

Articles

Interrogating the Four Ps: Positionality, Privilege, Power, and Professionalism in the Rhetoric and Composition Job Market

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This article examines academic job market experiences as an embodied performance, considering how different bodies must navigate that performance in different ways. Engaging with the critical race theory methodology of counterstory developed by Aja Martinez and the social justice heuristic developed by Rebecca Walton, Kristen R. Moore, and Natasha N. Jones, we use a framework of positionality, privilege, power, and professionalism to interrogate the politics of academic hiring. We use this framework to theorize from our personal stories and to consider how Othered job seekers interact with hiring bodies in ways that are deeply visceral and that are always implicated within institutionalized power relations. We then provide recommendations that will help hiring committees and faculty mentors move toward more equitable and inclusive academic hiring practices.

Scholarship in rhetoric and composition has discussed how minoritized job seekers face disproportionate challenges on an academic hiring market that is already stressful, anxiety-inducing, and exhausting (Blackaby et al.; Dadas, “Reaching”; Dadas, “Interview”; Exum et al.; Price; Rivera; Sano-Franchini; V6; Walwema and Arzu). This article builds from that work, centering positionality, privilege, power, and professionalism as a framework for interrogating the politics of academic hiring through the critical race theory methodology of counterstory (Martinez). We examine the academic job search as an embodied performance, considering how different bodies must navigate that performance in different ways.

To do so, we draw on personal experience and theoretical scholarship to consider how job seekers who are Othered—whether through the rhetorics of disability, race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, nationality, class, and/or pregnancy—interact with hiring bodies in ways that are deeply visceral and that are always implicated within institutionalized power relations. Othered bodies exist in contrast to what Rosemarie Garland-Thomson describes as the normate, “the constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configu-

rations and cultural capital they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them” (8). The normate is the default body for which, we argue, hiring conventions are instituted: 12-hour-day campus visits that involve walking around large campuses and college towns with constant social interaction and few breaks assume an ability to endure such conditions (as other scholars have already noted); the demand to front travel costs for campus visits assume a level of economic privilege; and the heteronormative white male cultures of many academic departments privilege cis-gendered, white men with U.S. citizenship who do not have to navigate thorny questions regarding maternity leave, childcare, visa sponsorship, or campus climate.

As a diverse collective of six scholars in rhetoric, composition, and technical communication—three of us Asian/American, three of us white, one of us an international scholar, and several of us women, disabled, queer, and/or first generation college graduates—we disrupt the normate in a number of ways. Three of us are pre-tenure faculty, two of us are tenured, and one of us is in a non-tenure track position. As such, this article demonstrates how centering marginalized perspectives may be conducive for imagining hiring practices that are more humane, equitable, and accessible.

First, however, we introduce the heuristic that frames our analysis. Continuing the social justice turn in the field of technical communication, Rebecca Walton, Kristen R. Moore, and Natasha N. Jones developed the “3Ps” heuristic—positionality, privilege, and power—as a theoretical framework to enact social justice in the field. Here we borrow their terms and add a fourth “P,” professionalism, to highlight the need to strategically interrogate normative notions of professionalism as manifested in academic hiring practices. We suggest that professionalism underlines how current social justice efforts are forestalled in the context of late capitalism on the basis of systematized restricted access to the flow of material resources. For instance, racialized, gendered, ableist, and classist ideas about professionalism become critical metrics that affect people’s ability to obtain and maintain stable employment. We bring these four concepts together to examine our Othered experiences as job seekers and to challenge common perspectives in the field that job seekers should deal with the conditions and other minimizing reactions to critiques of academic hiring practices.

We apply this 4Ps framework to our embodied experiences as variously minoritized Others on the job market by taking up the concept of positionality through the methodology of counterstory, which Aja Y. Martinez defines as “a narrative method to theorize racialized experience” (17). Such narratives, Martinez explains, “serve the purpose of exposing stereotypes and injustice and offering additional truths through a narration of the researcher’s own experience” (17). Consequently, counterstory empowers “the minoritized through

the formation of stories that disrupt the erasures embedded in standardized majoritarian methodologies” (3). Our three white authors acknowledge we cannot claim counterstory as Martinez describes it because it is a genre of resistance for Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). Still, we are all informed by Martinez’s conception of resistant storytelling, and we use this method as multiply marginalized scholars who aim to tell stories that situate rather than erase whiteness. Too often, fear of misappropriating the methods of BIPOC scholars leads to erasure of their significant intellectual contributions to the field. Instead, we hope to model a way of taking seriously and acknowledging the intellectual work of BIPOC scholars and providing stories that work in solidarity with those who are racially minoritized—while being careful not to conflate our experiences.

