nature of the job, the pressures of accountability and intensification, and the persona of perfectionism" (p. 496). The nature of the profession then leads into guilt entrapment—the stronger the care, the stronger the guilt. Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) explain that, "the more important that care is to a teacher, the more emotionally devastating is the experience of failing to provide it. In this respect, the more one cares, the more susceptible to depressive guilt one is likely to be" (p. 496). In this case, depressive guilt is when a teacher feels that they are not meeting or attending to the needs of their students. For example, a teacher who is severely sick might still come into work because he or she does not want to abandon the students by taking a sick day. This personal narrative highlights how my relational expectations as a teacher were enacted and how my self-sacrificing behavior led me to my feelings of depressive guilt.

Method

Black feminists have often used the methodology of autoethnography in order to generate theories about one's self (McClaurin, 2001). Autoethnography, as framed by Ellis (2004), is "writing about the personal and its relationship to culture," while the author "look[s] through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations" (p. 37). The concept of autoethnography is understanding that the use of self is never secondary, but often woven into one's scholarship (McClaurin, 2001).

Procedure

I use the conceptual ideas of autoethnography combined with Nash's (2004) methodology of scholarly personal narrative where the personal is used to explore the notion of othermothering and guilt as experienced by teachers. Nash makes an appeal to faculty and scholars in schools of education to use more scholarly personal narrative in order to connect to concepts within teaching. He unites the idea behind the pedagogical practice to storytelling:

Good teaching, good helping, and good leadership are, in one sense, all about storytelling and story-evoking. It is in the mutual exchange of stories that professionals and scholars are able to meet clients and students where they actually live their lives. It is in the mutual sharing of our personal stories, particularly in the willingness of professionals, and they, as students, can actually profess what we believe and hear what others profess to believe. Our stories get us closer to knowing who we are and who they are (p. 2).

The scholarly personal narrative helps faculty, like me, to unearth my professional stories in order to make sense of the larger pedagogical picture.

Data

Autoethnography and personal narrative are employed in this piece to connect my stories of othermothering with my college students. The use of memory and journals were referenced to reconstruct these stories. The narrative is used with the ethical truth (Nash, 2004) as relaying the accuracy of the facts without deceit and dishonesty, in essence, being just as caring and mothering to the data as I would to my students.

Findings

The Evolution of a Name: Becoming Family

“Mom! Mom!” A student started screaming down the hallway of our departmental office complex. “Mom! Are you here?” My ears immediately perked up to this call. I knew that Mom referred to myself. Interestingly enough, I was not a mother. At the time, I was a 30-year-old Black female Assistant Professor (tenure-track) with no children. I was certainly not old enough to have a 21-year-old child, but my students argued otherwise. To them, I was called mom because that was how they viewed me. The term, mom, acknowledged my roll to the students, but it was also used in a tongue-in-cheek manner, as I was clearly too young to be my students’ mother. Yet, every time I was called mom, it would warm my heart. The familial term, to me, showed how my students valued our working relationship. Collins (2000) discusses that the use of familial language in othermothering to explain the ties that bind within the Black community. With my students, it was made clear that I played a mother role. This evolution of being called mother continued to progress over the years.

One day, my class and I were finishing a semester long service-learning project at a high school in Philadelphia. We debriefed the project with the high school students, while having a pizza party in order to thank them for their hard work. After the high school students left for their next class, my college students were laughing in the back of the classroom. Curious, I approached the group in the back. My student, Dashawn², stated, “Okay, we finally got your ‘hood name³.”

Bethany added, “Oh, you are going to love this, Doc! It took us all day to figure it out, but we got it.”

“Let’s hear it,” I replied.

“You ready for this?” Dashawn announced, as he knew he was on stage, “Drumroll, please!” All of the college students started banging on the desk, and slowly started to crescendo the beat. Dashawn took a deep breath and stated loudly and clearly, “Mama Fefe!” My students and I laughed hysterically. When I finally caught my breath, I asked, “Mama Fefe, huh?”

