UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

EMERGE:
Developing an Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework for Media Production Education - An Autoethnographic Study with Student and Faculty Perspectives

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By
TRACI E. WILLIAMS
Norman, Oklahoma
2025

Downloaded from SHAREOK. Persistent Handle URL: https://hdl.handle.net/11244/341817

EMERGE:
Developing an Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework for Media Production Education - An Autoethnographic Study with Student and Faculty Perspectives

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR
GAYLORD COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATION

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

Dr. Ralph Beliveau

Dr. Meta Carstarphen

Dr. Melanie Wilderman

Dr. Rita Keresztesi

© Copyright by TRACI E. WILLIAMS 2025
All Rights Reserved.

Acknowledgements

To my husband: Thirty years together and we've always had each other's back. You've been there through every late night, every doubt, every moment I wanted to quit. You believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, held down the fort, and reminded me why this work matters. This degree has your name on it too.

To Aiden and Rylee: You share me with so many students. You two are my everything. I hope watching me struggle and refuse to give up has shown you that it's never too late to chase your dreams. This is for you-proof that your mother practices what she preaches.

To Darlene: You've kept me connected to the maternal side of my family. I wish Debbie, Aunt Jean, and Uncle Guylon were here to see this. I learned so many of my values from them—they were my first directors in life. Thank you for being the bridge to the family that raised me.

To my ride-or-die cousins, Leslie and Cecilie: You show up for me every single time, no questions asked. That kind of unwavering support is rare, and I don't take it for granted.

To my mother-in-law and my father, **who I lost during this process:** I hear you constantly, especially on days when I want to give up. Life doesn't always follow the script we wrote, but I believe everything happens for a reason, even when that reason breaks your heart.

To Chimere: My sister-in-law who became my sister. You stepped in without hesitation and showed me that family is about who shows up. Thank you for choosing me.

To Dr. Dorsey: You joined the ancestors far too soon. You were the executive producer of my academic journey. Without you, I would not have become a professor. You saw something in me I couldn't see in myself. I wish you were here to see this finished project. I carry you with me in every classroom.

To my committee: Ralph, Meta, Melanie, and Rita. Never would I have thought I'd have a committee of friends, colleagues, and mentors all at once. Ralph, as my chair, you were my director—keeping the vision clear. Meta, you were my line producer, keeping me grounded when the scope threatened to overwhelm. Melanie, you helped me build the world where theory and practice could come alive. Rita, you gave me creative freedom while offering the guidance I needed. This production wouldn't exist without your collective vision.

To my sisters I've met along the way: Marietta, Lindsey, Katrina, Carmen, Tierra, Kathy, Kennedy, Leslie, Kelsey, Bailey, Jenson, Barbara, Carla, Kyra, Erin, Colleen, Mary Anna, Meta, Melanie, and Cyndi…You lifted me up, cheered me on, and reminded me that I wasn't alone. You are proof that chosen family is just as powerful as blood.

To all my friends and family not mentioned by name: Your presence in my life shaped who I am. Every encouraging word, every act of kindness—it all mattered.

To my students: Past, present, and future. You were my inspiration for this entire project. This research exists because of your stories, your voices, your dreams of seeing yourselves reflected on screen and behind the camera. You weren't just subjects of my research—you were collaborators, proof that change is possible. This dissertation is yours as much as it is mine.

To the ancestors who have guided me: Your strength when mine faltered, your wisdom passed down through generations—all of it lives in this work. You taught me that some stories must be told, even when the telling is hard. I come from a long line of storytellers, fighters, and dreamers. This is our story. Finally, to anyone who has ever felt invisible or unseen in spaces that weren't built for you, this work is for us. Our stories matter.

Abstract

This autoethnographic study examines symbolic annihilation in media production education through the lived experience of a Black female professor navigating predominantly white institutions. Drawing on Tuchman's (1978) concept of omission, trivialization, and condemnation, extended through Ortega's (2024) application to educational contexts, this research investigates how these patterns manifest in creative media classrooms, perpetuating systemic inequities that mirror industry disparities documented by Smith and Pieper (2023). The study weaves together personal narratives and scholarly analysis through multiple theoretical lenses: intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), epistemology of ignorance (Mills, 1997), stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), and hidden curriculum (Giroux & Penna, 1979) to examine how overlapping systems of exclusion operate in media education. Through student questionnaires at the University of Oklahoma, questionnaires and interviews with women media educators nationally and internationally, and autoethnographic critical incidents, the research reveals how symbolic annihilation operates through curriculum design, production dynamics, and institutional structures. This study develops EMERGE (Empowering Media Education through Responsive Growth Experiences); a theoretically grounded pedagogical framework and the first Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework specifically designed for media production education. Synthesizing eight theoretical perspectives into actionable strategies, EMERGE provides educators with both critical understanding of how exclusion operates and concrete tools for countering it.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Opening Credits: An Introduction ……..……1
Research Questions…….……5

Chapter 2: The Screening Room: Literature Review…….……11
Part 1: Defining the Problem Symbolic Annihilation in Media and Education……...11
Part 2: Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Exclusion……28
Part 3: Pedagogical Approaches for Transformation……...51
Part 4: Synthesis and Research Contribution……...64

Chapter 3: The Producer's Chair: Methodology…….……71
Data Analysis Approach…….……....80

Chapter 4: The Dailies: The Results……..87

Chapter 5: Rough Cut to Picture Lock: The Emerge Framework……...129
Introducing Emerge: A comprehensive Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework…132

Chapter 6: Closing Credits: The Conclusion……..……140

List of Abbreviations…….……157

Appendix A: Faculty Survey……...……..……158

Appendix B: Student Survey……..…..175

Appendix C: IRB Approval…….….184

Appendix D: Teaching Philosophy……...185

References……...…186

Chapter 1. OPENING CREDITS

"Never wake up every day and go to a job you hate." These guiding words from my DECA teacher, Sam Guarino (1992), framed my early career choices and eventually led me to confront the systemic inequities embedded within the entertainment industry. My experiences navigating exclusion, marginalization, and symbolic annihilation have driven my commitment to transforming media education to create inclusive pathways for diverse storytellers. In Guarino's class, I got my first real shot in the entertainment industry: a co-hosting spot on "*2010: Taking You to the Future*," a teen show on FOX. When the producers handed out scripts for the next day's on-camera audition, I went home, rewrote mine completely, and landed the role using my own words. That first taste of television, where I eventually became an associate producer and writer fresh out of high school, led me into casting for films. This is where I learned what sixteen-hour days really meant, sometimes sleeping in my car between shoot days. At first, the work felt magical. Being part of something creative, watching actors transform into characters, seeing firsthand how the illusion of movie magic comes together behind the scenes. I felt like I was finally breaking into the industry. But the magic couldn't outweigh the exhaustion, the toxic behavior, or the pressure to sacrifice everything else in my life. It was more than just being tired; it was navigating the unwanted touches on set, enduring inappropriate conversations passed off as "industry culture," and being in a system that wasn't built to hear everyone's story, that didn't want to see its own blind spots.

Working in Los Angeles drained all my energy. Those early days where I thought my voice was being heard were overwhelmed by the politics of an industry that has been institutionalized and built with a small few in mind. The unwritten rules became clearer: success

meant fitting into a mold that wasn't shaped for everyone, staying quiet about things that made the workspace feel unsafe, smiling through the discomfort of being treated as less than equal.

I found myself back in Ohio, pursuing my master's degree, finally able to name what I had experienced. What I had witnessed wasn't just individual acts of exclusion. It was symbolic annihilation at work, a systematic erasure that happens through omission, through trivialization, through condemnation. Now, instead of being silenced by this system, I study it. I dissect it. I use my voice to expose how the entertainment industry doesn't just tell stories; it decides whose stories are worth telling and who gets to tell them.

Teaching feels like home. I grew up watching many family members work in education: my mother heading a pre-school, my aunt pursuing her degree while raising two children and working full-time, my uncle navigating the complex dynamics of school leadership. Through them, I witnessed how education could be both an art and an act of resistance, and how systemic inequities were often dismissed as individual circumstances.

Now I wear many hats: professor, wife, mom, friend, advisor, doctoral student. Through it all, I see exactly how symbolic annihilation plays out in academia. My teaching ideas? Often brushed aside as "too experimental," despite being grounded in years of industry experience. My voice? Sometimes ignored unless I force my way into the conversation, risking being labeled "aggressive" or "difficult." When I see my students, especially students of color and women, light up when they finally see themselves represented in the media we study, or when they feel empowered to tell their own stories through their projects, that's when I know I'm exactly where I need to be. This is what my teacher Sam encouraged me to find: work that matters. But finding work that matters means confronting why that work is necessary. The exclusion I experienced wasn't exceptional; it was systemic, documented, and replicated across the industry in patterns

that persist today. The disparities I witnessed firsthand aren't anecdotal; they're measurable, ongoing, and tracked by researchers who confirm what marginalized professionals have always known.

The Problem of Symbolic Annihilation in Media Education

The disparities symbolic annihilation theory describes aren't relics of Hollywood's past. They're documented realities of today's entertainment industry. Consider just one stark example: while women directors led 28% of top streaming films in 2024, not one woman of any racial or ethnic background directed a streaming film with a budget of $100 million or more (Hunt & Ramón, 2025). Zero. Meanwhile, White male directors dominated higher budget ranges, with nearly half directing films exceeding $20 million (Hunt & Ramón, 2025).

These budget disparities reveal symbolic annihilation operating systematically. The industry grants women opportunities while restricting the resources necessary to fully succeed, creating a pattern where diverse voices are acknowledged but never fully empowered. Chapter 2 examines these patterns in depth, but the essential mechanism is clear: omission through severe underrepresentation, trivialization through resource restriction, and condemnation through limited access to career-sustaining opportunities. As the UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report states bluntly: "White men continue to disproportionately receive more investment from Hollywood" (Hunt & Ramón, 2025, p. 47).

The Education-Industry Pipeline

These industry patterns don't exist in isolation from educational institutions. They create a feedback loop where documented disparities in professional opportunities actively shape curriculum priorities, resource allocation, and whose expertise gets valued in media production classrooms. This pipeline operates through three interconnected mechanisms that transform

industry barriers into educational inequities. First, industry gatekeeping becomes curriculum gatekeeping. When the industry systematically limits women's and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) creators' access to resources, opportunities, and creative authority, it artificially constrains the academic hiring pool. These professionals, denied access to high-profile projects and major studio experience, may lack the traditional credentials academia values: blockbuster credits, prestigious festival recognition, or extensive high-budget portfolios. Hiring committees seek "qualified candidates" without acknowledging how industry barriers prevented women and BIPOC professionals from building those credentials in the first place. When faculty who navigated these barriers bring their hard-won industry experience to the classroom, their pedagogical innovations are labeled "experimental" and lack adequate support. Meanwhile, traditional approaches receive full institutional backing.

Second, representation in faculty mirrors representation in industry. The National Center for Education Statistics (2023) reveals a striking parallel: White faculty constitute approximately 72% of all full-time positions in degree-granting institutions, with Black faculty representing only 6 percent. This faculty demographic creates a hidden curriculum where students learn through absence whose creative authority the institution values. BIPOC students learn that their perspectives are marginal, while White students may develop unconscious associations between professional competence and whiteness, associations that persist when they enter the industry as hiring managers, executives, and collaborators.

Third, educational practices train students to accept rather than challenge industry barriers. If media production programs continue using the same logic that restricts women directors to small budgets and excludes them from major productions, we're not preparing diverse students to transform the industry; we're training them to accept and perpetuate existing

barriers. When curriculum centers only Western narrative structures, when critique disproportionately targets work by students of color, when production roles default to gendered assumptions about technical aptitude, we reproduce the symbolic annihilation students will encounter professionally.

As Banks (2019) argues, faculty cannot change the entertainment industry's culture alone, but they can amend the culture of their courses, giving students tools to prepare for the workforce while equipping them to challenge the inequities they will encounter. Current research has documented these problems extensively, but as Coleman and Yochim (2008) argue, researchers must move beyond analysis and develop specific strategies for resistance. This study responds to that call by translating theoretical frameworks into practical pedagogical tools that counter symbolic annihilation in media production classrooms.

Research Questions

This research addresses four interconnected questions:

1. How do themes of symbolic annihilation (omission, trivialization, and condemnation) manifest in current and former students' experiences within the University of Oklahoma's Creative Media Production program?
2. How can autoethnographic analysis of a Black female educator's encounters with symbolic annihilation in the entertainment industry and in higher education inform the development of counter-narrative pedagogical approaches in media production education?
3. What evidence, including experiences of women media educators nationally and internationally, demonstrates how epistemology of ignorance, stereotype

threat, and intersectionality collectively reinforce systemic barriers within media production education?

4. How can symbolic annihilation and its reinforcing barriers be systematically addressed through the development and implementation of a practical Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework for media production education?

Study Significance and Contribution

Despite increased calls for representation in media, several critical gaps persist in current research. The literature reveals scarcity in studies examining how symbolic annihilation manifests within media production classrooms, especially regarding resistance strategies employed by faculty of color and their impact on curriculum development (Coleman & Yochim, 2008). While there is academic and public interest in studying creative media production curriculum in higher education (Hickey et al., 2014), no standardized format exists for educators to follow, nor is there an evaluation process for these programs (Muir, 2013).

Three significant gaps frame this study's contribution:

First, prior research on production classroom inequities typically centers on gender alone, overlooking intersectional factors. The connection between industry experience and academic practice, particularly how workplace biases migrate into teaching spaces for diverse faculty, remains understudied (Banks, 2019).

Second, no previous study has investigated the use of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) paired with experiential learning (EL) in a long-form student-led projects in a higher education journalism creative media program (JCMP).

Third, while researchers have documented symbolic annihilation extensively, few have developed systematic frameworks for educators to implement counterstrategies in their classrooms.

This autoethnographic study addresses these gaps by developing a comprehensive Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework specifically designed for media production education. Rather than merely documenting exclusion, this research equips educators with systematic tools for creating equitable learning environments that prepare diverse students to transform industry practices. By examining my experiences as a Black woman educator and the sole Black faculty member in my department, this research illuminates barriers that might go unnoticed in traditional research approaches.

This study contributes to broader discussions about representation, pedagogy, and leadership in creative media education while providing insights into how students navigate and challenge existing power dynamics to develop their authentic creative voices. As the industry increasingly recognizes that representation drives both creative excellence and commercial success (Hunt & Ramón, 2024), this research provides critical insights for higher education's role in nurturing talent that authentically reflects our diverse society.

Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach

This study weaves together several interconnected theoretical frameworks. Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), explains how overlapping identities such as race, gender, and class shape unique experiences of privilege and oppression. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), defined by scholars like Geneva Gay (2010) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995), leverages diverse students' cultural knowledge and lived experiences to enrich learning environments. Epistemology of ignorance (Mills, 1997) examines how individuals and

institutions actively choose not to see or acknowledge inequality. Stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) describes how negative stereotypes can significantly impede individual performance and participation.

Through the lens of Black feminist thought, this study examines my journey and the experiences of other female media educators maintaining professional excellence while managing multiple roles. I play the part of a student-centered educator who values student voices, as a colleague seeking support and recognition from predominantly White faculty and administration, and as a woman balancing academic demands with personal relationships, professional career, and family responsibilities. This research documents how I cultivate and maintain joy, as conceptualized by Black women scholars like Walker (1992), Dillard (2019), and hooks (1994), while confronting institutionalized obstacles in both academia and the film industry.

Autoethnography serves as the primary methodology due to its effectiveness in illuminating personal experiences that reveal subtle and systemic patterns of marginalization often invisible in traditional research methods. By situating my narratives within broader cultural and pedagogical contexts, this study deeply investigates the intersections of personal and structural dynamics shaping media production education.

The research employs epistemology of ignorance to analyze personal and institutional patterns of knowledge resistance, using qualitative data to explore how these manifest in both faculty and student experiences. Through stereotype threat theory, I examine my own navigational strategies in academia while documenting student experiences in classroom and creative spaces. The pedagogical analysis draws on experiential learning theory, hidden

curriculum research, and culturally responsive teaching practices, with each section enriched by narrative accounts of classroom experiences and curriculum development.

These frameworks inform practical teaching strategies including experiential learning, uncovering hidden curricula, navigating unwritten rules within predominantly White institutions (PWIs), and creating pedagogical approaches that honor all students' cultures and experiences. Ultimately, this scholarly exploration builds toward the creation of a practical pedagogical framework that educators can systematically implement to cultivate more equitable and inclusive media production classrooms.

Overview of Chapters

This dissertation explores systemic inequities in media production education through an autoethnographic lens, providing educators with practical tools to dismantle patterns of symbolic annihilation. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review exploring symbolic annihilation and supporting theoretical frameworks, including detailed analysis of industry data and educational disparities. Chapter 3 describes the autoethnographic methodology, including data collection procedures and analysis techniques. Chapter 4 analyzes the narratives and data gathered from my experiences and student perspectives. Chapter 5 synthesizes the theoretical insights and empirical findings from previous chapters to present a comprehensive Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework for media production education. This framework translates theoretical concepts into actionable pedagogical strategies, offering educators systematic tools for transforming their classrooms and creating equitable pathways for diverse storytellers.

My journey from those high school dreams through Hollywood and into the classroom wasn't linear, but it was necessary. Each experience built upon the last, giving me the tools and

perspective needed to not just teach media production, but to help reshape the narrative about who gets to tell stories. Because while my high school teacher was right about not hating your job, I've learned something even more important: sometimes the work you're meant to do isn't just about personal satisfaction; it's about creating space for change, one classroom, one student, one story at a time.