Counterstory allows us to challenge the stock story of the normate job candidate and envision different ways of conceptualizing what a job market story can be. Our narratives are fragmented, incomplete, and not meant to be understood as linear. Throughout the following narratives, we incorporate varied styles and voices to highlight the differences among us. Our stories are in no way representative of all marginalized bodies, nor of the whole of our experiences on the academic job market; however, we share them because they present experiences often unseen in discussions of academic hiring that centers the normate.

In the next section, we offer counterstory vignettes related to our experience of being an Othered job seeker; we understand these vignettes as incomplete articulations of our own positionalities. Across our vignettes, we take up considerations of disability, ethnicity, caregiving, international status, and financial precarity. Next, we apply the concepts of privilege, power, and professionalism to our vignettes and show how they challenge dominant hiring practices. We conclude with recommendations for hiring committees, academic mentors, and the discipline at large. Inspired by the action-oriented definition of social justice by Walton, Moore, and Jones which includes “recognizing, revealing, rejecting and replacing” oppressions with intersectional, coalitional actions (133), we see our work here as enacting social justice in that we unsettle unjust ways of framing the academic job market that reinforce the capitalistic, white settler, and ableist nature of higher education. By sharing our counterstories, we reject exclusionary notions of professionalism and offer recommendations that will help the discipline work toward replacing oppressive practices. Ultimately, our goal is to push for academic hiring practices that “embrace social justice and inclusivity as part of its core” (Jones et al. 212).

Otherness on the Job Market: Our Counterstories as Articulations of Positionality

We understand our counterstories, which we share in this section, as articulations of our positionalities that challenge the stock story of the normate job candidate. As Walton, Moore, and Jones emphasize, “Positionality is a way of conceiving subjectivity that simultaneously accounts for the constraints and conditions of context while also allowing for an individual’s action and agency” (63). Especially important to our work here is that positionalities are complex, contextual, and take place within larger, shifting systems of power. As our six narratives below illustrate, the privileges we may enjoy and the power to which we have access shifts and changes as our various subjectivities take shape, are historicized, and are interpreted differently in different situations.

Keller Kirycki: *Invisible Disability and Perceptions of Professionalism on the Campus Visit*

Finally. A diagnosis.

“You have Hashimoto’s Thyroiditis, a condition where your immune system sees your thyroid as an invader,” my doctor says. “Your thyroid is responsible for supplying energy throughout your body. Your immune system works too well. And so, your thyroid can’t produce enough hormones to give energy to your cells. And when your cells have little energy, your body can’t function properly.”

I receive a prescription for synthetic thyroid hormone that I will take for the rest of my life.

Ten years after my diagnosis of Hashimoto’s, I am readying for a campus visit. I plan ways to manage my condition without too many people noticing it.

I’ll ask for more downtime as I confirm the details of my visit. Email. Easy.

“Dear hiring committee chair,” I begin, “I’m looking forward to my visit on your campus. I’ll need additional downtime while on my visit. Once I hear from you, I can supply some details.”

In the reply from the chair, he assures me there is plenty of time for me to prepare for each item on my agenda. He’s misunderstood me, but I’m conflicted about revealing too much about my health too soon.

Fear.

What if I need more time to rest after my presentations? My body can’t handle stress very well. What if my blood sugar drops, and I need to eat during my teaching demonstration?

Shame.

What if I don’t perform like an academic? What if they see my requests as reasons not to hire me?

Resentment.

I decide to remain silent.

During the visit, I experience a flare. I'm having difficulty breathing, my heart is racing, skipping beats. I feel a heaviness in my legs that makes it difficult to walk.

Fit in.

"Hey all," I say to the committee as we walk into the building. "Can we take the elevator? I'm having trouble breathing."

I see your side eye, dude. I know we've taken the stairs the whole time. I have been here. You're probably thinking I'm just another fat, lazy woman who wants to take the elevator.

"No problem," a woman in our group interrupts. "I'll go with you."

Relief.

Breathe in. 45 seconds to recover. Breathe out.

The difficulties I experience because of my condition, the stress of the visit, and the burden of not being transparent about my health is too much for me to handle. As we wait for the elevator to come to our floor, I reveal my thyroid condition to the woman, a potential colleague and ally.

Tears.