² All names are pseudonyms in order to provide anonymity.

³ In this example, “‘hood name” is slang to refer to a nickname that would be used by people in the neighborhood.

Dashawn explained, "Yeah, get it? Mama because you are our mom and Fefe because, you like cats." To this group of college students, the name Mama Fefe was used as a deeper term of endearment. I would often get emails and text messages addressed to Mama Fefe. This nickname, aside from always generating a good laugh from me, also gave me a feeling of connectedness to my students. It demonstrated how well they knew me (i.e., my love for animals), but also it showed me their affection toward our working relationship. This use of an affectionate name is seen with various examples of othermothering. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) found in her study of Black women teachers, that students tended to also give affectionate names, like Momma Hawk.

Not only was my relationship as mother known in the college community, but it was also known to the blood-mothers of my college students. After the end of spring semester, I received a call from my student, Carlton, concerning summer courses he wanted to take at his local community college. In the middle of the conversation, his mother's voice in the background asked, "Who are you talking to, [Carlton]?"

Carlton answered, "It's my second mom?"

His mother immediately replied in the background, "Oh, hi Dr. Mawhinney!" Carlton's mom, as well as other bloodmothers, acknowledged me as an othermother. I would always feel a connection to my students and their families when they would acknowledge my role as othermother. Considering the historical roots of othermothering, acknowledgement of the othermothers in the Black community is quite common (Case, 1997; Collins, 2000; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004). What was interesting in this evolution of being referred to as a mother was how I started to also address myself as the same. I would catch myself saying statements in class like, "Your papers are due next class. You know Mama don't take papers late!" or, "Mama's proud of how you all did on the quiz."

For my students, my familial name was recognition of my othermothering role and responsibilities. The name generated from the relational expectation I set for myself as a teacher, and the students' reinforced those expectations within the name. Being called mother identified my relationship with my students, but it also identified my expectations to outsiders or other prospective students.

Yet, this student-driven mother identity also complicated my relationships with students. For example, one of my student's⁴ grades started to fall during the semester. One evening, I called the student into my office.

"Okay, seriously, what is going on?" I hastily asked.

"I'm really struggling. I shared some special information with someone I trusted two weeks ago, and now it is all over campus," the student explained. After taking a minute, the student continued, "I really trusted [a friend], but now I feel I have no one to turn to after what happened. [The friend] told everyone that I, I," The student stopped and let the thought go. I tried to finish it, "That you're gay?" I decided to throw that out there, since it was something that I had suspected for a long time. I braced myself hoping I did not offend the student with my blunt statement.

"Bi-sexual," the student interjected, but looked relieved as the information was finally out in the open.

"Okay, why was that so hard to tell me?" I asked more out of curiosity, as it was known among my students that I was an advocate for gay rights.

The student explained, "Because you're, like, my mom. It was like I had to come out to my mom for the first time. That's pretty hard, you know!" The student and I talked for a long time about how to cope with the current situation, but I stepped away thinking about how my familial relationship as mother complicated the openness of the situation between the student and me. I was emotionally hurt that the student felt troubled talking to me about sexuality, when I would pride myself on my role as advocate for students. On the other hand, I had to understand that being viewed as a mother also came with other complications concerning students' openness with me. Yet, after the admission of the student's sexuality, there was an immediate need to activate my othermothering responsibilities of relatedness and expression of care. This was often done with my students through office conversations.

"I Need to Talk to You," and Other Office Conversations with Mama Fefe

"Mom! Are you here?" the shouts continued in the hallway.

"I'm in my office!" I yelled back to the student. Corrin bolted around the corner, and walked into my tiny office. "Good, I need to talk to you." She proceeded to help herself to a chair and sat down next to me, as she had done

⁴ Due to the highly personal nature of the material in this situation, the student's gender and the omission of a pseudonym is purposeful identity protection.

numerous times before. Most of my conversations with students started with the phrase, "I need to talk to you." For all of my students, this was a prompting phrase to segue into the specific teacher expectations they needed to activate.