Chapter 2. THE SCREENING ROOM: *LITERATURE REVIEW*

PART 1: *Defining the Problem: Symbolic Annihilation in Media and Education*

Symbolic Annihilation: Theoretical Foundations

George Gerbner, who crafted cultivation theory, coined the concept of symbolic annihilation to describe how the lack of representation in media cultivates assumptions about society in the real world (Means Coleman & Yochim, 2008). Scholars have since expanded this foundational concept. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu characterized it as a form of subtle violence that disregards the legitimacy of an identity (Paul & Hess, 2013). Cole Bowman offers a more explicit definition: "the term symbolic annihilation refers to the erasure of people: specifically, categories of people like women, people of color, people with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ+ community from popular media" (Bowman, 2021, para 3). What these scholars share is recognition that underrepresentation sends a powerful message about who matters in society.

Building on Gerbner's foundational work, Professor Gaye Tuchman divided the concept of symbolic annihilation into three aspects: omission, trivialization, and condemnation. Omission means when certain groups are systematically excluded from media representation, audiences receive a clear message: these people don't matter, or perhaps don't exist at all (Tuchman, 1978). This form of erasure operates powerfully through what is not shown.

Scholars have expanded on Tuchman's framework by tracking how omission persists across different contexts and time periods. Klein and Shiffman (2009) analyzed over 65 years of animated cartoons and found that women, racial minorities, elderly people, and LGBTQ+ individuals remained dramatically underrepresented throughout this entire period – with little improvement over time (Klein & Shiffman, 2009, p.69). These groups were often symbolically annihilated, appearing at rates far below their actual presence in the population. The 2025 Global

Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) confirmed that "progress towards gender equality in the news media is flatlining" (GMMP, 2025, "Key Facts" section). Despite affecting 50% of the population, gender-based violence barely makes the news (GMMP, 2025). This selective silence tells audiences which issues and whose experiences matter in public discourse.

Merskin (1998) documented similar patterns for Native Americans, finding that Indigenous peoples experienced near-total exclusion in media unless portraying historical figures, effectively erasing contemporary Native American existence from public consciousness. Gutsche and colleagues (2022) demonstrated how omission operates in contemporary news coverage through missing context. In their analysis of news coverage of incidents where White people called 911 on Black individuals engaged in everyday activities, they found that journalists systematically omitted cultural context about where these incidents came from and their connection to larger racial and social conditions (Gutsche et. al., 2022, p.263). This erasure of context represents a form of symbolic annihilation that allows audiences to view incidents as isolated rather than as patterns of systemic racism. I see this play out in my own classroom. When I ask students to name a film about my ancestors (Black people) before they were enslaved, they can never name one. That silence reveals how omission shapes whose stories are told and whose histories are considered worth preserving.

Trivialization is the minimizing of an image. When groups do appear in media, they are often relegated to narrow, stereotypical roles that reduce the complexity and humanity of their lived experiences (Tuchman, 1978; Udasmoro, 2017). This teaches audiences that certain populations are less significant or capable than others.

Klein and Shiffman (2009) demonstrated how trivialization operates in animated cartoons. Even when underrepresented groups appeared, they were limited to specific character

types and restricted narrative functions. This pattern constrained the range of roles available to them compared to majority group members (Klein & Shiffman, 2009, p. 68-71). Harp, Loke, and Bachmann (2013) examined how women remained symbolically annihilated in news media's globalization discourse, finding that female perspectives were trivialized or excluded from serious economic and political discussions (Harp, Loke & Bachmann, 2013, p.8). Gutsche and colleagues (2022) revealed how trivialization operates through contemporary news practices. In their analysis of 2018-2019 news coverage of racial profiling incidents, they found that media outlets used hashtags like #BBQBecky to describe serious cases where White people called police on Black individuals engaged in everyday activities. These cutesy monikers trivialized incidents of racial profiling and potential violence, transforming them into entertainment rather than examining them as manifestations of systemic racism. The researchers introduced the concept of linguistic appropriation, demonstrating how media can adopt a community's language while stripping away its original meaning and social justice intent (Gutsche et al., 2022, p. 263). This appropriation serves as a form of symbolic annihilation even when the affected community's own terms are being used.

The 2025 GMMP documented that women's participation as news sources continues primarily in ordinary roles — as popular opinion providers and eyewitness accounts rather than expert sources or authorities. While strides have been made toward gender parity in reporter roles, digital news has not proven to be a pathway to greater inclusion of women as media professionals. Historical patterns confirm that women reporters are much more likely to select female news subjects than their male counterparts, suggesting that systemic change requires diversifying who tells the stories. Even as women's visibility in media increased numerically, they were often objectified for visual appeal rather than featured as authoritative voices,

demonstrating how trivialization persists even when representation expands (GMMP, 2025). The quality and dimensionality of representation matter as much as its presence.

Condemnation is the vilifying of an image. This aspect of symbolic annihilation presents certain groups as threats, problems, or moral failures within the narrative structure (Tuchman, 1978; Udasmoro, 2017). Such representation distorts what it means to belong to a certain group (Bowman, 2021).

Recent scholarship has traced how condemnation adapts across different marginalized communities while maintaining its harmful function. The 2025 GMMP found that despite "the Beijing Platform's demand for non-stereotyped portrayals, reinforced by the recent Pact for the Future (2024) which requires action to dismantle barriers for women and girls – gender stereotypes in 2025 are more entrenched than they were over the past 30 years" (GMMP, 2025, "Key Facts" section). This entrenchment manifests through condemning portrayals that continue to define women through narrow, often negative frameworks. Shaheen (2001) analyzed Hollywood's vilification of Arab peoples in his documentary, *Reel Bad Arabs*, finding that Arabs were largely invisible in media unless depicted as terrorists, villains, or morally corrupt figures. This created a pattern of condemnatory representation that justified discrimination. Means Coleman and Yochim (2008) examined how African Americans faced condemnation through media portrayals that confined them to criminal roles or stereotypes, providing ideological justification for intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender (Coleman & Yochim, p. 7). These scholars demonstrated that condemnation often operates through narrative framing and character motivation, making it more insidious than overt negative stereotyping.

These three aspects of symbolic annihilation pose significant harm, as they offer possible role models in manners that are belittling and frequently exploitative. Such representation

distorts an individual's understanding of what it truly entails to belong to a certain group (Bowman, 2021). The media is a tool that instructs the masses, and the underrepresentation of certain populations in media cultivates false perceptions of how those populations fit in society (Klein & Shiffman, 2009). Symbolic annihilation in media teaches the public whose stories and images are not important (Brown, 2021, p. 604).

Symbolic Annihilation in Educational Settings

While Tuchman's framework initially addressed media representation, recent scholarship demonstrates how symbolic annihilation operates through institutional policies and educational practices. Ortega's (2024) critical ethnographic study of English language education in Colombia reveals how symbolic annihilation functions as what he terms "necropolitical processes," systematic institutional decisions that determine which voices, perspectives, and professional possibilities "live or die" within educational contexts (Ortega, 2024, p. 73-74).

Ortega theorizes that symbolic annihilation in educational settings operates through a "Death Triumviratus" of capitalism, neoliberalism, and globalization that creates "death-making processes" affecting both educators and students (Ortega, 2024, p. 67). His framework exposes how supposedly neutral educational policies function as mechanisms that systematically exclude diverse perspectives through three interconnected forces.

Capitalism operates as an economic system where private individuals and corporations own the means of production and operate for profit (Wood, 2016 as cited by Ortega, 2024). What does this mean in a creative media production program? It means education gets treated like any other product you can buy — you pay tuition, you get skills, those skills supposedly translate into a job. As Ortega explains, drawing on Adam Smith, capitalism's essential feature is "the motive to make a profit" through exchange transactions (Ortega, 2024, p. 68).

In media production education, this plays out in specific ways. Students become consumers shopping for the best value — they compare programs based on equipment lists, industry connections, and employment statistics. Faculty become sellers pitching their program's worth — we market our industry partnerships, our alumni success stories, our professional-grade facilities and school rankings. The entire educational experience gets measured by market logic: Is this worth the investment? Will I get a return on my tuition dollars? Can I sell these skills to an employer?

Even creativity itself gets commodified. Students learn to think about their creative work in market terms: What will this be worth? Who will buy it? Does this story have commercial appeal? Rather than asking "What do I need to say?" or "What does my community need?", students learn to ask, "What can I sell?" Their worth as filmmakers gets measured not by the power of their vision or the importance of their stories but by their employability — whether they can package themselves as products the industry wants to buy.

Neoliberalism takes capitalism's market logic and applies it to government policy and institutional practices. Harvey (2007) describes neoliberalism as an ideology that privileges free markets as the most effective way to allocate resources and positions economic growth as the best path to human advancement (as cited by Ortega, 2024). But as Ortega points out, neoliberalism isn't just an economic policy — it's a way of thinking that reshapes how we understand education itself. Chomsky (1999) explains that neoliberal policies claim to benefit everyone while serving the interests of a few powerful people who control social life for personal profit maximization (as cited by Ortega 2024).

In film programs, neoliberalism means structuring almost everything competitively. Students compete for equipment, faculty attention, crew positions, festival submissions,

internship recommendations. This competition trains them perfectly for an industry built on scarcity thinking, but it also makes students see each other as threats rather than allies, which makes collective organizing for industry change nearly impossible. Individual success matters more than collective advancement — when one student succeeds, we celebrate it in recruitment materials rather than asking what conditions made that success possible or whose labor supported it. As Ortega argues, neoliberalism shifts education from public good toward private benefit, from developing citizens toward producing workers (Ortega, 2024).

Globalization refers to the deepening interconnectedness of economies, cultures, and people worldwide through technology, trade, and capital movement (Helpman, 2018, Ortega, 2024). Film schools promise students "global careers" in a "worldwide industry," but here's what happens: we teach Hollywood's three-act structure as universal storytelling grammar, train students on equipment and software Hollywood uses, and steer them toward internships in LA or New York. As Bartelson (2000) notes, globalization is paradoxical — it claims to break down boundaries while maintaining rigid hierarchies (Bartelson, 2000, Ortega, 2024).

"Industry standards" reveals the trick. When we tell students we're teaching industry standards, we are really teaching Hollywood standards — specific aesthetic choices, production hierarchies, and storytelling conventions from one industry in one country serving primarily White, male perspectives. But calling them "industry standards" makes them seem neutral, universal, customary. International students travel thousands of miles to learn methods that will supposedly work "globally," but they're really learning to replicate Hollywood's approach and see their own storytelling traditions as less professional. Ortega describes how globalization creates "new markets based on neoliberal ideas" that end up "commodifying goods and resources" (Banya, 2010, as cited in Ortega, 2024, p. 72). Those students become the distribution

network — spreading Hollywood's methods worldwide while their own cultural approaches get dismissed as regional or amateur.

These three forces work together as what Ortega calls the "Death Triumviratus" because they're not separate forces but interlocking gears in a system (Ortega, 2024, p. 67). Capitalism commodifies education. Neoliberalism makes that commodification seem natural and beneficial. Globalization expands the reach of both while maintaining who holds power. Together, they enact symbolic annihilation — not just by failing to include diverse voices but by systematically eliminating alternative possibilities for what education could be and what students could become. The Death Triumviratus makes symbolic annihilation structural rather than accidental, institutional rather than individual.

Understanding the mechanism through which this elimination happens requires examining Mbembe's (2019) concept of necropolitics. Necropolitics describes how power operates through deciding who gets to thrive and who gets systematically diminished — not through literal death but through "the right to exterminate and exercise political power as a prerogative to dispose of human subjects and bodies (and the intellect)" (as cited in Ortega, 2024, p. 73). What makes these processes particularly effective is that they operate "gradually and often inconspicuously" (Ortega, 2024, p. 74). Institutions don't announce exclusionary intentions. Instead, they structure rewards, resources, and professional pathways in ways that appear neutral but systematically disadvantage those who don't conform to dominant norms.

The commodification of education (capitalism), the competitive individualism (neoliberalism), and the enforcement of Hollywood standards as universal (globalization) — all of these function as necropolitical processes that make marginalized perspectives literally unthinkable, unmarketable, and unprofessional.

This is symbolic annihilation operating at the institutional level. When the Death Triumviratus enacts symbolic annihilation through necropolitical processes in media production education, it creates what Ortega describes as "living dead of the system" (Ortega, 2024, p. 74) — students and faculty who remain physically present, but whose authentic voices, creative visions, and transformative possibilities have been systematically eliminated.

These necropolitical processes reveal the mechanism through which symbolic annihilation operates in media production education. It's not just that diverse voices are underrepresented or that certain stories don't get told. The system actively eliminates the conditions that would allow diverse voices to thrive — constraining what faculty can teach, what students can imagine making, and what counts as legitimate professional practice. This is symbolic annihilation functioning at the institutional level: making marginalized perspectives literally unthinkable, unmarketable, and unprofessional through structures that appear neutral but systematically advantage those who already fit industry norms.

Applying this expanded understanding to media production education reveals parallel dynamics. The key is to understand that the entertainment industry's documented disparities in representation don't emerge in a vacuum. They reflect educational systems that may be systematically reproducing these inequities through curriculum design, resource allocation, and pedagogical practices. When media production programs prioritize industry "standards" shaped by historically homogeneous gatekeepers, they may inadvertently perpetuate symbolic annihilation through omission of diverse creative traditions, trivialization of alternative storytelling approaches, and implicit condemnation of narratives that challenge dominant industry patterns.

Ortega's documentation of educator "counter-narratives," resistance strategies deployed by teachers to humanize their practice despite institutional constraints — provides crucial insight for understanding how media educators might similarly resist symbolic annihilation (Ortega, 2024, p. 77). These counter-narratives suggest that transformation requires not just curricular changes but systematic challenges to the institutional forces that constrain educational possibilities. This institutional analysis of symbolic annihilation directly connects to the documented patterns of exclusion in media industries themselves, creating a cycle where educational inequities reinforce professional disparities.

Ortega's work provides crucial theoretical grounding for examining symbolic annihilation in educational settings. However, his focus on language education in Colombia does not address the unique dynamics of creative media production programs in U.S. higher education, where students are being trained to enter the very industries with documented patterns of exclusion (Smith & Pieper, 2023). Furthermore, while Ortega identifies necropolitical processes that exclude diverse voices, no existing framework integrates symbolic annihilation analysis with culturally responsive pedagogy and experiential learning approaches specifically designed for media production contexts. This gap is particularly significant given that media production education serves as the direct pipeline into industries where symbolic annihilation is extensively documented, yet educational practices that may reproduce these patterns remain largely unexplored.

Evidence of Symbolic Annihilation in the Film Industry

The film industry provides stark illustrations of how symbolic annihilation operates not through isolated incidents but through systematic patterns of resource allocation, opportunity restriction, and career limitation. UCLA's 2025 Hollywood Diversity Report shows some

movement toward equity in certain areas, but the overall picture reveals exclusion operating across multiple dimensions of film and television production.

Streaming Films and Gender Disparities

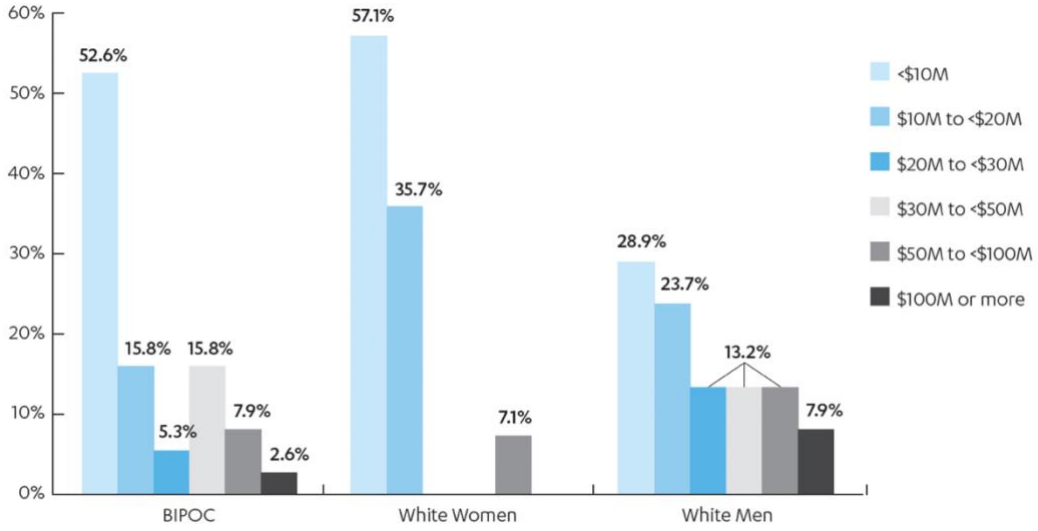
In 2024, BIPOC filmmakers directed 41% of top releases, nearly matching their 44.3% share of the U.S. population (Hunt & Ramón, 2025). That looks promising until you dig deeper. When all directors and co-directors are counted, BIPOC representation drops to 38.7% (Hunt & Ramón, 2025). The numbers tell different stories depending on how you count, a reminder that aggregate data can mask persistent inequities. Women directors tell an even starker story, leading just 28% of top streaming films despite making up over half the population (Hunt & Ramón, 2025).

But representation numbers only capture part of the problem. How the industry distributes resources reveals how it values diverse creative voices, and here the disparities become impossible to ignore. The 2025 report exposes a pattern that perfectly illustrates symbolic annihilation through trivialization: 92.8% of streaming films directed by White women had budgets below $20 million, compared to 68.4% for BIPOC filmmakers and 52.6% for White men (Hunt & Ramón, 2025). Put another way, the industry consistently gives women directors fewer resources to work with, even when it gives them opportunities.