I've made the invisible visible.

Bose: *A Mid-Career Non-Tenure Story: Privilege and Disability*

A first-generation child of Desi immigrants, I acknowledge my parents' drive to build a life in the US. I have anxiety and depression resulting from Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), which were diagnosed while I was on the job market. My job market perspective emerges from non-tenure precarity, a scenario demonstrated by the low numbers of tenure-track positions listed during years of my job searches. Along with being first-generation, neurodivergent, and contingent, I was also more recently a parent and caregiver of a relative with a severe disability.

The stock story describes a non-tenure professor with majority teaching and administrative obligations. Promotion leans on stellar teaching and instruction-related activities, while scholarship encourages connections between teaching, administration, and service. Although the institution is R1 and claims a teaching mission through employment of "career-track" faculty (Arizona Board of Regents), the pay is lower and security of employment is not guaranteed, regardless of rank.

The counterstory shows a neurodivergent person-of-color (POC) scholar-teacher. My ADHD/OCD diagnosis defined my twenties: I relied upon spousal medical insurance, commuted for adjunct teaching, and finished my disserta-

tion while applying for jobs. Disabled graduate students require support systems centered upon self-advocacy (Carter et al.); moreover, POCs enrolled in and working at postsecondary institutions are subject to discrepancies of poverty and race (Seelman). These factors personally manifested through a seemingly contradictory approach to time management: hyperfocus and multi-tasking. The outcome: anxiety escalates due to the desire to attain perfection and spirals into depression as tasks remain incomplete for indefinite time periods.

These difficulties emanate from the unstable job market, but they also reveal hidden demands placed on marginalized applicants. This follows the presumption of normalcy of the able-bodied subject, in which everyone is presumed able-bodied as a default unless it is made known they are not (Bose et al.). I was financially secure until my 30s, even after the accrued costs of cross-country moves, which were based on the low number of tenure-track jobs and the necessity for geographic stability. Starting a family on a low salary with little security took a toll on my scholarly productivity, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the cycle towards multiple projects with little to show for completion began again. Housing an extended family member with major caregiving needs at this time also took a toll, which, once that person moved, made me want to take on several projects in an attempt to catch up.

All this has drastically affected my career; I conduct research suited to someone with a doctorate and perform my expected job functions, but the process is lengthy and tiring to someone who underwent graduate school to obtain a tenure-track position.

Sano-Franchini: *Transnational and Interpersonal Border Crossings: A New Mother Goes on a Campus Visit*

I'm applying to jobs the semester after M is born. It is November, and I have my first campus visit. She is four months old. I am at a loss. Thanks to the faculty coordinating my program's job group, I feel informed yet clueless as to what to expect. The faculty coordinators guide me through the process of requesting time during the visit to pump. Twenty to thirty minutes, every 3-4 hours.

Devastated to leave my then-infant at home for the first time, I cry in the hotel room that evening. I set my alarm to wake in the middle of the night to pump.

When I get to campus, I'm surprised to receive comments about how I am pumping and have a child.

Was some kind of an announcement made? Is this legal?

It doesn't help that I'm in a different country—where I'm not sure what the laws are around hiring and discrimination—or that I've never been on a campus

visit before. Someone asks my marital status and what my partner does. Maybe they do things differently here . . .

My first few breaks are in a conference room. With practice, I've gotten better at squeezing the manual pump, my hand muscles having adapted to the now-familiar movement. After 15 minutes on each side, I walk down the hall to clean up. I try to hide the pump, but it is too big for my arms to conceal. I hold my breath and walk quickly, hoping no one else comes down the hall. As I pour the milk down the drain, I push back voices from the prenatal classes I'd taken about how precious that milk is, how it adapts, providing nutrients based on baby's specific needs.

If I sleep for five hours, I can pump before and after without having to wake in the middle of the night.

Day two. Another break to pump. The conference room is booked for a meeting. I speak to the administrative assistant, and she puts me in the office across from hers. A couple of people are in the office but they leave so I can use the room. I thank them and get to work.

Not ten minutes in, keys are jangling at the door. A middle-aged man barges in.

"Get out!" I blurt.

Alarmed, I turn around, facing my back to him as I try to hide my exposed breast.

"This is my office!" he exclaims, annoyed.

I don't blame him. For fuck's sake, I just yelled at him to get out of his own office.

I try to calm down and explain, "I'm pumping. They put me in here. Please. I need a minute."