Ultimately, my office became a safe space where students knew that they could activate the five components of the teacher-student relational expectations. If they needed assistance on proofreading a paper for my class or another professor's class, they would come to the office. If they needed food because they had run out of money on their student dining hall account, they would come to my office. On the other hand, the office conversations were primarily used for talking through personal issues.

The office was a safe space to vent serious concerns or issues with students that had nothing to do with academics. It was a space where students could receive an expression of care. Students would discuss their concerns about being pregnant, confusions about cheating in their personal relationships, fights they had with roommates, or deeper concerns about friends. I provided a sounding board for the students through relatedness and expression of care. For them, it was motherly advice, but for me it was also an aspect of my pedagogical commitment. I felt that students' lives could affect their academics, and if I could support them emotionally, this would ensure that they could fulfill their academic commitment.

The safe space of the office and my relational expectations to students became evident to other faculty. This acknowledgment of my mothering role led one of my colleagues to refer a student of his to me because, as he said, he believed that I could provide relatedness and expression of care to some of the student's personal circumstances. Although she was not a student in one of my classes, I enacted othermothering in my relationship with her. We would have two-hour conversations in my office in order to satisfy her need to express her thoughts.

The office conversations were also a place where students knew they could come to me for advocacy. The role of the teacher and othermother is to advocate for students' needs, which is quite common for non-White faculty (Mitchell, 1998). If there were problems working through institutional red tape, students would come to my office for help. I often advocated for students in areas like financial aid for loan assistance and within academic departments to work through course-related issues.

The office conversations were a vital element of my relationship with students; they became increasingly time-consuming. Days that I was on campus and not teaching a class, I had students in my office from nine o'clock in the morning to roughly eight o'clock at night. It was not unusual for me and some of my colleagues to have a steady stream of students at our doors throughout the day. The institutional framework of othermothering at HBCUs (Hirt, et al., 2008), and in some cases otherfathering, were continually activated in faculty offices. Our students, like students at other HBCUs, expected us to be available (Guiffrida, 2005). However, othermothering often came with a price.

Care-sickness and Depressive Guilt

The othermothering was not a unique concept to HBCUs. Although there were certain relational expectations between my students and me, other faculty also had various relational expectations with their students. There is an embedded sense of duty (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Guiffrida, 2005) among HBCU faculty. The cultural norm of othermothering also creates an environment where the students accept this type of relationship as an expectation and not the exception (Hirt, et al., 2008). Hirt, et al. explains that those who aspire to teach in HBCUs need to establish a personal and nurturing relationship with students. This continued connectedness to students often prevents faculty from becoming numb to their students' circumstances (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002). On the other hand, the missing element of this equation is the emotional toll on faculty.

Roseboro and Ross (2009) discuss the notion of "care-sickness," particularly among Black women educators. They argue that Black women educators care because they "equate work with care believing that work connects them to the larger community and provides the social and political avenues to affect change" (Roseboro & Ross, 2009, p. 35). Since care is central to othermothering, the idea of care is normative to the profession. Since care and teaching run parallel, what can happen is that care-sickness can evolve from simply being tired of caring too much.

I argue, from the perspective of my particular situation, that care-sickness started to set in due to the emotion of guilt I associated with my relational expectations to my students. As mentioned previously, Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) theorized how the act of teaching can generate guilt entrapment. The stronger teachers care in the profession, the stronger the sense of guilt is emotionally developed in teachers. They further specify that guilt entrapment can create a specific guilt they call depressive guilt (when a teacher feels that they are not meeting or attending to the needs of their students).

In my case, the othermothering relationships created depressive guilt (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991). This depressive guilt generated from feeling like I could not do enough. I could not take back their pain of a personal conflict. I would hit walls advocating for them in the institution's hierarchy that I could not find a way around. This depressive guilt was also my drive for continued advocacy of my students, but it had emotional and financial repercussions. This situation came to a head during my final two years teaching at the HBCU.