The most telling statistic? Not one woman of any racial or ethnic background directed a streaming film with a budget of $100 million or more in 2024. Zero. Meanwhile, four men (three White and one BIPOC) got those opportunities (Hunt & Ramón, 2025). This budget ceiling shows how the industry can appear to open doors while limiting what women directors can accomplish. White male directors got the most equitable budget distribution by far. Nearly half directed films exceeding $20 million, and 7.9% steered projects with budgets of $100 million or

more (Hunt & Ramón, 2025). These aren't just numbers on a spreadsheet. They determine career trajectories, visibility, and who gets invited back for the next project.

Figure 1. Streaming Film Budget by Director Race/Ethnicity and Gender, BIPOC (N=38), White Women (N=14), White Men (N=38), 2024

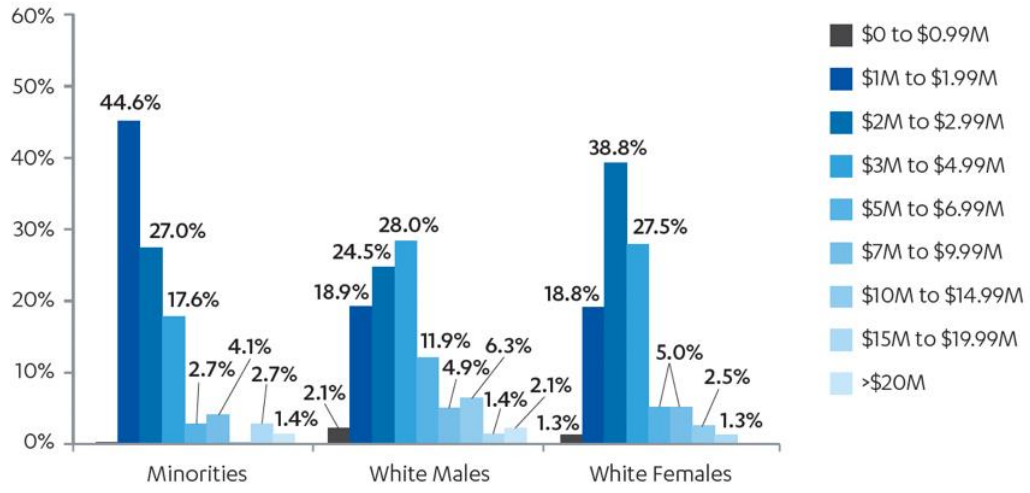


Hunt, D., & Ramón, A. (2025). Hollywood Diversity Report 2025: Part 2 Streaming. UCLA Division of Social Sciences. Figure 4, p. 23.

Digital Television Budget Disparities

The pattern extends beyond individual film budgets to operate as an industry-wide mechanism affecting both film and television production. Digital television, where students increasingly seek employment alongside film opportunities, demonstrates the same systematic resource restriction. In the 2021-22 television season, creators of color (71.6%) and White women (58.9%) were significantly more likely to receive episodic budgets under $3 million compared to White male creators (45.5%), as shown in Figure 2 (Hunt & Ramón, 2023). White male creators dominated higher budget ranges, particularly for projects exceeding $7 million per episode (14.7%), a tier where creators of color (5.4%) and White women (6.3%) had substantially less access (Hunt & Ramón, 2023).

Figure 2. Digital Television Episodic Budget Distribution by Creator Race/Ethnicity and Gender, 2021-2022 Season



Hunt, D., & Ramón, A. (2023). Hollywood Diversity Report 2023: Part 1 Film & Television. *UCLA Division of Social Sciences. Figure 9, p. 31.*

The parallel patterns in film and television budget allocation reveal that symbolic annihilation operates not through explicit exclusion but through systematic resource limitation that grants opportunities while restricting the means to fully succeed. Whether in streaming films or digital television series, the industry communicates that women's and BIPOC creators' visions merit less institutional investment than White men's work, regardless of proven competence or audience demand. This creates cascading disadvantages: smaller budgets limit access to top talent, restrict production quality, reduce marketing reach, and ultimately constrain career advancement opportunities. The consistency of this pattern across platforms demonstrates that media production students enter an industry where gatekeeping mechanisms systematically devalue diverse creative voices through resource allocation decisions that begin long before cameras roll.

Executive Leadership and Development Deals

Diversity in executive leadership (producers, studio heads) has barely budged: 87% White in television, 92% White in film (McKinsey, 2021). And when it comes to film deals

(those studio or production company agreements that give creatives resources to develop projects before filming even starts), White men held 57% of all principal positions in 2024 (Hunt & Ramón, 2025). Women made up only 26.5% of film deal principals, roughly half their share of the population (Hunt & Ramón, 2025).

Figure 3a. Share of All Film Deal Principals, by Gender, 2024 (N=291)

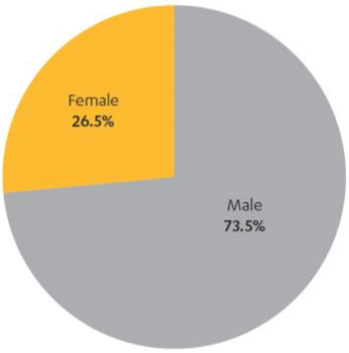
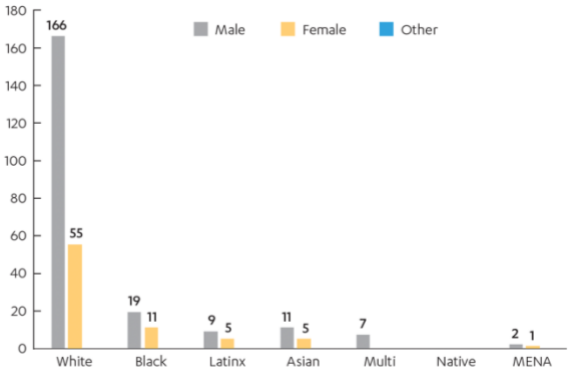


Figure 3b. All Film Deal Principal Counts, by Race/Ethnicity & Gender, 2024 (N=291)



Hunt, D., & Ramón, A. (2025). Hollywood Diversity Report 2025: Part 2 Streaming. UCLA Division of Social Sciences. Figures 5 & 6, p. 47.

Film deal principals, individuals granted studio or production company agreements providing resources for project development, were overwhelmingly White (75.9%) and male (73.5%), with White men alone representing 57% of all principals. Women comprised only 26.5% of film deal principals, demonstrating that gatekeeping structures restrict access to development resources long before production begins. These statistics demonstrate symbolic annihilation operating systematically:

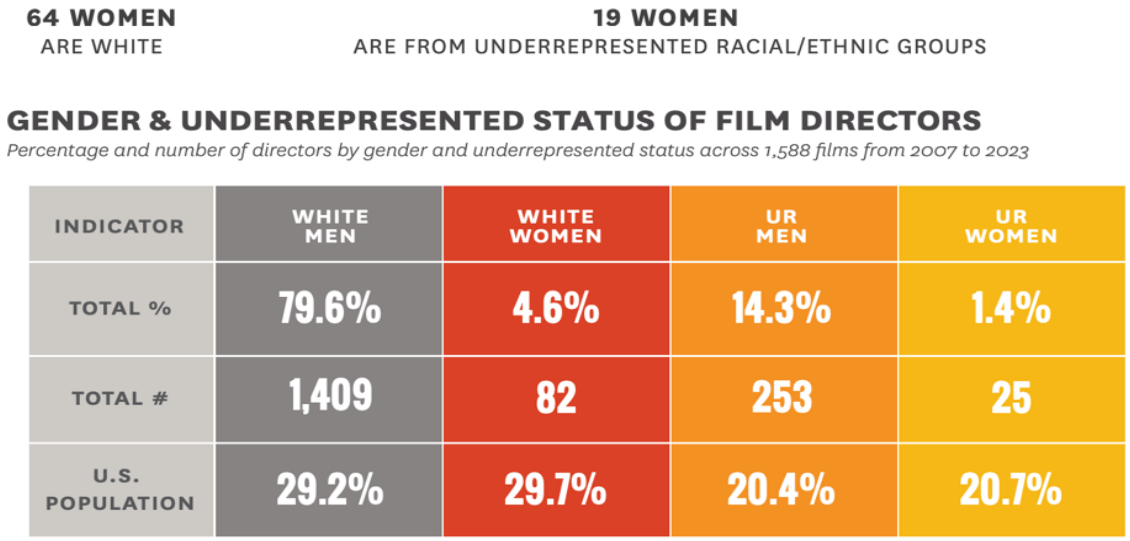
> **Omission:** Severe underrepresentation, particularly of women directors and BIPOC executives.
>
> **Trivialization:** Budget ceilings that limit women's access to high-profile projects regardless of proven competence.
>
> **Condemnation:** Restricted access to the ongoing opportunities and resources necessary for career advancement.

What becomes clear is that the industry has developed sophisticated ways to maintain exclusion while appearing to promote inclusion. The documented patterns reveal a structure that perpetuates inequity not through overt discrimination alone, but through resource allocation decisions that determine whose creative visions get full institutional backing. As the UCLA report puts it bluntly: “White men continue to disproportionately receive more investment from Hollywood” (Hunt & Ramón, 2025, p. 47).

Evidence in Film Directing: Long-Term Patterns

Recent data from Dr. Stacy L. Smith and Dr. Katherine Pieper at the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative examining 1,588 films from 2007 to 2023 reveals persistent and severe disparities in directing opportunities across both gender and race (Smith & Pieper, 2023). Figure 4 presents a powerful visualization of these disparities, comparing the representation of directors across gender and racial/ethnic categories to their proportion of the U.S. population. The data reveals that White men directed 79.6% (1,409) of top films despite comprising only 29.2% of the U.S. population, demonstrating massive overrepresentation. In stark contrast, women from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups accounted for just 1.4% (25) of directors, despite making up 20.7% of the population, a 19.3 percentage point gap between population representation and industry access (Smith & Pieper, 2023).

Figure 4. Gender and Underrepresented Status of Film Directors: Percentage and number of directors by gender and underrepresented status across 1,588 films from 2007 to 2023.



Underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. From "Inclusion in the Director's Chair" by S. L. Smith and K. Pieper, 2023, USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. Copyright 2023 by USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative.

The intersectional nature of this exclusion becomes strikingly clear when examining how gender and race mix to create the most severe barriers. White women directed 4.6% of films (82 directors) despite representing 29.7% of the U.S. population, while men from underrepresented groups directed 14.3% of films (253 directors) compared to their 20.4% population share. However, women from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups face the most dramatic underrepresentation, directing only 1.4% of films while comprising 20.7% of the population (Smith & Pieper, 2023). This pattern illustrates what Crenshaw (1991) describes as intersectional marginalization, where overlapping identity categories create unique experiences of exclusion that cannot be understood through single-axis analysis of either race or gender alone.

Looking specifically at gender across all racial/ethnic groups, Smith and Pieper's (2023) data shows minimal improvement over time. In 2023, only 14 (12.1%) of the 116 directors attached to the 100 top-grossing domestic films were women compared to 102 (88%) men, a ratio of 7.3 male directors for every female director. This represents only modest progress since

2007 when women comprised just 2.7% of directors. Across the entire 17-year period, women directed only 6% of the 1,769 films examined (Smith & Pieper, 2023). All three aspects of symbolic annihilation are evident in this longitudinal data:

> **Omission:** The severe underrepresentation of women directors, particularly women of color, constitutes a form of erasure from the creative leadership landscape (Smith & Pieper, 2023). When women from underrepresented groups direct only 1.4% of films while comprising over 20% of the population, their near-total absence from the director's chair sends a powerful message about whose creative visions are valued.
>
> **Trivialization:** Career sustainability appears significantly more challenging for women, with 78.3% of female directors making only one feature film during the 17-year span, compared to 55.8% of male directors (Smith & Pieper, 2023). This pattern suggests that women's contributions are valued less and given fewer opportunities to develop. Even when women gain access to directing opportunities, the industry systematically limits their ability to build sustained careers.
>
> **Condemnation:** The industry structure effectively punishes women by limiting their career longevity. While top female directors like Anne Fletcher and Lana Wachowski directed four films each, and Greta Gerwig directed three, their male counterparts had significantly more opportunities, with Tyler Perry directing 18 films, Steven Spielberg 12, Clint Eastwood 11, and Ridley Scott 10 (Smith & Pieper, 2023). This disparity in repeat opportunities demonstrates how the industry assigns greater value and trust to cis male directors regardless of commercial or critical success metrics.

The pattern continues with the examination of 2023's top 250 films. Exposed are the systemic barriers women face in securing other key creative roles. Women cinematographers were absent from 94% of these films, women composers were missing from 86% and 72% of projects went into post-production without women editors (Lauzen, 2024). These numbers demonstrate how the highest levels of filmmaking remain largely closed to women's creative voices.

This evidence of systemic exclusion documented by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative and the research by Lauzen (2024) directly connects to research on symbolic

annihilation in media education, demonstrating how industry barriers create a cycle of exclusion that begins in educational settings and continues into professional opportunities, particularly affecting women and women of color. The data shows that symbolic annihilation operates not just through complete omission but through severe limitation of opportunities, creating a system where even successful women directors, particularly those from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, face restricted access to sustained careers (Smith & Pieper, 2023). The 19.3 percentage point gap between population representation and directing opportunities for underrepresented women reveals the cumulative effect of intersecting barriers based on both gender and race, underscoring the necessity of intersectional analysis in understanding and addressing symbolic annihilation in media industries and the educational pipelines that feed them.

PART 2: Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Exclusion

Having established the pervasive nature of symbolic annihilation in both media industries and educational institutions, this section examines the theoretical frameworks that help explain how these patterns of exclusion are created, maintained, and experienced. These interconnected theories provide analytical tools for understanding not just what symbolic annihilation looks like, but how it operates at structural, psychological, and epistemological levels.

Standpoint Theory and Intersectionality

Standpoint theory started out as philosophical theory, but over time it's evolved into something more focused on communication (EBSCO Information Services, n.d.). The roots trace back to German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in the early 1800s. Hegel studied the different standpoints between enslavers and enslaved people. He noticed something crucial: your position in a relationship and your group's influence shape how you understand information and authority (EBSCO Information Services, n.d.). Fast forward to the 1980s, and feminist

theorist Nancy Hartsock picked up standpoint theory to examine differences between men and women. She built her work on Marxist ideas — specifically, that your work shapes how you see and understand the world (EBSCO Information Services, n.d.). What Hartsock created was feminist standpoint theory, putting women's social experiences at the center. But here's the problem: Hartsock failed to include the viewpoints of women of color (EBSCO Information Services, n.d.). It's important to understand that standpoint theory doesn't claim men and women are inherently different. Instead, it argues that cultural and social factors lead women to construct experiences that differ from their male counterparts (EBSCO Information Services, n.d.).

While "standpoint" sounds like just another word for "perspective," it means something more specific in standpoint theory. Getting to a real standpoint takes work; you must dig past the surface ideas about society that we all just assume are natural and normal (Harding, 2009). Dr. Tracy T. Bowell from the University of Waikato explains that feminist standpoint theorists make three key claims: knowledge is shaped by one's social position rather than being objective or universal; marginalized groups have better insight into social dynamics and can ask more penetrating questions than those in privileged positions; and research on power relations should start with marginalized people's experiences to gain the most accurate understanding (Bowell, n.d.).

This understanding of how social position shapes knowledge becomes more complex when we consider intersectionality. The theory of intersectionality examines how overlapping social categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality interact to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991). As a Black scholar and professor, my own standpoint illustrates this complexity. While my academic position grants certain institutional privileges, my racial identity provides critical insights into systemic inequalities that shape both

my research and pedagogy. Rather than holding just one social position, people navigate multiple, intersecting identities that create distinct standpoints. As a framework for analysis, intersectionality instructs scholars to identify where power is held and where power centers collide, allowing us to critically evaluate institutions and areas where people face multiple forms of oppression (Kelly et al., 2021).

Together, these theories provide a powerful approach for creative media education. My perspective as a Black woman educator brings both the analytical tools of standpoint theory and the lived experience that intersectionality helps articulate. Bringing these frameworks into my creative media classroom means centering diverse voices and challenging students to examine whose perspectives have traditionally been valued in media production. This theoretical foundation shapes how I design assignments and facilitate discussions, requiring students to move beyond surface-level representation to understand how different social positions generate unique insights. When students learn to recognize and value different standpoints and intersecting identities, they create more nuanced work, develop both critical thinking and empathy, and build the analytical skills necessary to create inclusive content and collaborate effectively in an industry that claims to value diversity and inclusion.

Theoretical Implications

My standpoint as a Black woman scholar provides what Collins describes as epistemic privilege, knowledge born from marginalization, yet institutional structures continue privileging supposed objectivity and neutrality, as if whiteness and maleness aren't standpoints themselves, just unmarked ones. This connects directly to Crenshaw's (1991) theorization of intersectionality: my overlapping identities create unique forms of marginalization that cannot be understood through single-axis analysis of either race or gender alone.

This understanding connects to what Carstarphen (2021) terms the "pedagogy of pain," recognizing that systemic violence and daily inequities cannot be separated from the classroom. As Carstarphen powerfully states, "I am African American, a female with rank of professor, and I should not exist" (Carstarphen, 2021, p. 144). This statement captures the necropolitical reality of educational spaces — the systematic diminishment that operates "gradually and often inconspicuously" (Ortega, 2024, p. 74) to make marginalized faculty and students feel their presence is always provisional, always under question. This pedagogy acknowledges that marginalized educators and students carry into learning spaces the weight of tokenization, microaggressions, and hostile environments. Pedagogy of pain refuses the pretense that education operates separately from the inequities shaping participants' lives. Instead, it demands that educators acknowledge this reality and create spaces where pain can be named, processed, and transformed into critical consciousness and collective resistance.