The man shuffles off in a huff. I explain what happened to the administrative assistant. She's cheerfully apologetic and lets me know that the office is shared by four people.

Later, the chair says he thinks this visit will have been "good practice" for me.

Six months later, I'm on another campus visit. I'm surprised when this search chair, a woman, offers to freeze my milk.

Osorio: *Laboring in Every Sense of the Word: Hiding Pregnancy and Birth on the Academic Job Market*

For my first Skype interview, I am poised and prepared. The camera points directly at my face. I've created a portrait of so-called professionalism: natural looking make-up, hair clean and controlled, blazer resting on my shoulders. I snap two selfies to capture the moment, one of my face, where the camera remains focused during the interview. The other of my torso, my seven-month

pregnant body bursting through the blazer but hidden from the camera. I joke to myself: I just hope I don't have to stand up for any reason.

One month later, after what feels like my millionth Skype interview, I thank the panel, close my laptop, and hop onto the metro. I walk into the hospital, sign in, and a nurse takes my blood. She reviews the check-in process for my cesarean delivery, scheduled forty-eight hours later. On my metro ride home, I pick up my two year old daughter from daycare. We sing children's songs in Spanish as we walk home. I forget to send a thank you email to the interview committee.

Three days later, I am sitting in the hospital bed, worn out from surgery but giddy at the sight of my newborn child. She sleeps on my chest, worming her body to my breast between short rests. I soak in the softness of her skin, the echo of our hearts beating together as I check my voicemail for the first time that day. There, I hear a message inviting me to a campus interview for the dream job. I am weary but ready. I send my partner outside of my door with our child; he is tasked with keeping the medical team out while I return the call and schedule the visit.

One month later, I drive to the mall to shop for interview clothes. In store after store, my postpartum body rejects each outfit. My stomach still sags, my breasts still heavy. My proportions don't fit into any suit or dress that would read professional. I cry in the lactation room, angry that my body won't hide the secret I worked so hard to obscure all these months. I wipe off my tears and head into the maternity clothing store. Maternity work clothes are expensive, and I take no joy in the irony of buying pregnancy clothes to hide evidence of my postpartum body.

My story has a happy ending: I secure a tenure-track job. But what is not seen in my success story is the weight I carry, the extra labor of hiding my laboring body on the job market.

Chen: *The International Candidate: Unrecognized, Forgotten, Navigating the Unknown*

Another day, another application to complete. I click on the button on the university HR page for the position to which I want to apply and am taken to another generic form to complete. Once again, I'm faced with the question: "Are you eligible to work in the United States?" At the time, I'm not eligible beyond what my student visa allows on my own campus. But a month later I would be submitting my application for permanent residency through marriage (green card application), which I expect to be approved by the time I'd start at any job. I say "yes" to the question, as I did several times before in other applications. This time, the form doesn't ask me "Would you need employment visa sponsorship?" I have to assume that if my green card falls

through and I ended up needing sponsorship maybe they would provide it for me. Maybe?

A few months later, I'm set for a phone interview for a tenure-track position. Sitting at my dining table at home, my phone in front of me—fully charged, ring tone on—my notes pulled up on my laptop screen next to the phone. My palms are sweating. I'm dressed up in a suit and jeans with dress shoes even though they won't see me—just to put myself in the headspace for a job interview.

The phone rings, I answer. “Hello?” “Hello, is this Chen?” “Yes, this is she.”

The search committee chair quickly introduces herself and the rest of the committee. Then they say, “Before we get started with the questions, I wanted to let you know that we don't sponsor work visas at our institution.”

I'm immediately taken aback and am glad that they can't see my face because I must look shocked and confused. In a split second, so many things run across my head, and I don't know what to say.

Not wanting to let the silence go on longer, I answer, “Oh ok. I don't need sponsorship anyway because I'm in the process of a green card application.”

Was I smug in that response? Did I sound frustrated?

The rest of the interview goes fine, yet that first statement and my response to it lingers after the interview. Why do they make that assumption? Is it because of my non-English name? Is it because my undergraduate degree was from a different country? What if I had needed the sponsorship, what could I have done at that moment? Hang up the phone and say sorry I applied? Or if I find out later I need the sponsorship after all (if my green card application fell through or didn't get approved in time) when I advanced further in the interview process, what would happen then?

A few months later, I get my green card; I don't need sponsorship. I am lucky the timing works out, but the stress and emotional labor of navigating the uncertainty during the search stays in my memory.