Mama Pays for College

During my second year at the HBCU, I was asked to become director of an early admissions program at the institution. This administrative position assignment was in addition to my responsibilities as a tenure-track Assistant Professor. I was expected to continue to teach four classes a semester; I was also required to publish and provide service to the college. The early admissions program invited junior and senior high school students to take classes at the college where they simultaneously earned high school and college credit. The college credit they earned could be transferred to any university they eventually chose to attend. I was brought in to replace the former director who left the institution to take another position. Before he left, he had enrolled about 20 students into the program for the fall. I worked hard over the summer to create the fall program for incoming high school students. My responsibilities required me to create the courses, hire faculty to teach the courses, market the program to schools, recruit high school students, and handle all administrative tasks related to the program.

The program was funded by a state grant funneled through the students' school district. As I worked over the summer, I quickly realized that the budgeted funds would not cover the costs of running the program. There were not even enough funds to pay my staff or myself. This situation activated my othermothering (Collins, 2000) instincts even though I never even met the student participants face-to-face. Interestingly, I found myself in a similar predicament when I worked for a high school program at a nearby university several years earlier. A few years into the program, the university shut down the program to those high schoolers. The students that were promised (and counting on) scholarship funds for attending the program were subsequently denied the scholarships.

Emotionally, the experience was devastating to me. Students' college dreams were affected by the closing of the program and depressive guilt developed as I was not able to stop the situation. I knew that I could not emotionally go

through another experience like those in earlier years. As director of a similar program, I felt responsible for assuring that "the rug" was not pulled from under these students. My depressive guilt (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991) was fueled by this situation, and I was simply at a crossroads—either let the system deprive these urban students of promised support, or find a way to run the program.

I made a decision at the crossroads, and my credit card and I funded the program. It was a very difficult decision. However, I made it based on relational expectations. I believe that in my role as othermother, I was expected to provide a way to support the program so the students could earn their college credit. I decided that the needs of my students were more important than my own needs (James, 2010). The program I created for these students ran well, and they received the expected academic benefits and college credit. Unfortunately, the decision I made as an othermother had a personal detrimental impact. I was \$9,000 in credit card debt, which generated financial strains in all areas of my life. After the first year of the program, the university eventually began to provide the funds needed to support the program. However, I went almost seven months without being paid my Director's salary. With limited income and major financial debt, I was forced to look for a new place of employment with higher pay in order to get myself out of debt.

Sadly, from my perspective, I determined that the HBCU fostered this instance of othermothering. It ultimately neglected and abandoned faculty, in this case myself who acted as the othermother. Institutional priorities as reflected in this case, placed its responsibility to faculty and students second to other needs. Ironically, my decision to leave the HBCU generated depressive guilt (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991); I felt I was neglecting and abandoning my college students by leaving the institution. They were not aware of my responsibilities for the early admissions program. My othermother-related expectations regarding the program ultimately impacted our teacher-student relationship. I felt I had to transition out of the HBCU and out of my role as their teacher.

The day came at the end of the school year when I had to tell my college students that I was leaving the HBCU. I placed fliers around the building advertising for my students to come have pizza and conversation with me. About 30 of my closest students showed up for the meeting in a small room. The students started coming to the meeting in small groups prior to the meeting's start time.

“Ummm. You know I love pizza Doc!” expressed Jada.

“This is true!” I replied. Then speaking to everyone: “Grab your pizza and then let’s sit and talk.”

“Just like a family,” stated Christian. The irony of this statement was that this was just like a family meeting and activating our familial roles (Foster, 1993; Loder, 2005). Mama Fefe was about to divorce the HBCU, and I needed to discuss how this decision would affect my relationship with my students.