Remembering Patricia Hill Collins' insights about Black women's standpoint theory helps me reframe these challenges. Our unique social location provides a distinctive angle of vision on social reality that enriches both scholarship and pedagogy. My voice matters not despite my Blackness and womanhood, but because of it, bringing perspectives and insights that contribute to more complete understandings of media, education, and the complex dynamics that shape both fields.

Understanding how intersecting identities shape knowledge production and pedagogical authority provides essential context for examining the psychological dimensions of exclusion. The patterns of underrepresentation documented in the film industry (Figure 4) are mirrored in the educational institutions preparing future media professionals. As the following discussion

reveals, the demographic composition of academia creates conditions that intensify stereotype threat, particularly for all students navigating predominantly White educational spaces.

Stereotype Threat

The creation of an inclusive and accessible learning space requires educators to deeply understand how stereotype threat shapes student experiences. When students fear confirming negative stereotypes about their identity group, it can significantly impact their performance and sense of belonging (Cresswell-Yeager & Whitaker, 2020). This theoretical framework illuminates how identity and context intersect in educational settings, providing crucial insights for classroom practice. By recognizing how stereotype threat operates, educators can better understand the complex ways students' awareness of societal stereotypes about their race, gender, or other aspects of identity influences their educational experience and engagement with learning materials.

The presence of stereotype threat compels educators to establish learning environments that affirm students' diverse identities while consistently maintaining rigorous academic standards for all learners (Steele, 2010; Cresswell-Yeager & Whitaker, 2020). Cresswell-Yeager and Whitaker's analysis of Steele's book Whistling Vivaldi (2010) identified crucial themes emphasizing why educators should develop a comprehensive understanding of stereotype threat to effectively support student achievement and create inclusive learning environments (Cresswell-Yeager & Whitaker, 2020, p. 266):

1. Individuals know when they are being stereotyped,
2. Individuals know what people could think about them,
3. Individuals are aware that anything they do that fits the stereotypes could be taken as confirming it.

4. Individuals are aware that they could be judged and treated according to those stereotypes.

This understanding becomes particularly vital in creative media education, where representation and identity expression are central to the learning process.

Stereotype threat is described as a situational threat, meaning it can arise in any context where negative stereotypes related to one's group membership are perceived to be relevant (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007). The concept of stereotype threat arises when an individual finds themselves in a situation where a negative stereotype about their group is portrayed, leading to the fear of being stereotyped, judged, or treated in line with the stereotype, and possibly conforming to it (Steele, 1997). "A stereotype-threat is conceptualized as evoking fear to confirm negative stereotypes, it is often proposed as a mediator in models explaining the consequences of threat cues" (Kroon & Selm, 2024, p. 3). Research indicates that when individuals are exposed to a group-based stereotype threat, they tend to distance their personal identity from the domain associated with the negative stereotype (Pennington et al., 2016; Keller, 2008). Empirical research shows that exposure to counter-stereotypical, as opposed to stereotypical, media representations significantly reduce prejudiced beliefs among individuals from outgroup populations (Kroon & Selm, 2024).

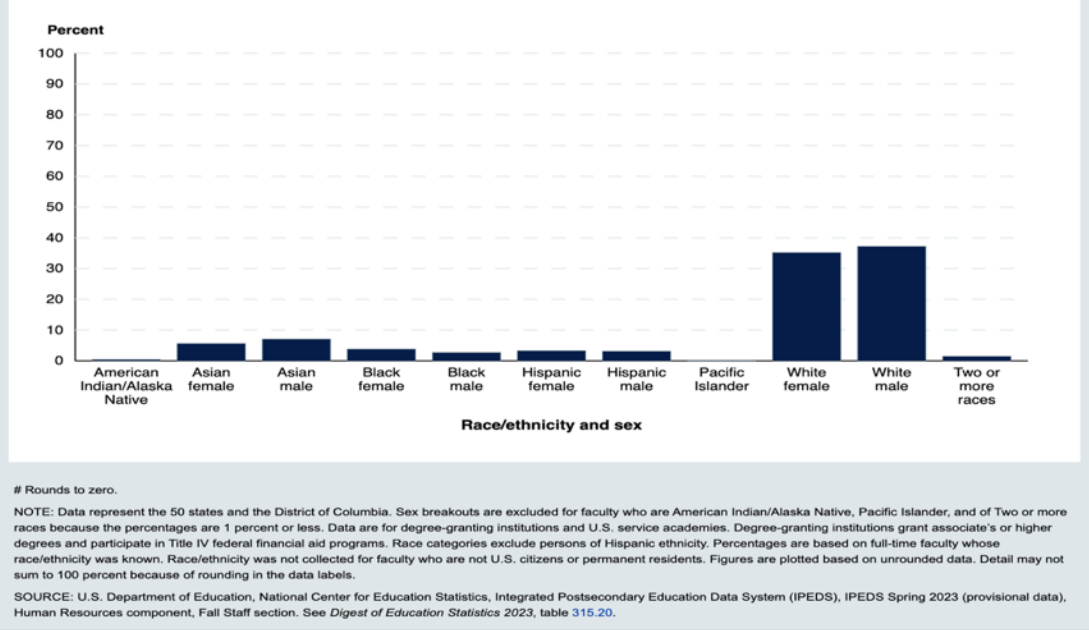
Negative stereotypes about one's group can cause members to experience various types of threats, which are shaped by the interaction between two key dimensions: the target of the threat (either the individual or the group as a whole) and the source of the threat (which may come from the self, members of other groups, or members of one's own group) (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007). Some theorists describe stereotype threat as a self-evaluative state in which anxiety about reinforcing a negative stereotype, either in the eyes of others or oneself, leads to

behaviors that align with and ultimately confirm the stereotype (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007; Koenig & Eagly, 2005). Scholars have synthesized these descriptions: “Stereotype threat is described as a psychological predicament where individuals are hindered from reaching their full potential due to the awareness that failure could reinforce a negative stereotype associated with their group, and by extension, themselves” (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007; Schmader, 2002, p. 194).

Faculty Diversity and Stereotype Threat in Higher Education

According to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2023), White faculty account for about 72 percent of all full-time positions in degree-granting institutions. Within that total, White men are about 37 percent and White women about 35 percent. All other racial/ethnic groups combined represent less than 30 percent of full-time faculty. Black faculty remain severely underrepresented, with Black women about 3 percent and Black men about 3 percent. Hispanic women and men are each about 3 percent. Asian men are about 6 percent and Asian women about 5 percent. American Indian/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races each represent about 1 percent or less.

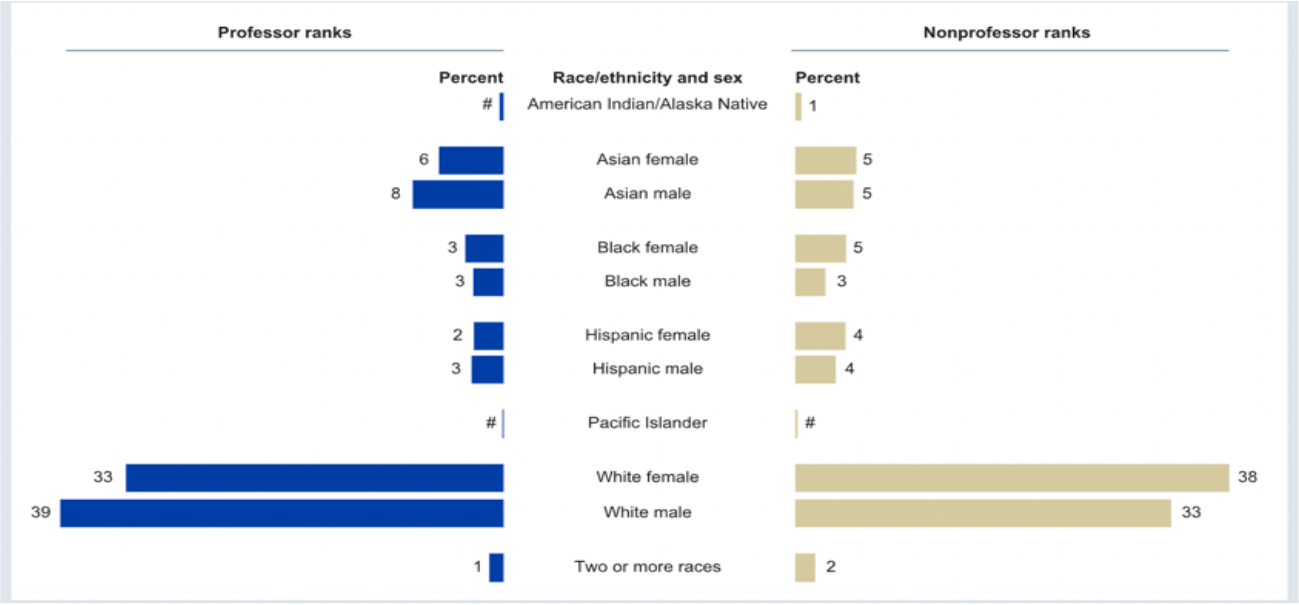
Figure 5. Percentage distribution of full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex, Fall 2022. *Note. Percentages reflect shares of all full-time faculty. Totals may not sum to 100 because of rounding and suppressed cells.*



Source. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Human Resources component, Fall Staff section, Fall 2022 (provisional). See Digest of Education Statistics 2023, Table 315.20.

The underrepresentation of faculty of color becomes more pronounced when rank is considered. Figure 6 separates professor-rank positions (assistant, associate, and full professor that are tenure-track or tenured) from non-professor-rank positions (lecturers, instructors, and other non-tenure-track roles) to show how inequities compound at higher levels of authority.

Figure 6. Percentage distribution of professor-rank and non-professor-rank full-time faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex, Fall 2022. *Note. Percentages are calculated within each rank category; the professor-rank column sums to about 100 percent, and the non-professor-rank column also sums to about 100 percent. Some groups round to zero. Totals may not equal 100 because of rounding and suppressed cells.*



Source. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Human Resources component, Fall Staff section, Fall 2022 (provisional). See Digest of Education Statistics 2023, Table 315.20.

Figure 6 exposes a troubling pattern of stratification within academia. Among professor ranks, which include tenure-track and tenured positions offering job security, academic freedom, and institutional power, White males represent 39% and White females 13%, totaling 52% of these prestigious positions. In contrast, all faculty of color combined hold significantly smaller percentages of professor-rank positions: Asian males (8%), Asian females (5%), Hispanic males (3%), Hispanic females (3%), Black males (3%), and Black females (3%), with other groups rounding to zero or representing 1%.

The disparities become even more striking when examining non-professor ranks, which include instructors, lecturers, and adjunct faculty who typically have less job security, lower pay, limited benefits, and reduced institutional influence. White males and White females dominate these positions as well (33% and 38% respectively), but the distribution reveals how faculty of

color, when they do enter academia, are disproportionately channeled into these lower-status positions. Asian females and males each represent 5% of non-professor ranks, while Hispanic males and females each represent 4%, and Black males and females each represent 3-5% of these positions.

This stratification pattern demonstrates what scholars describe as "occupational segregation" within academia, where even when faculty of color gain access to higher education institutions, they face barriers to advancing into tenured, professor-rank positions that carry the most institutional authority, job security, and influence over curriculum and policy decisions (Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). For students, particularly students of color in media production programs, this means they rarely encounter faculty of color in positions of established academic authority. Instead, if they have instructors of color at all, those instructors are more likely to be in contingent, non-tenure-track positions with less institutional power to advocate for curriculum changes, secure resources for diverse students, or challenge departmental practices that perpetuate inequity.

The implications for media production education are particularly significant. Non-tenure-track faculty, who are disproportionately faculty of color as Figure 6 demonstrates, often face higher teaching loads, limited access to professional development funds, reduced equipment access for pedagogical innovation, and exclusion from department governance and curriculum planning (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). When faculty who bring diverse industry experience and cultural knowledge are systematically positioned in contingent roles with limited institutional authority, their ability to transform curricula, challenge hidden biases, and implement culturally responsive teaching practices becomes severely constrained. This structural inequality means that even when media production programs employ faculty of color, those faculty may lack the

institutional positioning necessary to effectively counter symbolic annihilation in curriculum and pedagogy.

Furthermore, this stratification intensifies stereotype threat for students of color. Not only do they rarely see faculty who share their racial identity, but when they do, those faculty members often occupy lower-status positions within the academic hierarchy. This sends implicit messages about whose expertise is valued, who belongs in positions of authority, and whose perspectives shape the discipline's knowledge base. Students learn through observation that even when people of color enter academia, systemic barriers limit their advancement to positions of full professional recognition and institutional power (Steele, 2010). For media production students preparing to enter an industry already characterized by severe disparities in creative leadership (as shown in Figure 4), educational environments that replicate these hierarchies provide no counter-narrative to industry inequities.

These statistics powerfully illustrate the institutional context in which symbolic annihilation operates within higher education. The dramatic underrepresentation of faculty of color, particularly Black and Hispanic faculty, creates an environment where students from these backgrounds rarely see themselves reflected in positions of academic authority. This demographic reality directly connects to research on how symbolic annihilation manifests in creative media education, where the scarcity of diverse perspectives among faculty inevitably shapes curriculum development, mentorship opportunities, and the evaluation of student work.

Furthermore, this extreme underrepresentation creates conditions that foster stereotype threat, as defined by Steele and Aronson (1995), where students from marginalized groups fear confirming negative stereotypes about their group identity. In media production education specifically, Black students face the additional psychological burden of navigating an

environment where their creative voices and technical abilities may be judged against stereotypical expectations rather than their actual performance, particularly when they rarely see faculty who share their racial identity. As Steele (2010) notes, environments where one's group is severely underrepresented heighten awareness to potential judgment, creating additional cognitive load that can impair performance and undermine students' willingness to take creative risks or pursue leadership roles in production settings.

Epistemology of Ignorance

Epistemologies of ignorance reveal how the ways we choose not to know something shape what we end up knowing and believing (Bowleg et al., 2017). To really understand what we know, we must study what we don't know, the forgotten, hidden, and unexplored spaces. Examining what remains unknown, forgotten, or suppressed is essential to understanding the boundaries of knowledge itself (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007; Tuana, 2009). People often think ignorance just means not knowing something, like having a blank spot in your mind that just needs to be filled in with the right information (Bhatt & MacKenzie, 2019). But it's much deeper than that. Ignorance can actively shape how people see things, make them resist new information, and even serve a purpose for them (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007; Bhatt & MacKenzie, 2019).

Researchers are examining how various forms of ignorance, both unconscious and intentional, function to maintain racial inequality and white privilege in society (Martinez, 2020). Not knowing isn't always accidental. Epistemologies of ignorance show us that people often work hard to stay ignorant. They build and protect their not-knowing. This manufactured ignorance is tied to power: who gets to be believed, who gets to be heard, and who gets to be doubted (Tuana, 2009). Powerful groups maintain their power by actively choosing not to know

certain things. In spaces divided by race and gender, White people and men use specific ways of thinking (or not thinking) to stay on top. It's not just accidental ignorance; it's a deliberate practice that helps them keep their dominance (Bowleg et al., 2017). To truly understand knowledge, we must examine who benefits from keeping certain things unknown. We can't separate what we know from what we choose not to know, or who gains power by staying ignorant while forcing others to bear the burden of that ignorance (Tuana, 2009).

The Hidden Curriculum: Uncovering Hidden Bias

Hidden biases operate as implicit, often unconscious beliefs about social groups that form through repeated exposure to cultural messages. Banaji and Greenwald (2013) describe these biases as "bits of knowledge about social groups stored in our brains because we encounter them so frequently in our cultural environments. Once lodged into our minds, hidden bias can influence our behavior toward members of particular social groups, but we remain oblivious to their influence" (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013, p. xxi). These biases connect directly to what scholars call the hidden curriculum (HC) — those implicit and unspoken messages, beliefs, and assumptions that permeate educational settings (Myles, Trautman, & Schelvan, 2004). Unlike the formal curriculum we write in syllabi, the hidden curriculum emerges subtly through actions, inactions, and unwritten rules about what matters in educational spaces.

Bowles and Gintis (2002) spent 25 years studying how schools prepare students for the workplace, and what they found explains exactly how hidden curriculum operates. Schools don't primarily teach work skills through explicit curriculum. Instead, they structure social interactions and rewards to replicate workplace environments. They call this the correspondence principle. "The contribution of schooling to individual economic success could only partly be explained by the cognitive development fostered in schools" (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 1). What do students

actually learn? How to function within hierarchical structures through what they experience daily — the reward systems, power dynamics, and behavioral expectations embedded in educational practices. This is the hidden curriculum at work, teaching students which behaviors, personalities, and approaches lead to success long before they enter the workplace.

And the research backs this up in ways that should make every educator pay attention. Bowles and Gintis (2002) surveyed sixty-five studies on test scores and earnings. Cognitive performance accounted for only about 15% of earnings variation. Personality and behavioral traits? They played substantially larger roles. Even more striking: when cognitive test scores were added to earnings equations that already included years of schooling, the coefficient of schooling only reduced by an average of 18%. That means 82% of schooling's contribution to earnings operates through non-cognitive pathways (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 13). What schools teach students extends far beyond course content to include behavioral patterns, personality traits, and social orientations that employers value. The hidden curriculum accomplishes this teaching.