Tetreault: *Feeling the Financial Impact of the Academic Job Market*

I log into my credit card account and feel nauseous.

The balance stares back at me and I know that, once again, I won't be able to pay it off this month . . . or the next . . . or the next. I'm in my second year of a great tenure-track job, but I still can't dig myself out of the debt I got into on the academic job market.

When I was on the job market in 2017–18, I had not finished my dissertation and made a grad student stipend, but I was protected from economic insecurity by virtue of being white and coming from a middle-class, economically stable family. I did not have medical bills or medical debt, as many disabled people do, and I am childless, which makes it easier to be loose with money

and to make individualistic decisions for me and my partner. I am also queer, which impacted my choices on the market. My queerness, as a non-normative social position, makes me skeptical of traditional markers of achievement and American individualism, while I simultaneously benefit from these systems as a white, educated person.

Despite these privileges, I felt the financial impact of the job market and of pursuing an academic career in general. In addition to credit card debt, I carry a six-figure student loan debt with an income-based repayment plan barely touching the interest. I'm praying for public service loan forgiveness to remain a viable option. Like many millennials, the idea of achieving traditional markers of middle-class status—like home ownership or investments—seems unattainable to me.

There are many job seeking costs that never get reimbursed: expensive travel to the Modern Language Association (MLA) conference for first-round interviews; airport parking fees; credit card interest that accrues while waiting for reimbursement; and, most notably, the summer pay gap until my first paycheck. Like many academic jobs, I signed a contract in March 2018 for a job that would not provide a paycheck until October 2018, but my PhD funding ran out when I graduated in May 2018. Some people seek summer employment to fill this gap, but I was so exhausted and immersed in a cross-country move and my partner's job search that I did not; I ended up using credit cards to cover most of my and my partner's expenses during this time. I was only able to pay my rent because I was able to take an advance on my generous startup funds from my department for the summer, an option that would not be available to many new hires.

I am extremely privileged: right out of my PhD program and by the age of 30, I secured tenure-track employment at an R1 university. Still, at one point, while waiting for reimbursement and piling up more out-of-pocket expenses, I was carrying around \$10,000 of debt directly related to the job market. If a racially and economically privileged scholar like me still struggled with the financial impact of the job market, then this presents an issue for the field. We need to think about how the financial norms built into the job search process exclude multiply marginalized scholars, which is further exacerbated by the field's tendency to obscure the very real costs of going on the market.

Positionality, Privilege, Power, and Professionalism in Academic Job Search Counterstories

Our academic job market counterstories highlight the interconnected workings of power, privilege, and professionalism—the 4Ps of a social justice framework. These stories reveal multiple moments when we had to negotiate the unspoken conventions of academic hiring in particular and academic culture

more generally. Below, we discuss our positionalities in terms of privilege, power, and professionalism to further unpack the multifaceted dimensions of these interconnected terms. Moreover, we consider how our counterstories speak to the workings of power within academic culture more broadly.

Privilege

The idea of privilege highlights the distinct and unequal status across different positionalities based on how they are situated in relation to institutionalized ways of knowing. As with our positionalities, our privileges are relational and contextual. Moreover, the goal here is not to advance a hierarchy of privileges, but to consider how these different forms of Otherness come together to challenge the stockstory of the normate job candidate and reveal the interlocking systemic oppressive practices that marginalize particular groups, albeit in different ways. Although our counterstories describe various challenges we experienced, we all also enjoy varying degrees of privilege, and our stories all had relatively happy endings: we were each able to procure an academic position. Our various privileges, whether in relation to or proximity to whiteness, class background, citizenship, disability, gender, sexual orientation, caregiver status, labor conditions during our PhDs, or a combination thereof, gave us unearned advantages on the job market. To provide one example to illustrate this point, it's not new or groundbreaking to say that the way money works in academia privileges some and disadvantages others. In "Reimbursement Policies Make Academia Less Inclusive," Jessica Sagers shows how reimbursement culture assumes that people are able to front large sums of money for travel, research, or job seeking activities, or that they have a high credit limit they can draw from while waiting for reimbursement (plus the ability to cover the interest that accrues in the meantime). Those with access to money or substantial credit are likely to also be white, able-bodied, and otherwise privileged. However, as Tetreault's counterstory shows, even those who are racially and economically privileged struggle with the financial impact of the job market specifically and an academic career in general. Recognizing how academic hiring practices and systemic institutional conditions may privilege some but not others can help us work toward more socially just practices that intentionally address the needs of minoritized candidates.