After everyone got their pizza and started to eat, I explained, “So, I wanted to talk to you all about something.” I began to explain why I was leaving, what I would be doing, and what this meant for our relationship. I was crying, and my emotions got the best of me. My tears represented the emotional depressive guilt I felt about the situation. I felt that by leaving I was, in some way, abandoning my students. I perceived the situation to be that I was not keeping my unstated promise to see them through to the completion of their degrees.

During the meeting, a number of my students were hysterically crying. Others said they were shocked by the news. Some students put the news of my leaving on Twitter. Faculty members and students came into the room after reading the Twitter feed to verify the news of my leaving. Ultimately, I believe that my students gave their blessings and understood that I had to move on to another institution. However, as they accepted the fact of my leaving, our relationship changed. Some students seemed to pull away emotionally as if they were feeling abandoned. Some expressed denial and refused to talk about my leaving. Of these, two would start to cry when they crossed my path a week after the announcement.

The depressive guilt described by Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) from this situation was strong as I felt my decision to support my high school students caused me to pay a very high price for my relationship with my college students. The concept of othermothering (Collins, 2000) was generated out of this idea to support orphaned slave children (Case, 1997; Guiffrida, 2005; Hirt, et al., 2008). I felt that I was making my college students into orphans. In reality, I knew that there were other faculty members at the HBCU that supported them with the same expectations. Othermothering has deep historical roots in HBCU and Black schooling institutions (Hirt, et al., 2008; Roseboro & Ross, 2009; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004; St. John & Cadray, 2004). Still, I could not help but think that I was hurting my students by leaving them behind.

It is a mix of the ethic of care (Noddings, 1988, 2005), depressive guilt (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991), and my expectations as a teacher that still has me coming back to the HBCU. A former colleague had asked me to conduct his class when he attended a conference. Although the drive is two hours away from my new institution, I agreed to use my day off to act as his substitute instructor for the class. It is this same mixture of emotions and expectations that makes me field calls at 10 p.m. on a Saturday night from a student requesting assistance in writing a paper for class.

The additional relational expectations and presence of depressive guilt contribute to the self-sacrificing nature of many faculty members at HBCUs. Fries-Britt and Kelly (2005) point out how faculty at HBCUs go beyond the call of duty, Hirt, et al. (2008) calls for HBCU faculty to continue establishing nurturing relationships, but at what price? The othermothering theoretical framework at HBCUs does not account for how problematic the development of depressive guilt (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991) can be on faculty. It seems like the ethic of care (Noddings, 1988, 2005) can quickly turn into an issue of lack of self-care and care-sickness for the teachers.

Where's The Boundary? Othermothering at a PWI

Currently, I am in a tenure-track position at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). I approached this new position wanting to set more definitive boundaries between self-care and other-care. Yet, I had not (and still have not) established what that boundary would look like in action. I do not host a stream of students in my office as I did at the HBCU. The students who do come to talk with me are those who take classes with me and are primarily Black American and Puerto Rican pre-service teachers. They come to share their struggles in their personal lives or their frustrations with the lack of diversity on campus. They come to discuss issues of race in their field experiences. My students say they see my office as a safe space for discussion. Interestingly, the discussion usually revolves around race, as my students feel they can only discuss these issues with me as one of only a few Black professors.

At times, I also find myself going out of the way for my students. For example, during the winter break, one of my Black students, Felicia, forgot an important book needed for class. Unfortunately, this was not a book she could get from the library. Also, she did not have the funds to re-purchase the book even if she could afford to take the train to campus to get it. Thus, I ended up driving an hour and a half from my home to hers so that she could borrow a personal copy of the book. Felicia expressed her thanks to me for getting the

book to her. The fact that she asked me to do this suggests that she felt relatively sure that this was a request to which I would respond willingly. She knew that she could come to me with this issue. My response to Felicia's and similar requests, demonstrates that my othermothering is still enacted in the context of my current employment at the PWI. At the HBCU, the othermothering framework was an institutional expectation from all faculty members in order to provide targeted support for Black students to be successful in their college experience. At the PWI, my students (most of whom are Black), are the ones who expect othermothering from Black faculty as described in Guiffrida's findings (2005). I find that I am deeply motivated to accommodate their expectations so that they can see themselves as successful as their White peers. In essence, I enact my othermothering in order to provide racial uplift so that my pre-service teachers can go on to successfully serve as role models to future teachers and to successfully teach children who have tended to be underserved in their school settings.