Here is proof this matters for media production education. When 3,000 U.S. employers were surveyed about what matters most in hiring decisions, "attitude" ranked highest at 4.6 on a 5-point scale. "Years of schooling" came in at 2.9. "Academic performance" scored just 2.5 (Bureau of the Census, 1998, as cited in Bowles & Gintis, 2002). British employers told a similar story: "poor attitude, motivation, or personality" showed up as a recruitment obstacle in 62% of cases reporting skill shortages, compared to "lack of technical skills" in only 43% (Green, Machin, & Wilkenson, 1998, as cited in Bowles & Gintis, 2002). So, film production programs face this reality: students learn behavioral and personality patterns through hidden curriculum

that will matter more for their professional success than technical skills. But here's the problem — these patterns may be encoding and reproducing industry inequities.

Rob Sabal (2001) noted this in his work Teaching Media: production educators often unwittingly reinforce hidden biases by consistently rewarding projects that mirror familiar narratives, limiting diverse expressions. Berry and Kernan (1983) showed how mass media, especially television, shapes social values and reinforces biases that infiltrate educational practices. When teachers recognize how hidden bias functions within the hidden curriculum, they can identify implicit messages being transmitted and intentionally reshape their teaching to create more inclusive, reflective learning environments (Giroux & Penna, 1979).

What does this look like in actual film production courses? Hidden biases manifest when instructors unconsciously value narrative structures that follow Western three-act formulas while subtly dismissing non-linear storytelling approaches. Assignment feedback praises students who reference recognized White male directors while overlooking references to equally significant women directors or filmmakers of color. Equipment access reveals hidden hierarchies — certain students get more hands-on time with advanced equipment based on perceived "natural aptitude" rather than demonstrated interest. Even class discussions show bias when contributions about technical aspects from male students receive more substantive engagement than similar comments from female students.

These patterns are exactly what Bowles and Gintis (2002) describe: schools structure rewards to replicate workplace hierarchies. But when film programs do this, they're replicating Hollywood's documented inequities. When we reward the personality traits and behavioral patterns that lead to success in an industry where White men direct 69% of films while Black directors make only 9.5% (Hunt & Ramón, 2023), we risk socializing students into the very

structures that perpetuate symbolic annihilation. The hidden curriculum teaches students which voices, stories, and approaches are considered legitimate in the field. We're encoding industry power dynamics directly into educational practices without ever making these values explicit in the curriculum.

The research on personality traits makes this even more clear. Bowles and Gintis (2002) looked at GED holders — people who show substantially better cognitive performance than other high school dropouts. But their wages? Barely higher. Behavioral and personality factors override cognitive advantages (Heckman, Hsee, & Rubinstein, 1999, as cited in Bowles & Gintis, 2002). Another study using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics found that motivational and behavioral traits measured 15-25 years earlier substantially predicted adult earnings. When these variables were introduced, they reduced unexplained variance by 5% — five times larger than the average contribution of cognitive scores (Duncan & Dunifon, 1998, as cited in Bowles & Gintis, 2002). When film programs structure their hidden curriculum around "professional behavior," "collaborative attitude," and "industry-ready demeanor" without examining whose behaviors count as professional, whose collaboration style gets valued, and which industry standards are being replicated, we may be training students in precisely the personality patterns that maintain existing hierarchies.

We are at a point in our history where educators acknowledge there are more students attending schools with ethnically diverse populations, yet the majority of textbook-based curriculum still depicts history from a Eurocentric perspective (Shropshire, 1999). Curriculum in textbooks that contain selective biased information about people of color contributes to negative perceptions of these groups (Shropshire, 1999). This curriculum design exemplifies the epistemology of ignorance in action — actively producing not-knowing through what gets taught

and what gets erased. Universities help keep White ignorance alive by embracing a business-minded approach to education that's rooted in whiteness. They claim to be colorblind and merit-based, but their whole system of deciding what counts as knowledge and success is built on White standards and experiences (de Saxe, 2021, 2023).

Here's where Bowles and Gintis's (2002) research on intergenerational inequality connects. They found that knowing someone's parental income is "about as informative about the person's own economic status as is the person's own years of schooling attained, or score on a standardized cognitive test" (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 4). The intergenerational correlation for family income averages 0.43, substantially higher than researchers previously believed (Mulligan, 1997, as cited in Bowles & Gintis, 2002). When media production programs structure their hidden curriculum to reward students who already possess cultural capital — familiarity with industry references, access to professional networks, comfort with expensive equipment, confidence in critiquing work — they may be functioning as mechanisms of intergenerational status transmission rather than as engines of social mobility.

A teacher's impact on student achievement is the primary measure of their effectiveness. This influence should be considered the most critical aspect of teaching quality (Center for Teacher Quality, 2007; Jones & Collier, 2020). Insufficient preparation leaves many educators unable to recognize or address culturally responsive issues when they arise in educational settings. This knowledge gap also diminishes their capacity to effectively utilize instructional materials (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Jones & Collier, 2020). "Teachers need to be aware of the value perspectives presented to their students through both the curricula and the teaching materials they use in order to avoid unknowingly perpetuating bias and prejudice" (Hollins & Oliver, 1999, p. 15).

Bowles and Gintis (2002) help us understand why teacher awareness matters so much. They demonstrated that schools influence cultural evolution through two mechanisms: which cultural models (teachers) students encounter, and which behaviors the reward structure reinforces (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 18-20). When children are paired with teachers who model particular cultural traits and when school reward structures favor certain behaviors, students learn not through explicit instruction but through observing what leads to success. In media production education, this means students learn whose stories matter, whose creative approaches receive validation, and which professional behaviors lead to opportunities — not primarily through syllabi but through daily patterns of recognition and dismissal. Faculty who are unaware of these dynamics become unwitting agents of the correspondence principle, preparing students for an industry structure without questioning whether that structure should be replicated.

Despite growing interest in entertainment industry careers among college students, there's a noted absence of inclusive coursework, especially in scriptwriting classes, limiting non-stereotypical character development (Banks, 2019; Walker, 2022). Educators must remain mindful of the viewpoints and values embedded within their curricular choices and instructional materials to prevent inadvertently perpetuating bias and prejudice among their students (Hollins & Oliver, 1999). Professors can identify curriculum gaps if they understand what exposure students receive in the classroom about diversity as they are being prepared to work in their fields of study (Muturi & Zhu, 2019; Richard, 1996). Research on college level informal hidden (bias) curriculum found the influence "of personal growth and development to be strongly present and at times far more relevant than the formal curriculum" (Warren, Mitten, D'Amore, & Lotz, 2019, p. 141).

The book The Agony of Education: Black Students at White Colleges and Universities by Joe R. Feagin, Hernan Vera, and Nikitah Imani discusses the fact that many universities and colleges make only token movements in diversifying curriculum and no real progress (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996). Students of color often feel isolated on media production projects and in the classroom (Banks, 2019). Higher education institutions that are cultivating the next generation of media directors, writers, editors, and cinematographers must take into consideration when creating curriculum that students develop ideas for their content from their personal values and unconscious biases (O'Brien, 1990). The Hollywood Diversity Report launched at the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA in 2014 releases a report on cultural representation in the television and film industry every year. Their 2023 report presented data that shows Black writers in Hollywood are underrepresented at 10 percent compared to White writers at 67 percent. Black directors are underrepresented at 9.5 percent compared to White directors at 69 percent (Hunt & Ramón, 2023).

Bowles and Gintis (2002) concluded that schools' historical evolution "is not accounted for by the gradual perfection of a democratic or pedagogical ideal. Rather, it was the product of a series of conflicts arising through the transformation of the social organization of work and the distribution of its rewards" (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 2). If we apply this lens to media production education, we have to ask: whose interests shape program structures, reward systems, and definitions of professional success? When film programs replicate Hollywood's hierarchies through their hidden curriculum, they may be functioning less as sites of creative and intellectual development and more as sorting mechanisms that channel students into industry positions while leaving industry structures unquestioned. Numerous educators lack adequate culturally competent knowledge, experience, and training. Since societal transformation begins with

education, if we expect students to contribute meaningfully to society, the impetus for change must originate from those who teach them (Grey & O'Brien, 1996; Jones & Collier, 2020).

The hidden curriculum will operate whether we acknowledge it or not. It works through the correspondence principle that structures school experiences to mirror workplace hierarchies. It operates through reward systems that value personality and behavior over cognitive skills. It functions through cultural transmission that reproduces intergenerational inequality. Recognizing how this happens gives media production educators both a diagnostic tool and a call to action. The question is whether we will let hidden curriculum unconsciously replicate Hollywood's documented inequities or whether we will deliberately restructure our programs' reward systems, behavioral expectations, and cultural models to prepare students for an industry that should exist rather than simply the one that does.

The Three Forms of Cultural Capital in Media Education and Industry

Bourdieu (1986) identifies three distinct but interrelated forms of cultural capital that operate simultaneously to reproduce social hierarchies. Understanding how each form manifests across the education-to-industry pipeline reveals the specific mechanisms through which symbolic annihilation is enacted and maintained.

Embodied Cultural Capital: Dispositions, Habitus, and "Natural Talent"

Embodied cultural capital exists as "long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" acquired through prolonged exposure and socialization (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 258). In media education, this manifests as aesthetic sensibilities, narrative understanding, and communication styles developed through family exposure to media, arts, and storytelling traditions. Students from backgrounds historically excluded from media representation often possess rich embodied

cultural capital through oral storytelling traditions, community-specific aesthetic practices, or survival narratives that offer unique creative perspectives.

However, symbolic annihilation operates by systematically failing to recognize these alternative forms of embodied cultural capital as legitimate knowledge. When curriculum exclusively validates Western narrative structures, European art film traditions, or Hollywood production standards, it devalues the embodied cultural capital that diverse students bring to creative spaces (Lareau, 2015). Faculty may interpret a Black student's use of nonlinear storytelling as "lacking technical proficiency" rather than recognizing it as sophisticated narrative capital from African American traditions. Asian American students' collaborative approaches may be read as "indecisiveness" rather than appreciated cultural dispositions.

The concept of "natural talent" itself masks embodied cultural capital. When White male students are perceived as having "natural aptitude" for directing, what's being recognized is embodied capital that aligns with dominant industry aesthetics. The UCLA data showing women and BIPOC directors receive lower budgets (Figure 1.) partly reflects how the industry devalues embodied cultural capital that diverges from White male norms. When studio executives describe a woman director as "lacking confidence," they often respond to differences in how authority is performed, differences rooted in embodied cultural capital rather than actual competence.

Objectified Cultural Capital: Equipment, Resources, and Industry Access

Objectified cultural capital exists in material cultural goods: equipment, film libraries, diverse media examples, and industry networks (Bourdieu, 1986). Students from affluent backgrounds often arrive at university already familiar with professional equipment, having participated in summer film programs or built portfolios through well-resourced high schools.

This accumulated advantage appears as individual merit when it represents family investment in cultural goods.

In higher education, film libraries dominated by White male directors, lighting tutorials designed for European skin tones, and departmental resource allocation patterns all represent objectified capital that reinforces hierarchies. Non-tenure track faculty, disproportionately faculty of color (Figure 6), often have reduced access to equipment privileges or production budgets, perpetuating inequality when they cannot provide students the same access to objectified capital as tenure-track colleagues.

In the film industry, the systematic budget disparities documented in the UCLA reports (Figures 1-3) represent objectified capital inequality at scale. A $100 million budget provides access to A-list actors, top cinematographers, marketing campaigns, and distribution networks. When zero women directed films with budgets over $100 million in 2024 (Hunt & Ramón, 2025), they were denied objectified capital necessary for industry recognition. The 57% of film deal principals who are White men (Figure 3b) control development funds, office space, and relationships with financiers, gatekeeping objectified capital before production even begins.

Institutionalized Cultural Capital: Credentials and Gatekeeping

Institutionalized cultural capital exists through academic qualifications, credentials, and institutional recognition (Bourdieu, 1986). In media education, this includes terminal degrees from “prestigious” film schools, internships at major studios, and national awards from recognized festivals. Assessment criteria that consistently reward projects mirroring industry standards shaped by homogeneous gatekeepers’ force students to choose between maintaining authentic expressions and fitting dominant expectations or risking lower evaluations.

The severe underrepresentation of Black faculty (3% each for males and females), (Figure 5) means few students encounter professors whose institutionalized capital includes lived expertise in navigating industry racism. Letters of recommendation represent crucial institutionalized capital; faculty with industry connections write letters that carry weight, while faculty without such networks cannot provide the same certification. First-generation students and students of color often lack access to faculty possessing this form of capital.

In the film industry, the 79.6% of directors who are White men (Figure 4) possess institutionalized capital that operates invisibly as "industry standard." Studio executives (87-92% White), (McKinsey, 2021) create a closed system where institutionalized capital is validated by those who already possess it. A White male director who attended film school with a studio executive possesses credentials that convert to relationships, which convert to budgets. Greta Gerwig's three directing credits versus Tyler Perry's 18 films (Smith & Pieper, 2023) reflects how institutionalized capital (industry recognition) gates access to future opportunities.

These three forms do not operate independently but compound and convert into one another, creating cycles that either accelerate or impede advancement. For students at intersectional positions, particularly Black women, capital deficits compound. Without embodied capital aligned with dominant aesthetics, accessing objectified capital becomes harder. Limited objectified capital restricts building portfolios for institutionalized capital. Without institutionalized capital recognized by gatekeepers, limited industry opportunities prevent accumulating the objectified capital to demonstrate competence. Each deficit makes others harder to overcome.

This framework reveals symbolic annihilation operates not through single barriers but through systematic restriction of all three capital forms simultaneously. Educational

interventions addressing only one form (providing equipment without addressing embodied or institutionalized capital) have limited effect. Comprehensive transformation requires addressing all three while recognizing how intersecting identities shape access to each.

PART 3: Pedagogical Approaches for Transformation

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Higher Education

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), also known as culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), can be defined as an "instructional pedagogical strategy" that uses the tools needed to educate all students from all parts of society (Larke, 2013, p. 39). Another definition is pedagogy "that teaches to and through the strengths of ethnically diverse students" (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Gay, 2000, p. 29). Students have a well-rounded education when the contributions of people from diverse backgrounds are welcomed and encouraged by the lessons teachers include within their curriculum (Pewewardy, 1999). Most studies on CRT are done at the grade school level with most students in the study being African American (Morrison et al., 2008; Byrd, 2016). Educators who use CRP methods can respond to classroom challenges in a calculated way (Larke, 2013). Professors who are the most successful in the classroom intentionally think of themselves as providing an education, as fostering how students learn (Bain, 2004). Academics who utilize CRT recognize that education inherently operates within existing power structures and social hierarchies, and they inspire, motivate, and guide their students to understand how they can serve as catalysts for societal change (Pinto-Lopez et al., 2020). CRT embraces an approach where learning experiences are built around student needs and perspectives, with instructors taking on the role of guides who facilitate knowledge construction rather than simply delivering information (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Cresswell-Yeager & Whitaker, 2020). Creating a

safe, natural, and authentic critical learning environment for students is what the best teachers do (Bain, 2004).

For clarity, throughout this paper when I discuss CRT, I am referring to culturally responsive teaching or culturally relevant pedagogy. These concepts are not to be confused with critical race theory. Both are abbreviated as "CRT," but they are distinct concepts. Critical race theory emerged from critiques of critical legal studies. While critical legal studies scholars examined how historical and cultural factors shaped legal frameworks, they failed to address racism and racial dynamics in their analyses (Cook & Bryant, 2024). Critical race theory was established specifically to highlight the experiences of people of color and to examine the perpetuation of white supremacy systems (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Critical race theory offers pedagogical approaches that expose the mechanisms by which racism maintains oppressive systems, while also advocating for the dismantling of racial oppression.

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is practiced when an educator creates a class atmosphere that acknowledges the cultural differences, knowledge base, beliefs, and values of their students as assets to the learning environment (Gay, 2010). The term "pedagogy" in our contemporary language originates from an ancient expression meaning a slave assigned to the role of an instructor. The Greek term "paidagogos" later transformed into Latin as "paedagogus," referred to a slave of somewhat elevated status responsible for accompanying children to and from places of learning (Givens, 2021). While race and ethnicity constitute just one aspect of culturally responsive teaching, there is widespread agreement in the literature that cultural factors significantly impact classroom dynamics. Although scholars generally endorse this perspective, research examining how teacher and student identities shape classroom communication remains scarce (Maingi, 2017).

Professors who are the most successful in the classroom intentionally think of themselves as providing an education, "as fostering how students learn" (Bain, 2004, p. 67). "Creating a safe, natural, and authentic critical learning environment for students is what the best teachers do" (Bain, 2004, p. 47). Practicing CRP gives educators a foundation to help facilitate the creation of inclusive teaching materials like books, workshops, and lectures which include the experiences of a diverse student body. Many researchers have stated that one of the most effective ways of educating and addressing the needs of a diverse student body is culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000, 2010; Ford, 2010; Harmon, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2010).

To be successful at CRP, an educator must first have a good foundation of their own cultural competence and be aware they are building a bridge, using their students' previous experiences and combining it with the curriculum (Byrd, 2016). This allows professors and instructors to engage the prior knowledge the students had before coming into the classroom and demonstrate a range of diverse expertise (Irvine, 2010, p. 59). Circumstances in the classroom may sometimes need adjustments and that can be challenging. Educators who use CRP methods can respond to uncomfortable changes in a calculated way (Larke, 2013). The "calculated" approach means teachers employ cultural knowledge, self-reflection, and pedagogical skills to navigate difficult moments in ways that maintain an inclusive learning environment rather than defaulting to conventional classroom management techniques that might inadvertently marginalize certain cultural expressions or learning styles (Larke, 2013).