For some of us, privilege aligns with responsibility. Bose, for instance, grew up with the cultural expectation that families unquestionably care for those in need. Such responsibilities align with the notion of duty assigned to the caregiver—that they are in a better place and therefore hold responsibility over those who are in need. Care of extended family members is an assumption deeply rooted within cultures that associate privilege with duty. Echoing Jasbir K. Puar's question about "which debilitated bodies . . . are valuable enough for

rehabilitation, and which cannot not be” (13) and as the spouse to a person holding conservatorship over a severely disabled person requiring constant care, Bose experienced some disconnect between his own identity as a professional and as a marketable body subject to normative expectations of caregiving.

In addition, Bose’s counterstory speaks to the privileges of able-bodiedness, especially as contextualized among intersecting systems of oppression. As his vignette reveals, ADHD and OCD contribute to anxiety/depression and ultimately, impact career growth. For writers with focus issues—wherein some aspects of writing become magnified as a result of the drive towards perfection—project completion is a massive challenge. When coupled with other marginalization factors (ethnicity, non-tenure status, and financial burden), such factors triangulate anxiety and depression.

Power

Our discussion of privilege makes apparent how institutional structures that position certain views, values, bodies, and positionalities as normate over Others have direct implications for access to power. Our stories illustrate Caroline Dadas’ observation that “interviews are partial, hierarchical, and rife with power dynamics that do not tilt in favor of the candidate,” and they show how these power dynamics are relevant to other aspects of the job search process as well (“Interview”). Power is often not acknowledged and, much like whiteness, manifests through the lens of neutrality: if certain positionalities are seen as Other, they are brushed over by the guise of objectivity through which everyday discourses become normalized. For example, Sano-Franchini’s narrative spoke to the value of acknowledging bodies through frequent breaks on campus visits. Her story also highlights the power dynamics between candidates and hiring committees. Candidates rarely hold the power to make and facilitate decisions that impact their own bodies, and when they do, it often comes at a cost—privacy, disclosure, or potentially the committee’s good will.

Our counterstories also speak to issues of personhood through the nexus of identity, disclosure, and power. As Puar states, “Bodies understood as disabled . . . have often been cast as inert passive objects rather than human subjects through a projection of ‘degraded objecthood’ elevated over ‘qualified personhood’” (26). Through this unpacking of personhood we can begin to develop ways to move toward more socially just academic hiring practices. Keller Kirycki and Osorio fretted over whether or how to disclose their embodied needs and the reasons behind them; Sano-Franchini’s disclosure of pumping (and perhaps her raced body) led to inappropriate comments; and because of racialized assumptions, Chen was pressured to disclose her immigration status at the beginning of the interview. On the job market, Othered job applicants

have to consider how disclosure will affect the already uneven power dynamics between multiply-marginalized applicants and hiring committee members. As disability scholars have noted, disclosure is a complex, rhetorical act (Price et al., Vidali), complicated by the fact that disabled identities always intersect with other identities and that “the risk-taking that accompanies disclosure is not experienced equally or in the same ways by all people” (Kerschbaum et al. 1–2).

The risk of disability disclosure likewise applies to rhetorical utterances in which job candidates must disclose Otherness and request accommodations. The lack of transparency in the job search process (from the ad to application tools) often puts applicants in the disempowered position of having to ask questions that they are not sure if they can/should ask, all while assumptions are made about us based on our names, academic records, or accent. For example, job ads can send rhetorically misleading or conflicting messages, especially to international job seekers. As Josephine Walwema and Felicita Arzu Carmichael explain, statements of institutional commitment to diversity and equity in hiring contradicts the language of legality and citizenship candidates encounter during the job application and hiring process. Even navigating job offers is often a mystery, as salaries and benefits tend not to be advertised, and negotiation processes rely on often unclear expectations that can disempower those who are positioned such that their access to these conventions is limited.

Our counterstories show how we all experienced feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy, fear, and powerlessness. We had to put up with more and ask for less in order to succeed. And while it can be easy for some to dismiss feelings as fleeting and immaterial, we understand that feelings are material, read in the context of systemic power, and can and often do affect people’s lives in very real ways. Finally, if faculty on the hiring side are not aware of the different ways a candidate might be Othered on the job market, the candidate may experience inappropriate or oppressive exertions of power, such as microaggressions or other challenges during interpersonal exchanges or the side eye directed at Keller Kirycki when she asked to use the elevator.