Although my othermothering behaviors at the PWI have been reduced since fewer Black and Puerto students are available to teach, I have not yet established what I would consider a reasonable boundary. I realized this when a Black colleague in another department recently pulled me into his office for what he called a "Come to Jesus Moment." In short, he told me that I was doing too much for the students. Further, he argued that I needed to slow down a bit for the sake of my own health. I admit that I worry that the care-sickness described by Roseboro and Ross (2009) will consume me in a few years if I do not follow his advice.

At the end of the day, I have not really learned my lesson on how to balance self-care and other-care. I have not learned how to separate professional and personal responsibilities. I would argue that this is because for Black faculty, especially female faculty, professional and personal responsibilities go hand-in-hand. Where does this position leave likeminded faculty?

Discussion and Implications

Roseboro and Ross' (2009) theory of care-sickness is what they attribute to the shortage of Black educators. Simply put, they hypothesize that

the current shortage of students of color entering the teaching profession is related, whether directly or indirectly, to the dissolution of current Black educators who are, quite honestly,

tired from caring, tired from trying to prove themselves intellectually capable (p. 36).

In my case, care-sickness evolved, as I was financially impacted by a system that did not support my students and me. I was emotionally tired from the guilt entrapment (Hargreaves & Tucker, 1991) generated from past experiences and future endeavors. The self-sacrificing nature of othermothering and the ethic of care took a toll emotionally (James, 2010) and financially on me, and ultimately had an impact on my decision to leave the HBCU. Although this was my personal scholarly narrative, I am convinced that my story is not unique in the HBCU environment.

Historical research has documented that the institutional framework of othermothering and the ethic of care (Case, 1997; Collins, 2000; Guiffrida, 2005; Hirt, et al., 2008) is imbedded into HBCUs and Black schooling (Jean-Marie, 2006; Siddle Walker & Tompkins, 2004; St. John & Cadray, 2004). However, I have not seen work that focuses on how Black faculty balance and cope with the consequences of these teacher-student relationships. While Guiffrida (2005) discusses how othermothering lessons are taught in Black teacher education programs, the discussion stops short of addressing concerns about how othermothering and caring can limit the self-care of the teacher. Little if anything is said about the repercussions to faculty of providing racial uplift through othermothering.

When reflecting on my case, it is evident that there were some individual choices I made (e.g., financing the early admissions program for high school students using my personal funds) where the responsibility of othermothering falls on my shoulders. Still, I believe that the tradition of othermothering within HBCU institutions and in Black teacher education programs certainly influenced my decision. Clearly, I took othermothering a step further over an already existing, but blurry boundary. The question remains: How are faculty to determine where the boundaries and responsibilities lie in othermothering? This and other questions are still unanswered when exploring othermothering in teaching. For example, what are other faculty experiences with othermothering? What are some institutional positions in regard to othermothering? Does othermothering still need to have a place in the teaching of historically underserved students today? Moreover, there are the questions concerning care. I have come to believe that teachers can care too much. Is too much caring care-sickness? If so, what is considered to be too much care?

I end this personal narrative with a call for open discussions among faculty and administrators at HBCUs and Black and other stakeholders at PWIs serving diverse student populations. I argue that discussions need to take place in order to begin to find answers to these and other related questions. The call for other faculty to talk to each other about these experiences is likely to provide useful observations based on experiences from various perspectives concerning this issue. Once these discussions take place, the information could be used to inform policy for hiring and retaining faculty most at risk for engaging in othermothering practices. Further, the discussions may inform policy makers regarding institutional responsibilities that are connected with othermothering. It is my hope that this personal narrative will be a catalyst for addressing this issue.

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