Researcher Jacqueline Irvine discusses five myths about CRP that have made this topic uncomfortable for some educators to implement in their classrooms and school curriculum:

1. Only teachers of color can be culturally relevant.
2. Culturally relevant pedagogy is not appropriate for white students.

3. Caring teachers of diverse students have no classroom management skills.
4. The purpose of culturally relevant pedagogy is to help diverse students "feel good" about themselves.
5. Culturally relevant teachers attend to learning styles by addressing African American male students' need for kinesthetic activities or by allowing Asian American students to work alone (2010, p. 58).

Including cultural lessons in all classes should be a priority for all educators (Gay, 2010, 2013). In one of the few empirical studies on CRP, researcher Christy Byrd concluded that when CRP methods are used by teachers to stimulate connection of other cultures in the lessons, the results are better learning outcomes (Byrd, 2016, p. 7). Faculty members who skillfully implement CRT willingly discuss their own struggles and achievements as learning opportunities for their students. Through this practice, they inspire and encourage students to strive toward reaching their fullest individual potential (Miller, 2020). Media instructors possess a valuable opportunity to design curriculum that simultaneously enhances cultural intelligence within themselves and their students, while developing effective pedagogical strategies that foster deeper student engagement in the learning process (Cresswell-Yeager & Whitaker, 2020).

Critical Media Literacy as Pedagogical Framework

Media literacy education has included critical dimensions since the 1920s, when educators first sought to develop informed, critical consumers who could analyze media's persuasive techniques and ideological messages. But media has changed dramatically. The landscape our students navigate bears little resemblance to the broadcast-dominated era that shaped traditional media literacy frameworks. Students now encounter algorithmic curation, user-generated content, streaming platforms, and social media ecosystems that blur the lines

between producer and consumer. More significantly for media production education, our students aren't positioned as consumers at all. They're creators entering an industry with documented patterns of exclusion. This shift demands that we extend media literacy's critical tradition into production pedagogy itself — teaching students to critically examine not just the media they encounter but the industry structures, power dynamics, and representational patterns embedded in the media they create.

Literacies as Socially Constructed

Kellner and Share (2007) argue that literacies are socially constructed within institutional contexts governed by specific rules and conventions. Because literacies evolve in response to social and cultural change, the interests of elites controlling hegemonic institutions, and the emergence of new technologies, media literacy must extend beyond technical skills to address how power shapes what gets created, distributed, and valued (Kellner & Share, 2007). This insight directly connects to symbolic annihilation in media production education. When curricula systematically omit diverse filmmaking traditions, trivialize non-Western narrative structures, and implicitly condemn creative approaches that challenge industry norms, they're not just leaving things out accidentally. They're maintaining what Mills (1997) calls epistemology of ignorance, actively cultivated gaps in knowledge that preserve existing power structures.

Critical media literacy differs from traditional approaches by explicitly addressing ideology and power. Masterman (1985 & 2001) established that media education's central concept should be representation, understanding that media are constructed symbolic systems rather than neutral reflections of reality. Buckingham (2003) extends this, arguing that media literacy must examine the social, cultural, and political contexts within which meaning making happens. For media production students, this means understanding that "industry standards" for

cinematography, editing, or narrative structure aren't neutral technical requirements, but culturally constructed preferences shaped by historically homogeneous gatekeepers (Luke, 1994; Buckingham, 2003).

From Analysis to Production

Traditional media literacy often stops at critique. Students learn to identify stereotypical representations, and that's valuable. But as Kellner and Share (2007) emphasize, critical media literacy must include production, creating alternative media that challenges rather than replicates dominant representations. Students need both the analytical tools to recognize symbolic annihilation and the creative skills to counter it through their own media-making practices. Without production components, media literacy risks creating cynical critics who can identify problems but lack agency to create solutions (Kellner & Share, 2007; Masterman, 1985/2001).

This dual emphasis on critique and creation becomes essential when examining how symbolic annihilation operates through all three dimensions identified by Tuchman (1978). Critical media literacy provides frameworks for recognizing omission (whose stories are systematically absent?), trivialization (whose contributions get marginalized?), and condemnation (whose creative approaches get dismissed as unprofessional?). When students learn that these patterns aren't natural but constructed, they gain tools for challenging them.

Integration with Culturally Responsive Teaching

The power of critical media literacy multiplies when integrated with culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994). While CRT emphasizes centering students' cultural knowledge as assets, critical media literacy provides frameworks for analyzing how dominant media representations have systematically devalued those same cultural perspectives. Together, these approaches help students recognize that their diverse backgrounds provide not

just personal stories to tell but alternative epistemologies and aesthetic traditions that enrich media production (Kellner & Share, 2007; Gay, 2010; Luke, 1994).

For example, when a Black student brings storytelling traditions from their community into a screenwriting class, critical media literacy helps frame those traditions as sophisticated narrative techniques rather than departures from "correct" structure. It makes visible how Hollywood formulas reflect specific cultural traditions that have been universalized through institutional power, creating space for multiple valid approaches.

Preparing Students for Industry Transformation

The stark disparities documented by Smith and Pieper (2023) and Hunt and Ramón (2025) — women directors receiving lower budgets, BIPOC creators facing restricted opportunities, systematic exclusion from creative leadership — didn't emerge accidentally. They reflect industry structures built on patterns of symbolic annihilation that critical media literacy helps students identify.

This theoretical grounding directly informs EMERGE's Media Literacy Phase (Chapter 5), which emphasizes developing students' analytical capacities to recognize how symbolic annihilation operates through media structures, representations, and industry practices. By integrating critical media literacy with culturally responsive teaching and experiential learning, media production education can move beyond simply training students in technical skills to preparing them as critically conscious creators capable of transforming industry practices (Kellner & Share, 2007; Buckingham, 2003).

Theoretical Foundations of Experiential Learning

In the simplest terms, experiential learning (EL) epitomizes the ideal learning journey, encouraging self-awareness as a learner and providing the tools for individuals to assume a form

of control for their development and learning environment (Institute for Experiential Learning, 2024). Experiential learning combines direct engagement with real-world situations and the transformation of these experiences into meaningful understanding (Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). In creative media education, this approach manifests through hands-on production work where students develop both technical expertise and artistic abilities through active participation in real-world scenarios. David Kolb developed the framework for Kolb's experiential learning theory, which explains how individuals learn by experiencing (Institute for Experiential Learning, 2024). Additionally, it should empower individuals to determine methods for achieving objectives, foster openness in addressing challenges, view mistakes as vital learning opportunities, offer chances to acquire new skills, provide regular feedback, promote experimentation with fresh approaches, and facilitate the application of classroom learning into practical activities (Brandon, 2002; Honey, 1992).

Hands-on Learning Approaches in Media Production

In a 2023 case study conducted at Bond University Film and Television School in Australia, feedback from students revealed their appreciation of the invaluable experience acquired by producing a full-featured film (Sergi, Fichett, & Fisher, 2023). The project at Bond University, titled: *The Fear of Darkness*, had a 1.5-million-dollar budget and was shot over 20 days (Sergi, Fichett, & Fisher, 2023). Commissioned research from the Mitchell Institute at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia demonstrated that students who gain work experience during their studies tend to achieve better employment outcomes by age 25 (Hurley et al., 2021). This finding comes from the "Industry Experiences and Their Role in Education to Work Transitions" report, which was developed as part of the Review of University-Industry Collaboration in Teaching and Learning for the Federal Department for Education, Skills and

Training (now the Department of Education) in Australia. These findings were a confirmation by Billet's (2015) prior research, which revealed that students who engaged in real-world industry-based learning environments complementing their classroom instruction acquired new hard and soft skills and experienced improved outcomes post-graduation (Sergi, Fichett, & Fisher, 2023). To ensure relevance to students and facilitate their transition into the workforce, universities must prioritize experiential learning as a crucial skill-building approach (Razali et al., 2018).

Engaged Pedagogy and Experiential Learning

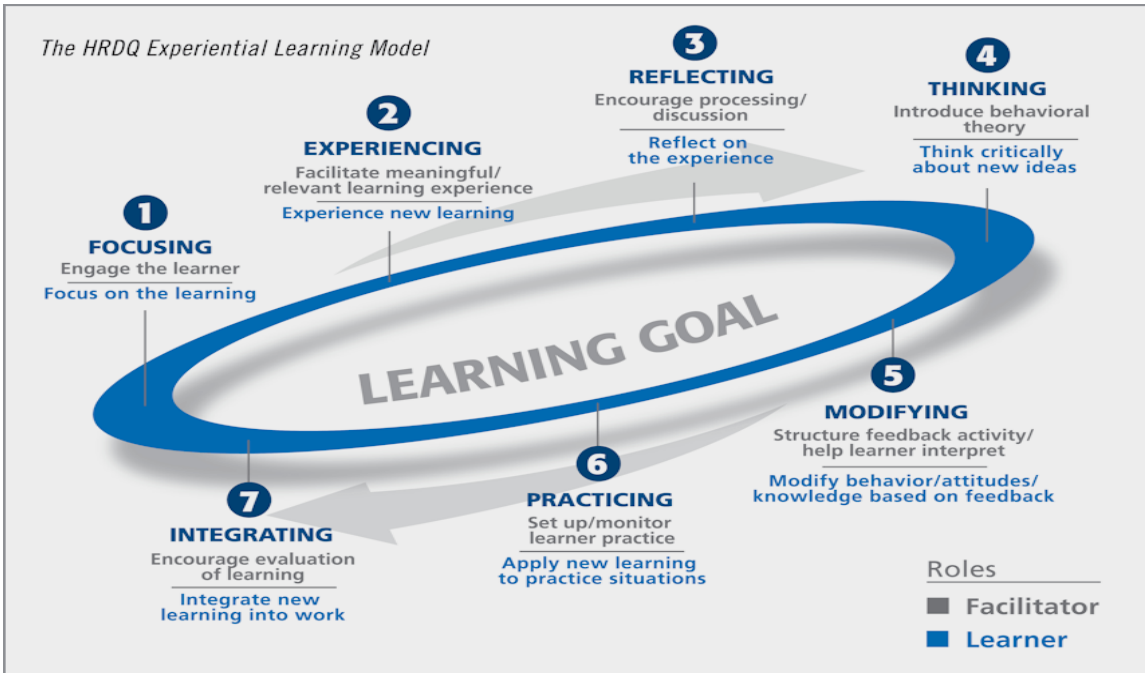
hooks' engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994) aligns naturally with experiential learning principles by emphasizing active participation and holistic development. When students engage in hands-on film production, they aren't merely learning technical skills. They are participating in a transformative process that engages their full selves. Just as hooks advocates for education that transcends simple knowledge transmission (hooks, 1994), experiential learning in media production creates spaces where students actively shape their understanding through direct experience, reflection, and personal investment in their creative work. The "safe spaces" (hooks, 1994) hooks describes become literal production environments where students can take creative risks, challenge traditional narratives, and develop their authentic voices. This mirrors experiential learning's emphasis on learning through doing, where theory meets practice in real-world contexts.

By integrating hooks' approach with experiential learning, the production classroom becomes a site where students don't just learn about media making. They engage in the complex process of understanding how their individual perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences inform their creative choices and collaborative relationships. However, experiential learning in media production carries risks. When we structure student productions to mirror

industry practices, we may inadvertently normalize hierarchies and workplace attitudes that maintain inequity.

The HRDQ Experiential Learning Model provides a structured framework that complements the theoretical foundations of experiential learning. This seven-stage cyclical model will be integrated into the EMERGE framework (Chapter 5) to illustrate how experiential learning theory can be systematically implemented in media education contexts to counter patterns of symbolic annihilation.

Figure 7.



https://hrdqstore.com/products/experiential-learning-model-poster (1992 & 2010)

Stage 1: Focusing

In the focusing stage of a student-led feature film production, faculty establish the project's parameters while engaging students in the purpose and vision. Instructors introduce the concept of equity in storytelling, discussing industry statistics like those from Smith and Pieper (2023) showing disparities in directorial opportunities. Students examine their own assumptions

about filmmaking roles and representation. Faculty create a project emphasizing equitable role distribution, diverse representation both on-screen and behind the camera, and authentic storytelling. This initial focusing stage sets expectations for conscious attention to addressing symbolic annihilation throughout the production process.

Stage 2: Experiencing

During the experiencing stage, students immerse themselves in pre-production and production activities with faculty serving as facilitators rather than directors. Like the Bond University project where students produced The Fear of Darkness (Sergi, Fichett, & Fisher, 2023), students take ownership of the entire production process. Faculty intentionally structure role assignments to counteract traditional gender and racial patterns, ensuring women and students from underrepresented groups have equal access to technical roles like cinematography and directing. Students experience the full complexity of filmmaking decisions while faculty provide scaffolding that supports experimentation and risk-taking.

Stage 3: Reflecting

The reflecting stage occurs both during and after production phases through structured reflection activities. Faculty facilitate regular debriefing sessions (production meetings) where students discuss their experiences, challenges, and observations about power dynamics within the production team. Students maintain reflection journals documenting their evolving understanding of inclusion and representation. These reflections specifically address questions about whose voices are centered in decision-making, how casting and character development either challenge or reinforce stereotypes, and how production hierarchies might mirror industry power structures identified by hooks (1994) as reinforcing dominant paradigms.

Stage 4: Thinking

In the thinking stage, faculty introduce critical frameworks for analyzing the production experience. Students apply theories of symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978), examining how their film addresses or perpetuates patterns of omission, trivialization, and condemnation. The class analyzes dailies and rough cuts through these theoretical lenses, identifying both unconscious biases and successful challenges to traditional representation. This stage connects students' direct experience to broader cultural patterns and industry practices, helping them think critically about their creative and technical choices within larger systems of representation.

Stage 5: Modifying

The modifying stage involves structured feedback processes that allow students to adapt their approach based on critical insights. Faculty establish multiple feedback channels, including peer review, community screenings with diverse audiences, and professional consultations. Students revise scripts, re-shoot scenes, or re-edit sequences based on this feedback, specifically addressing issues of representation and inclusion. This iterative modification process, as emphasized by Brandon (2002) and Honey (1992), teaches students to view feedback as valuable for growth rather than as criticism, particularly when addressing sensitive issues of representation.

Stage 6: Practicing

In the practicing stage, students apply their enhanced awareness to subsequent production phases or additional projects. For example, students who initially worked in familiar roles might shift to areas where they have less experience, applying new insights about inclusive production practices. This stage allows students to implement more conscious approaches to storytelling and technical execution based on their previous reflections and modifications. The practicing stage

demonstrates how theoretical understanding translates into practical action, preparing students for the type of industry-based learning that Billet (2015) found leads to improved post-graduation outcomes.

Stage 7: Integrating

The final integrating stage focuses on how students incorporate these lessons into their professional identity and practice. Students develop artist statements articulating their approach to inclusive filmmaking and create portfolios that demonstrate their commitment to equitable representation. They present their work to industry professionals, articulating not just technical achievements but ethical considerations and representational choices. Faculty help students connect their production experience to future career opportunities, addressing how they might navigate industry structures that have historically marginalized certain voices. This integration prepares students to become change agents who can help transform the stark industry disparities documented by Smith and Pieper (2023).

The integration of the HRDQ Experiential Learning Model strengthens the EMERGE framework by providing a structured, validated approach to experiential learning that directly addresses symbolic annihilation in media education. Each stage of the HRDQ cycle (focusing, experiencing, reflecting, thinking, modifying, practicing, and integrating) maps directly to components within the EMERGE framework, creating a comprehensive pedagogical system that guides both faculty and students through intentional learning experiences. By incorporating this established model, the EMERGE framework gains both theoretical validation and practical implementation pathways that transform media production education from simply replicating industry practices to critically engaging with and reforming them. This integrated approach enables educators to create structured learning environments that counter patterns of exclusion

while developing students' technical and creative abilities, ultimately preparing them to become change agents who can help transform the stark disparities documented in the film industry (Smith & Pieper, 2023).

PART 4: Synthesis and Research Contribution

Weaving the Threads: An Integrated Theoretical Approach

This study weaves together symbolic annihilation, intersectionality, culturally responsive teaching, experiential learning, hidden curriculum analysis, stereotype threat, and epistemology of ignorance, creating a rich theoretical tapestry that helps educators identify and actively dismantle representational inequities within media production education. While each theoretical construct offers valuable insights independently, their power is magnified when used together to illuminate the complex, multilayered nature of exclusion in creative media education and to develop actionable strategies for transformation.

The Foundation: Symbolic Annihilation as Structural Framework

Symbolic annihilation serves as the primary organizing framework for this study, providing a structured way to categorize and analyze the systematic erasure of diverse voices in media education. Tuchman's (1978) trilateral model (omission, trivialization, and condemnation) creates a valuable categorization for identifying specific manifestations of exclusion within curriculum, pedagogy, and production practices. These three categories provide critical scaffolding, allowing other theoretical approaches like intersectionality and hidden curriculum to meaningfully connect and deepen our understanding of exclusion in media education.

When examining omission, we confront the absence of diverse perspectives, histories, and creative contributions in media production curriculum. This erasure connects directly to Mills' (1997) epistemology of ignorance, revealing how institutional "not-knowing" functions to

maintain existing power structures in media education. The deliberate gaps in knowledge, the films not taught, the histories not included, the techniques not attributed to their diverse creators, represent more than simple oversight. They reflect a cultivated ignorance that upholds traditional power hierarchies within the industry and academia.