Professionalism

Professionalism is an idea frequently used by employers in and outside academia to assess the suitability and desirability of applicants. In a 2022 National Association of Colleges and Employers survey of employers who hire college graduates, 97.5% of respondents identified professionalism as either absolutely essential or essential for a new hire’s success (“Development” 15). But what do we mean when we say professionalism? As Chris Gallagher explains, ideas of what constitutes professionalism in rhetoric and composition today largely emerged from managerial professionalism: a standardized model neutralizing or dismissing cultural and social relationships for the sake of

“admitting, training, and credentialing new members of a profession” (83). Gallagher notes that professionalism is often conflated with disciplinarity in rhetoric and composition discourse, and this conflation advances the neoliberal “myth of meritocracy” (80).

This disciplining and discipline-making is also carried out in the ways non-normate bodies are judged against an idealized image of value-neutral professionalism (Black and Stone 246–7). Osorio’s concerns, for instance, were rooted in the historical framing of pregnant bodies as inherently unprofessional, which led her to strive to hide evidence of what Caroline Gatrell describes as a “leaky” body (623). The leaky body, Gatrell asserts, with its “bleeding, breast milk, amniotic fluids/breaking waters, vomiting and tears (caused by supposedly unpredictable hormones) is regarded as inappropriate within workplaces and most mothers feel under pressure to hide this” (624). Thus, Osorio strove to contain signs of maternal leakage while on the job market, projecting professionalism by hiding her embodied reality. As Puar described, “neoliberal demands for bodily capacity (what are often constituted as neoliberal ‘opportunities’ or ‘choices’ for the body)” are framed in such a way as to further marginalize those who are already excluded through institutional barriers (13).

In addition, Othered bodies have limited access to being perceived as professional according to the normate; academic structures create a hierarchy that positions some practices and experiences as more valuable than others. We think, for example, of how Bose and Keller Kirycki were not able to present in person at the CCCC panel from which this article emerged due to circumstances related to their counterstories above—their caregiver status and disability, respectively. Such constraints affect how candidates are perceived in terms of professionalism, whether on the basis of what their curriculum vitae look like or their access to networking and professionalization opportunities. By rewriting academic hiring through the perspective of Otherness, we are able to offer recommendations for a more socially just understanding of professionalism that fundamentally values the experiences of diverse bodies.

Rewriting the Job Market: Recommendations for Inclusive Hiring and Mentoring

As our vignettes demonstrate, the discipline must recognize the varied positionalities of job candidates and carefully analyze how our hiring practices Other those who are already multiply marginalized by social systems that span beyond but also run through academic institutions. In addition, we highlighted the varying nexuses of privilege that position some to be perceived as more professional than others. For example, academic job searches requiring the use of credit implicitly signal that some communities do not belong given that communities of color are disproportionately impacted by

the crediting scoring system (Rice and Swesnik 3). Further, we should consider privileges of generational wealth—where wealth is not limited to riches or luxury, but includes “the lingering effects of generations of discriminatory and wealth-stripping practices” that disproportionately affect Black and Latinx households in particular (Asante-Muhammed et al. 5). These issues are clearly manifested in academia: job seekers are still implicitly expected to be someone likely to have family assets, access to credit, or some other financial cushion to cover expenses. As a discipline, we need to talk about how our hiring practices signal who is included and who has to fight for inclusion. We also need to talk about changing these practices.

To that end, we offer suggestions for hiring committees and academic mentors to move toward more equitable and inclusive academic hiring practices. The “CCCC Position Statement of Best Practices in Faculty Hiring for Tenure-Track and Non-Tenure-Track Positions in Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies” and the “MLA Guidelines for Search Committees and Job Seekers on Entry-Level Faculty Recruitment and Hiring as well as Postdoctoral Applications” already offer many good suggestions for hiring institutions and committees. The recommendations we provide echo many found in these professional organizations’ recommendations, but our recommendations, informed by the social justice 4Ps framework we laid out, go further in affirming the value of minoritized Others in our institutions. As a result, we enact an approach informed by social justice principles while also acknowledging the limitations of fully achieving this goal in capitalist, white settler higher education institutions. Walton, Moore, and Jones emphasize that social justice needs to be “collective and active” (50; see also Piepzna-Samarasinha), and we call on all who may at one point or another be in a privileged position to effect systemic changes in our institutions regarding hiring practices or who may mentor job candidates.