Trivialization manifests when diverse creative contributions are acknowledged but marginalized or diminished in importance. This process aligns with hidden curriculum theory (Giroux & Penna, 1979), as the unspoken messages conveyed through resource allocation, assessment practices, and project valuation subtly communicate which stories, perspectives, and creative approaches "matter" in the professional world. When student films with diverse characters or non-traditional narrative structures receive less substantive technical feedback or are relegated to "identity" categories rather than recognized for their artistic and technical merits, the hidden curriculum reinforces symbolic annihilation through trivialization.

Condemnation, the active portrayal of marginalized groups in demeaning or stereotypical ways, connects directly to stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995). When media representations consistently portray certain groups negatively, students from those groups experience the weight of potential confirmation of those stereotypes, affecting their creative expression, technical confidence, and classroom participation. This psychological burden becomes an additional barrier to authentic participation and leadership in production environments.

The Intersectional Lens: Understanding Compounded Experience

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) provides a crucial analytical tool for understanding how multiple identity factors create unique experiences of symbolic annihilation in media education. By applying an intersectional lens, we can examine how race, gender, class, sexuality,

and other identity markers interact to create distinct patterns of exclusion and opportunity in production classrooms. This framework helps identify how symbolic annihilation operates differently for students occupying various intersectional positions, avoiding homogenizing the experiences of marginalized groups.

For instance, a Black female student navigating a cinematography course faces not only gendered assumptions about technical aptitude but also racialized expectations about creative interests and abilities. These overlapping challenges create specific barriers that cannot be understood through single-axis analysis of either race or gender alone. As a Black female educator working in predominantly white institutional spaces, I've witnessed firsthand how intersectionality shapes my pedagogical decisions and interactions, underscoring the necessity of this lens to authentically address the complexities of symbolic annihilation. Recognizing these intersectional complexities naturally leads to exploring pedagogical strategies that proactively counter symbolic annihilation in classroom settings.

Pedagogical Responses: CRT and Experiential Learning as Transformative Practice

Culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and experiential learning theory provide complementary pedagogical frameworks for countering symbolic annihilation in practice. CRT's emphasis on leveraging students' cultural knowledge and experiences as assets directly challenges the omission aspect of symbolic annihilation by centering diverse perspectives as valuable sources of knowledge and creativity. When students' cultural backgrounds inform their creative projects and technical choices, the curriculum moves from tokenistic inclusion to substantive integration of diverse viewpoints.

Experiential learning approaches, particularly when implemented through hooks' (1994) engaged pedagogy lens, create spaces where students actively construct knowledge through

meaningful production experiences. This approach counters trivialization by providing platforms where diverse creative visions can be fully realized rather than merely acknowledged. Experiential learning opportunities become transformative when marginalized students assume leadership roles and critically reflect on representation and power dynamics. This practice actively disrupts traditional patterns of symbolic annihilation.

Systemic Understanding: Hidden Curriculum and Epistemology of Ignorance

The hidden curriculum framework reveals how institutional practices, resource allocation, assessment methods, and informal interactions communicate powerful messages about whose creative expressions are valued and whose technical abilities are recognized. By making these implicit messages explicit, educators can identify and address systemic patterns of symbolic annihilation embedded within department culture, course sequencing, equipment access, and other institutional structures.

Mills' (1997) epistemology of ignorance provides a deeper understanding of how knowledge gaps about diverse media histories, techniques, and contributions are actively maintained rather than merely accidental. This framework helps identify how "not knowing" about significant creative contributions from marginalized groups serves to preserve existing power hierarchies in media education. By recognizing ignorance as a constructed state rather than a neutral absence of knowledge, educators can more effectively address the systemic forces that perpetuate symbolic annihilation through omission.

Psychological Dimensions: Stereotype Threat and Creative Identity

Stereotype threat theory illuminates the psychological impact of symbolic annihilation on students' creative confidence, technical risk-taking, and professional identity formation. Understanding how awareness of negative stereotypes affects performance, and participation

helps educators create environments where students can fully engage without the burden of potentially confirming stereotypes. This psychological dimension is crucial for understanding why simply adding diverse content to curriculum is insufficient without addressing the climate in which that content is taught and received.

Synthesis: Toward an Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework

The integration of these theoretical perspectives creates a comprehensive framework for analyzing and addressing symbolic annihilation in media production education. This multidimensional approach recognizes that effective transformation requires attention to structural patterns of exclusion (symbolic annihilation), the complex interplay of identity factors (intersectionality), pedagogical approaches (CRT and experiential learning), systemic dynamics (hidden curriculum and epistemology of ignorance), and psychological impacts (stereotype threat).

Through synthesizing these theoretical perspectives in novel ways, this study uniquely contributes an actionable Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework that educators can practically apply across curriculum design, pedagogy, and institutional policy. This framework will provide media educators with concrete strategies for creating more equitable and inclusive learning environments that prepare diverse students to transform the entertainment industry through authentic representation and diverse storytelling.

The EMERGE framework developed through this research (detailed in Chapter 5) translates these theoretical insights directly into actionable strategies. Grounded firmly in theory, EMERGE addresses not just the symptoms but also the deep-rooted structural, cultural, and psychological factors that sustain symbolic annihilation, ultimately empowering educators to foster authentically inclusive, dynamic media classrooms.

Gaps in Existing Literature and Study Contribution

Existing scholarship on culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1994), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), and symbolic annihilation (Tuchman, 1978; Ortega, 2024) exists in separate domains. While validated experiential learning models like the HRDQ seven-stage cycle provide structured implementation frameworks, these have not been applied to address symbolic annihilation in media education contexts. No existing framework integrates symbolic annihilation analysis with culturally responsive pedagogy and experiential learning through a systematic, validated implementation model specifically designed for media production education. While Ortega identifies institutional problems and CRT scholars offer pedagogical principles, no existing work synthesizes these insights into actionable strategies with clear implementation pathways for media educators.

Building on Ortega's (2024) concept of educator counter-narratives, this study examines how women faculty navigate and resist symbolic annihilation in media production education. Most existing research focuses on student outcomes or industry statistics, leaving unexplored the lived experiences, pedagogical strategies, institutional challenges, and resistance practices employed by women faculty working to transform media education. Furthermore, limited research examines how students perceive and experience symbolic annihilation in their media production coursework.

This autoethnographic study addresses these gaps by examining symbolic annihilation in U.S. media production education through multiple perspectives: my lived experiences as a Black woman faculty member, interviews with other women faculty navigating similar institutional contexts, and student questionnaire data revealing how symbolic annihilation manifests in learning experiences. Through this multi-perspectival approach, the study develops the

EMERGE framework, which integrates Ortega's institutional critique with culturally responsive and experiential learning approaches, operationalized through the HRDQ Experiential Learning Model's seven-stage cycle.

The EMERGE framework provides media educators with a theoretically grounded, systematically structured approach to countering symbolic annihilation through pedagogy. By adapting the HRDQ model (a validated experiential learning framework) to specifically address patterns of omission, trivialization, and condemnation in media production education, this research bridges the gap between theoretical critique and practical implementation. The framework's integration of the HRDQ cycle (focusing, experiencing, reflecting, thinking, modifying, practicing, and integrating) with symbolic annihilation analysis and culturally responsive teaching creates a comprehensive pedagogical system that guides both faculty and students through intentional learning experiences designed to challenge industry inequities.

By combining autoethnographic narrative with faculty interviews and student voices, this research provides both theoretical insights and practical strategies for educators working to counter symbolic annihilation through teaching practice. The EMERGE framework offers media educators an actionable roadmap for creating more equitable learning environments that prepare diverse students to transform the entertainment industry.

Chapter 3. THE PRODUCER'S CHAIR: METHODOLOGY

> I ask you to recognize the "truths" your epistemology illuminates and what "truths" are simultaneously occluded by it. I ask you to keep open the possibilities of limitless thinking and innovation. I ask you to remember that in a society structured by dominance and subordination, it's someone else's world; we just try to explain it.
> -- Gloria Ladson-Billings (2003, p.12)

> If an author experiences an epiphany, reflects on the nuances of that experience, writes to show how the aspects of experience illuminate more general cultural phenomena and/or show how the experience works to diminish, silence, or deny certain people and stories, then the author writes autoethnographically.
> -- Holman Jones et al. (2013, p. 23)

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed to investigate how symbolic annihilation manifests in media production education and how educators can analytically counter these patterns through pedagogical practice. The study employs a multi-method qualitative design that integrates autoethnography, student questionnaires, faculty questionnaires, and in-depth faculty interviews. This triangulation of data sources provides both breadth and depth, capturing the lived experiences of a Black female educator (myself), the perspectives of students navigating creative media programs, and the insights of women media educators nationally and internationally who are working to transform their classrooms.

Autoethnographic Methodology

Autoethnography is composed of three core elements that work together to create its meaning: First, "auto" refers to the personal or individual perspective, the self-examination aspect. Second, "ethno" incorporates the broader cultural context and social environment being studied. Finally, "graphy" represents the act of documenting, describing, and crafting this personal-cultural narrative into written form (Adams, Holman & Ellis, 2022).

Autoethnographers treat personal experiences as vital and valid "data" to provide insights that might be inaccessible to detached observers. This method reveals the complexity and nuance of lived experience, including emotional and sensory dimensions that often escape observation or conscious awareness, while illuminating how past occurrences inform present and future actions (Adams, Holman & Ellis, 2022, p. 4). "By critically reflecting upon one's experiences and actions, there is an awareness of either reinforcing or challenging power" (de Saxe & Ker, 2023, p. 89). My autoethnography serves as a powerful methodological tool that brings visibility to experiences typically absent from the academic conversation. By documenting my lived reality as a Black female educator in media production, I challenge existing power structures within both academic and industry environments. This approach transforms personal vulnerability into a source of scholarly strength, allowing me to illuminate systemic patterns of exclusion while contributing to institutional change through authentic representation of marginalized perspectives (Lapadat, 2017).

Autoethnography facilitates understanding through thick description (Adams & Herrmann, 2025). This study aims not just to quantify how often symbolic annihilation occurs but to show what it feels like to navigate production classrooms as a marginalized student or educator, what strategies prove effective for resistance, and how patterns of exclusion operate through seemingly neutral institutional practices. Thick description allows readers to understand these dynamics from the inside. Autoethnography harnesses the power of story (Adams & Herrmann, 2025). The narratives in Chapter 4 are designed to be vibrant and compelling, filled with observations and arguments that help readers understand symbolic annihilation not as abstract theory but as lived reality. Story makes research accessible and actionable for practicing educators.

The theoretical framework of symbolic annihilation guides this study's methodological approach, providing a critical lens through which to analyze how systemic erasure (omission), underrepresentation (trivialization), and preconceived judgements (condemnation) in the entertainment industry and the culture generally influence students' experiential learning within creative media environments. This theoretical lens illuminates how established practices within entertainment industries can intentionally and unintentionally reinforce the marginalization of diverse populations, ultimately shaping creative media students' hands-on learning journeys and creative voice development. The framework provides analytical tools to uncover themes of omission, trivialization, and condemnation that might otherwise remain unexamined in traditional media education research.

Ethical Dimensions of Autoethnography

Autoethnography is, at its core, an ethical approach to research that addresses many of the challenges present in traditional research methodologies. As Lapadat notes, autoethnography emerged partly in response to "the ethical issue of representing, speaking for, or appropriating the voice of others" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 589). This methodology enables me to examine symbolic annihilation, systemic barriers, and educational reform from both sides, as someone actively working within the system and as someone who has lived through these experiences. Through autoethnography, I can deeply analyze personal experiences to reveal subtle forms of symbolic annihilation, stereotype threat, and intersectionality that other research methods might miss. Unlike traditional research approaches where researchers might appropriate or misinterpret participants' experiences, autoethnography allows me to speak in my own voice. As Lapadat explains, autoethnography is "an ethical research practice that humanizes research processes and products and works to be more inclusive of how life is lived and how experience is storied"

(Lapadat, 2017, p. 592). By using my positionality as a Black female educator navigating predominantly White institutional spaces, I am engaging in "relational ethics" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 593), acknowledging how my stories implicate others while taking responsibility for how those implications are managed.

This research is grounded in "feminist communitarian ethics" where "moral aims and decision making do not stand apart from the conduct of research but are enacted within community in an ethic of care" (Christians, 2011; Denzin, 2014; Lapadat, 2017, p. 592). Such ethics "hold human dignity as central, and seek understanding, reciprocity, and communal well-being" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 592). By centering human dignity and community well-being, this research aims not only to document experiences of symbolic annihilation but to create pathways toward more equitable educational environments.

Navigating Researcher Vulnerability and Self-Care

Sharing deeply personal narratives about my experiences as a Black female educator creates inherent vulnerability. An "autoethnographic work can affect the researcher in unforeseen ways" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 594) and "reading and writing personal and traumatic autoethnographic stories can elicit strong emotions and stir up unresolved grief or repressed memories" (Lapadat, 201, p. 594). To address this challenge, I implemented specific self-care strategies throughout the research process, including:

1. Scheduled reflection periods after intense writing sessions.
2. Regular consultation with a trusted colleague who provided emotional support.
3. Maintenance of boundaries regarding which personal experiences I chose to share.
4. Recognition of the potential therapeutic value of the research while acknowledging its emotional risks.

My position in higher education creates a complex dynamic where I am both protected by academic freedom yet potentially exposed to professional judgment. As Lapadat points out, "a strength of autoethnography is its ability to present an intimate but transgressive account, writing the absent bodies and voices of researchers and professionals into their practice, and thereby challenging institutional and professional power relationships" (Lapadat, 2017p. 594). This potential for transformation justifies the vulnerability inherent in the approach.

Data Collection Methods

This study employed a purposive sampling strategy with data collection occurring through three primary sources, each designed to address specific research questions and provide complementary perspectives on symbolic annihilation in media production education.

Source 1: Autoethnographic Critical Incidents

Autoethnographic data consists of critical incidents drawn from my professional experiences as both a Black female educator in higher education and an entertainment industry professional. These narratives document encounters with symbolic annihilation across multiple contexts:

1. Educational settings: Classroom interactions, faculty meetings, curriculum development processes, and institutional dynamics at the University of Oklahoma and Kent State University.

2. Industry experiences: Working in Los Angeles and Ohio film. Student major project productions. Work including casting, scriptwriting, producing, and navigating professional hierarchies.

3. Professional identity navigation: Balancing roles as an industry professional, professor, doctoral student, wife, mother, and department colleague.

Critical incidents were selected based on their capacity to illuminate patterns of omission, trivialization, or condemnation as defined by Tuchman's (1978) symbolic annihilation framework. Each incident represents a moment where systemic inequities became visible through personal experience, revealing broader institutional dynamics that shape media production education.

Data collection methods for autoethnographic material included:

1. Reflective journaling throughout the doctoral program at OU.
2. Analysis of course materials, syllabi, curriculum documents, classroom and faculty interactions.
3. Review of institutional communications and departmental records.
4. Memory work reconstructing significant professional experiences.
5. Analysis of student feedback and course evaluations.

Source 2: Student Questionnaires (N=27)

Student questionnaires were distributed to two populations within the University of Oklahoma's Creative Media Production program:

Population 1: Recent graduates (2023-2025) who completed the program and could reflect on their full educational experience.

Population 2: Current students enrolled in fall 2024 and spring 2025 capstone courses who were actively engaged in production work. The student questionnaire (see Appendix A for full instrument) was designed to analytically assess how the three dimensions of symbolic annihilation manifest in student experiences. Questions were organized into six domains:

1. Demographics & Background (Questions 1-3): Collected data on gender identity, racial/ethnic background, and overall satisfaction to contextualize subsequent responses and enable intersectional analysis.

2. Perception & Representation (Questions 4-8): Assessed the extent to which students saw people with backgrounds like theirs represented in course materials, guest speakers, faculty, and showcased student work. This domain directly addresses the "omission" aspect of symbolic annihilation by measuring absence or presence of diverse representation across multiple educational contexts.

3. Participation & Omission (Questions 9-10): Examined students' experiences of being overlooked, having ideas dismissed, being interrupted, or being assigned stereotypical roles in group projects. These questions capture how omission operates not just through curriculum content but through classroom dynamics and collaborative processes.

4. Leadership Opportunities & Trivialization (Questions 11-12): Investigated access to leadership positions, encouragement to pursue leadership, support for creative visions, and frequency of leading projects or receiving recognition. This domain addresses how trivialization manifests through restricted access to high-visibility opportunities and creative authority.

5. Open-Ended Experiences of Condemnation (Questions 13-15): Provided space for students to describe in their own words instances where perspectives were excluded, challenges in pursuing leadership, and how creative ideas were received. These qualitative responses capture the subtle and overt ways students experience condemnation or devaluation of their contributions.

6. Overall Assessment (Question 16): Used 10-point scales to measure perceived impact of background on representation, participation, and leadership opportunities, providing quantitative data for comparison across demographic groups.

The questionnaire employed both Likert-scale items (1-5 ratings) for quantitative analysis and open-ended questions for qualitative depth, allowing for triangulation of findings and richer understanding of student experiences.

Ethical Safeguards for Student Participants

Researching one's own students raises legitimate concerns about power dynamics and potential coercion. Several safeguards protected student participants. The questionnaire was completely anonymous with no identifying information collected. Participation was voluntary with no course credit or incentives offered, and students were explicitly informed that their decision would have no impact on their grades or standing in the program. The study received Institutional Review Board approval, and students could skip any question or withdraw at any time. These safeguards ensured students could participate freely and respond honestly without fear of repercussions.