Suggestions for Hiring Committees

- Account for how biases persist even on seemingly diverse committees and attend to how already marginalized perspectives are valued on the committees. This means interrogating whose perspectives are privileged and presumed neutral while avoiding disproportionate service loads for multiply-marginalized faculty.
- To support international candidates throughout the process, committees should research institutional policies and legal constraints for hiring international candidates and be transparent about issues related to visa/permanent residency sponsorship up front, such as in the job ad.

- Offer flexibility in job market activities, such as modality and medium of interviews (see Dadas, “Interview”) and campus visit schedules, granting candidates agency in determining what works best for them instead of requiring them to seek accommodations to meet the needs of the hiring institution. This can include giving all candidates the option to schedule/reschedule first interviews, offering breaks for every candidate, and inviting candidates to engage in modes that are accessible for their various embodiments and subjectivities. To be clear, such flexibility should be made available to all candidates to avoid making candidates feel pressured to disclose something they may not feel comfortable disclosing.
- Avoid asking candidates to front campus visit travel or other costs. If reimbursements are absolutely necessary, do all that is possible to ensure reimbursements are processed in a timely manner. After all, hiring committees are better positioned to ensure timely reimbursement and advocate for more equitable travel funding practices than external candidates.
- Value candidates’ knowledge about the workings and implications of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, as well as the experiences that minoritized candidates can bring to your institution. Prioritize the need to hire those whose research, teaching, administration, and service work critically interrogates social justice questions of power, privilege, positionality, and professionalism.
- During campus interviews, offer candidates the opportunity to connect with cultural, campus, and community groups not involved in the hiring process. This way, candidates can ask questions candidly about living and working as a minoritized person in that community. For example, hiring committees can say “We are happy to connect you with any cultural, campus or community groups on or off campus, as well,” with a regularly updated list of such units/organizations, and note that the list is not exhaustive and candidates can request to meet with groups not on the list.
- As an ongoing process, advocate for changes to institutional policies preventing more equitable hiring practices (see nextGEN’s open letter).

Suggestions for Faculty Mentors

- Respect applicants’ needs and goals for the job search, including but not limited to geographical or family situations.

- Avoid making assumptions about applicants' positionalities (Keller, 122). Such behavior can come across as tokenizing, especially for BIPOC and disabled candidates, and often constitute microaggressive behavior.
- Identify ways to support or rally support for applicants based on expressed needs, such as fundraising to help purchase interview clothes.
- Make transparent the unpredictability of the academic job market, acknowledge how privileges coming from different academic positions affect job search experiences, and center the needs of people most threatened by intersecting systems of oppression.

We conclude with the notion that people with privilege of any kind, including the privilege afforded by surviving the job market and securing stable employment, can work to uplift those who come next rather than falling into the all-too-easy trap of reinforcing the status quo. Those persisting despite multiple oppressions are also often the most creative and resilient in developing interventions, workarounds, and community-based methods of supporting each other and surviving oppressive systems. To better serve them and their needs, we must work toward structural changes in academia and our institutions that normalize the perspectives of multiply-marginalized job seekers. By doing so, we will be more likely to restructure academic hiring in the direction of equity, thus making academia more accountable to diverse positionalities.

We wrote about our job market experiences before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Since the pandemic's onset, positions in rhetoric and composition have declined (Ridolfo; also Ridolfo in this issue), heightening the material effects of financial precarity and vulnerability, especially for those who are already multiply marginalized. The pandemic has exposed numerous faulty and oppressive commonplaces of our working lives: the assumption that physical presence is always needed, the push to cover for our institution's failings through individual acts of compassion and flexibility, the overlooking of how certain groups are disproportionately affected by medical risk and racist trauma in the name of equity. As our narratives above reveal, these are some of the same commonplaces that haunt the job market experience. However, the pandemic has also revealed that communities can respond creatively to oppressive institutions through mutual aid, advocacy, and care. We believe that the same energy can and should transform every aspect of our working lives, especially academic hiring. Once we begin questioning the commonplaces of managerial professionalism, we can reflect on our understanding of what it means to be professional, challenging dominant, value-neutral conceptions of professionalism. We can position hiring committees, departments, and

mentors as advocates for job candidates against institutional barriers. We can reject disciplinary boundaries and build networks of solidarity with our colleagues in humanities fields that have long been dealing with these issues. To meet the needs of this moment, and to amplify the social justice and diversity commonplaces we profess to value, our discipline should continue to examine hiring practices and varying experiences of job candidates, re-imagining what our professional lives can look like every step of the way.

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