Source 3: Faculty Questionnaires (N=12) and In-Depth Interviews (N=4)

Faculty questionnaires were distributed to women media production faculty nationally and internationally through professional networks including the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), Broadcast Education Association (BEA), and personal contacts developed through conference participation and scholarly networks.

The faculty questionnaire (see Appendix B for full instrument) was designed to capture both institutional barriers and pedagogical innovations employed by women faculty working to counter symbolic annihilation. Questions were organized into five domains:

1. *Demographics & Institutional Context* (Questions 1-5): Collected data on racial/ethnic background, years of teaching experience, institution type, and whether respondents were the

only woman or person of color in their department. This contextual information enables analysis of how institutional positioning shapes experiences and pedagogical approaches.

2. *Curriculum Development Experience* (Questions 6-8, 14, 17): Assessed ability to incorporate lived experiences into teaching, pressure to conform to institutional expectations, aspects of identity influencing teaching, and strategies for addressing curriculum omissions. These questions capture how faculty navigate institutional constraints while attempting to implement more inclusive pedagogical practices.
3. *Institutional Support & Barriers* (Questions 9-12): Examined freedom to design inclusive curriculum, departmental recognition of various contributions, and specific institutional barriers encountered. This domain directly addresses how symbolic annihilation operates at the structural level, shaping what faculty can accomplish despite individual commitment to equity.
4. *Pedagogical Approaches* (Questions 13, 15, 16, 18-20): Investigated specific teaching strategies employed, curriculum adequacy in representing diverse perspectives, and methods for addressing stereotype threat and hidden curriculum. These questions document the counter-narratives and resistance strategies faculty have developed to challenge symbolic annihilation through teaching practice.
5. *Experiences of Trivialization & Condemnation* (Questions 18-19): Used frequency scales to measure how often faculty experienced having expertise questioned, being assigned stereotypical roles, having contributions minimized, facing student resistance, or being labeled “difficult” for advocating inclusive practices. These questions capture how faculty themselves experience symbolic annihilation within academic institutions.

6. *Open-Ended Reflections* (Questions 21-25): Provided space for faculty to describe specific instances where their perspectives as women offered unique insights, how their teaching evolved in response to institutional challenges, strategies for maintaining joy despite barriers, recommended changes to media production education, and advice for new women faculty. These qualitative responses provide rich narrative data about lived experiences and developed expertise.

From the 12 questionnaire respondents, I conducted four in-depth follow-up interviews with faculty members who represented diverse institutional contexts:

Faculty Member 1: Community college educator, Black woman, West Coast

Faculty Member 2: R1 university educator, White woman, Midwest

Faculty Member 3: HBCU educator, Black woman, South

Faculty Member 4: International university educator, woman of color, outside U.S.

Interview protocol (developed after analyzing questionnaire data) explored:

1. Detailed narratives about critical incidents mentioned in questionnaires.
2. Specific pedagogical strategies employed and their effectiveness.
3. Institutional resistance encountered and navigation strategies.
4. Student outcomes observed when implementing inclusive practices.
5. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, lasted 60-90 minutes, were audio-recorded with permission, and were transcribed for analysis.
6. Participants selected their own pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality while honoring their contributions.

Data Analysis Approach

To systematically connect empirical findings with theoretical constructs and the developing EMERGE framework, I developed visual analytical frameworks for each data source (presented as Tables 1-4 in Chapter 4). These frameworks organized data analysis by: (1) identifying which symbolic annihilation component (omission, trivialization, or condemnation) each finding exemplified, (2) determining which theoretical framework(s) from Chapter 2 best

explained the pattern, (3) articulating the key finding or insight, and (4) connecting the finding to specific EMERGE phase(s) it informed. This systematic approach ensured that the EMERGE framework development was grounded in empirical evidence rather than theoretical abstraction alone. The visual frameworks made explicit the analytical process connecting raw data to theoretical interpretation to pedagogical intervention. Analysis occurred in multiple phases, employing both inductive and deductive coding strategies appropriate to each data source.

Phase 1: Autoethnographic Analysis

Autoethnographic narratives were analyzed using the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954 Borgen et al., 2005), which involves identifying, describing, and analyzing events that significantly illuminate the phenomenon under study. Each critical incident was examined through multiple theoretical lenses:

1. Symbolic annihilation framework: Coding for evidence of omission, trivialization, or condemnation.
2. Intersectionality: Analyzing how race and gender interact to shape experiences.
3. Epistemology of ignorance: Identifying patterns of institutional "not-knowing."
4. Stereotype threat: Examining psychological dimensions of navigating predominantly white spaces.
5. Hidden curriculum: Uncovering implicit messages about whose knowledge and authority are valued.

This multi-theoretical analysis enabled me to move beyond simple description to reveal how personal experiences illuminate broader structural patterns in media education.

Phase 2: Student Questionnaire Analysis

With 27 student participants, the sample was too small to run statistical tests that determine whether differences are "statistically significant" (tests like t-tests or ANOVA that require larger samples). Instead, I focused on identifying patterns: Which issues did students consistently report? Did women students and men students describe different experiences? Did students of color report different levels of representation than White students? Qualitative responses to open-ended questions (Q13-15) were analyzed using thematic analysis (Naeem, Ozuem, & Howell, 2023) with both deductive and inductive coding:

Deductive codes derived from the symbolic annihilation framework:

1. Omission: Absence, exclusion, invisibility, marginalization
2. Trivialization: Minimization, dismissal, stereotyping, limited roles
3. Condemnation: Criticism, devaluation, hostility, negative judgment

Inductive codes emerged from the data itself, capturing themes not anticipated by the theoretical framework (Naeem, Ozuem, & Howell, 2023).

Phase 3: Faculty Questionnaire Analysis

Faculty questionnaire data underwent similar analysis:

Quantitative items (Likert scales measuring frequency of experiences, agreement with statements) were analyzed descriptively, with particular attention to:

1. Patterns across institutional contexts (community college vs. R1 university vs. HBCU).
2. Consistency between reported barriers and pedagogical strategies employed.
3. Relationship between years of experience and types of resistance strategies developed.

Qualitative responses to open-ended questions (Q21-25) were analyzed thematically, focusing on:

1. Counter-narrative strategies: How faculty resist symbolic annihilation in practice.

2. Institutional barriers: Specific mechanisms through which symbolic annihilation operates structurally.
3. Pedagogical innovations: Concrete teaching strategies that successfully counter exclusionary patterns.
4. Emotional labor and sustainability: How faculty maintain commitment despite institutional challenges.

Phase 4: Faculty Interview Analysis

Interview transcripts were analyzed using narrative analysis (Victor, 2009) combined with thematic analysis. Each interview was first read holistically to understand the participant's overall story, then coded thematically for:

1. Critical incidents demonstrating symbolic annihilation in action.
2. Turning points where faculty developed new strategies or understanding.
3. Successes and failures in implementing inclusive practices.
4. Institutional dynamics that enabled or constrained transformation efforts.
5. Student impacts observed when counter-strategies were employed.

Phase 5: Integrative Analysis

The final analytical phase integrated findings across all data sources to:

1. Triangulate evidence: Identify patterns confirmed by multiple data sources (e.g., students reporting omission in curriculum corroborated by faculty describing institutional barriers to curriculum change).
2. Illuminate contradictions: Examine instances where data sources diverged, revealing complexity in how symbolic annihilation operates.

3. Validate autoethnographic insights: Assess whether patterns observed in personal experience were confirmed by student and faculty data, strengthening claims about systemic rather than individual phenomena.

This integrative analysis directly informed the development of the EMERGE framework presented in Chapter 5, ensuring that theoretical insights translated into practical strategies validated by multiple stakeholder perspectives.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To establish trustworthiness in this qualitative study, I employed multiple strategies:

Credibility (internal validity):

1. Triangulation of data sources: Autoethnography, student questionnaires, faculty questionnaires, faculty interviews
2. Member checking: Interview participants reviewed transcripts and preliminary interpretations.
3. Prolonged engagement: Four years of experience teaching media production at OU, 17 at KSU over 4000 students and 25 years of extensive industry experience.
4. Peer debriefing: Regular consultation with dissertation committee and colleagues.

Transferability (external validity):

1. Purposive sampling: Deliberate selection of diverse institutional contexts among faculty participants.
2. Clear boundaries: Explicit acknowledgment of study's scope and limitations.

Dependability (reliability):

1. Audit trail: Maintained detailed records of data collection, coding decisions, and analytical processes.

2. Methodological transparency: Clear documentation of procedures and analytical choices.

Reflexivity: Ongoing examination of researcher positionality and its influence on interpretation.

Negative case analysis: Actively searched for data that contradicted emerging patterns.

Raw data preservation: Maintained complete records of questionnaire responses, interview transcripts, and analytical memos.

Researcher Positionality

My positionality as a Black woman, former industry professional, current professor, doctoral student, wife, and mother fundamentally shapes this research. These intersecting identities provide both insider knowledge and analytical distance. As an insider, I understand the subtle mechanisms of symbolic annihilation through lived experience, enabling identification of patterns that might escape outside observers. This position grants what Collins (1990) describes as epistemic privilege, knowledge born from navigating marginalized positions. However, my insider status also requires careful reflexivity. Throughout data collection and analysis, I maintained awareness of how my experiences might shape interpretation, using theoretical frameworks and multiple data sources to ensure findings reflected patterns beyond my individual experience. My goal was not to claim the unlocated objectivity that traditional research frameworks pursue. Rather, I embrace what Haraway (1988) describes as "situated knowledge," the recognition that all knowledge comes from somewhere, from a specific standpoint with limitations and insights. Haraway argues that "only partial perspective promises objective vision" and that "feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). By openly acknowledging my position as a Black woman educator and making visible how that position

shapes what I can see, I become, in Haraway's words, "answerable for what we learn how to see" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). This accountability, this refusal to claim a view from nowhere, is precisely what makes autoethnographic research rigorous.

Study Limitations

Several limitations shape the scope and generalizability of findings:

1. *Sample characteristics:* Student participants came from a single institution (University of Oklahoma), limiting transferability to other contexts. Faculty participants self-selected into the study, potentially representing those most committed to equity issues.
2. *Sample size:* Student questionnaire responses (N=27) and faculty questionnaire responses (N=12) are relatively small, precluding robust statistical analysis and limiting confidence in patterns observed.
3. *Autoethnographic constraints:* Personal narratives reflect one individual's experiences, which, while theoretically situated, cannot represent all Black women educators or all experiences of symbolic annihilation.
4. *Temporal limitations:* Data collection occurred in 2025, capturing a specific moment in ongoing institutional and cultural shifts around diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.
5. *Institutional specificity:* My experiences are shaped by the principles of the University of Oklahoma and Kent State University, both predominantly White institutions in specific regional contexts.

Despite these limitations, the study's multi-method design, theoretical grounding, and focus on developing actionable pedagogical strategies provide valuable insights for media educators working to counter symbolic annihilation in diverse institutional contexts.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the methodological approach guiding this study's investigation of symbolic annihilation in media production education. By integrating autoethnography with student and faculty perspectives, the research captures multiple dimensions of how exclusion operates and how educators can systematically resist these patterns. The following chapter presents findings from this multi-method investigation, organizing results by research question.

Chapter 4: THE DAILIES: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter presents findings from four data sources that illuminate how symbolic annihilation operates in media production education and how educators and students resist it. The research investigated four interconnected questions: (1) How do students experience symbolic annihilation within media production education? (2) How can autoethnographic analysis of my experiences inform counter-narrative pedagogical approaches? (3) How do women media educators nationally and internationally experience and resist symbolic annihilation? (4) How can symbolic annihilation and its reinforcing barriers be systematically countered through framework development?

The findings are organized by research question, beginning with student experiences (RQ1), followed by autoethnographic insights from my own teaching and professional

navigation (RQ2), then women faculty experiences across diverse institutional contexts (RQ3), and concluding with synthesis pointing toward framework development (RQ4). Each section reveals how omission, trivialization, and condemnation function as mechanisms perpetuating inequity in media production education while also documenting resistance strategies and moments of transformation.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: Student Experiences of Symbolic Annihilation

How do students experience symbolic annihilation within media production education, and what patterns emerge across different identity positions?

Student survey responses were analyzed to identify patterns of symbolic annihilation across multiple dimensions of their educational experience. Table 1-1b presents the analytical framework used to organize student experiences, connecting their reported experiences to theoretical constructs and EMERGE interventions. The following sections detail findings organized by symbolic annihilation dimensions.

The student survey drew 27 complete responses from current students and recent graduates of the Creative Media Production program at the University of Oklahoma. The sample was 52% male (n=14) and 48% female (n=13). The racial breakdown showed 59% White (n=16), 15% Black or African American (n=4), 11% Multiracial (n=3), 7% Asian or Asian American (n=2), 4% American Indian or Alaska Native (n=1), and 4% Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (n=1). With White students comprising nearly 60% of respondents, the limited diversity in the student body itself reflects broader patterns of underrepresentation in media production education.

Student responses revealed wildly different experiences regarding diversity and inclusion, suggesting inconsistent implementation across courses and instructors. There was no consensus

on whether faculty represented diverse backgrounds, whether course materials featured diverse creators, or whether all students had equal access to resources and leadership opportunities. This variation indicates some students thrived while others struggled, often along identity lines that became visible in qualitative responses (Table 1-1b).

Major curriculum gaps emerged throughout student responses. Students repeatedly mentioned the absence of below-the-line professionals: no one teaching lighting, assistant directing, or basic safety protocols. The curriculum stayed firmly US-centric, focusing on American and European film while ignoring international cinema. Post-production training was described as "cursory and basic" at best.

One student captured the faculty diversity problem directly: during undergraduate years, "all of the professors were white, middle-aged or older men." Women weren't hired until this student returned for graduate school, and the first Black woman faculty member came even later. Another student noted that only their Black female screenwriting professor introduced concepts like the Bechdel Test and DuVernay Test, analytical tools for examining representation that should be standard across the curriculum.

These omissions exemplify what Tuchman (1978) identified as the first dimension of symbolic annihilation. When curricula systematically exclude diverse filmmakers, international cinema, and critical frameworks for analyzing representation, students receive implicit messages about whose creative authority matters and what constitutes "legitimate" film knowledge.

Gender disparities in how work was valued came through clearly in student responses. Students observed that "anything men had to say always seemed smarter" and carried more weight than women's suggestions. Since the faculty was predominantly White and male, those

perspectives dominated classroom discourse. Male students typically led productions, especially outside classroom projects, creating “almost completely male-led” production teams.

One student stated bluntly that their program was “practically homogeneously white” where “pretty much only White people had their stories shared.” This pattern reflects trivialization, the second dimension of symbolic annihilation, where diverse students’ creative interests and technical aspirations are systematically devalued or redirected toward stereotypical roles.

Institutional favoritism toward certain programs created a two-tier system that students recognized clearly. Greenlight Creative Productions and Gaylord Hall Productions monopolized resources and attention, leaving other students struggling for basic equipment access. One respondent claimed “nearly half of the college felt that way” about this inequity.

The practical impact proved severe. Students couldn’t access basic equipment because favored programs would “reserve more than needed,” forcing them to shoot without audio equipment or lights. This created what students called “black-sheeping, echo chambers, and exclusions.” Students outside the inner circle were “inherently at a disadvantage” for conferences, competitions, and networking opportunities.

These patterns exemplify condemnation, the third dimension of symbolic annihilation. Students excluded from resource access and networking opportunities receive messages that they don’t belong in professional production spaces. As one student recognized, success often depended more on who you knew and which group accepted you than on talent or effort. While some students emphasized personal initiative as key to success, others recognized that systemic barriers meant not everyone started from the same place.

Some positive patterns emerged in student responses. The Creative Media Marketplace hosted by the CMP department each year connected students with industry professionals. Individual faculty members, particularly the few women and faculty of color, made real efforts to diversify content and perspectives. However, these positives were exceptions rather than programmatic norms, suggesting that inclusive pedagogy depended on individual instructor commitment rather than systematic institutional practice.

Table 1

Student Experience Analysis: Symbolic Annihilation in Creative Media Education

Framework for Student Survey Data Analysis

Student Experience	Symbolic Annihilation Component	Supporting Theoretical Framework(s)	Key Finding/Evidence	EMERGE Framework Connection
Equipment Access	**Omission:** Students report inability to access basic equipment for capstone projects due to reservation patterns.	Institutional Resistance Epistemology of Ignorance Intersectionality Hidden Curriculum	*"While I was working on my capstone, there were three separate times where we couldn't have basic gear that we needed because Greenlight would reserve more than needed. We had multiple shoots without audio equipment, lights."*	**Empowerment Phase** Institute transparent equipment reservation systems with caps on organizational bookings to ensure equitable distribution.
Film History Curriculum	**Omission:** Students observe emphasis on American/European film types in curriculum with limited international content.	Hidden Curriculum Epistemology of Ignorance Critical Media Literacy Culturally Responsive Teaching	*"When it came to studies about the history of films... there seemed to be an emphasis on American/European types. I believe the curriculum could improve by adding films/film history of different countries, regions, and/or cultures."* *"There was a creative media market place workshop that touched on lighting people of color on camera that made me realize how little we talked about capturing different races in front of the camera."*	**Media Literacy Phase** Redesign core curriculum to include modules on global cinema. Require technical courses to include modules on filming diverse subjects (lighting for different skin tones).
Program Recognition	**Trivialization:** Students report certain programs receiving consistent praise and support while others feel excluded.	Institutional Resistance Stereotype Threat Intersectionality Emotional Labor	*"Organizations like GHP and Greenlight felt like they were constantly praised and supported by the college while many other students were left out to dry. I can say with confidence that nearly half of the college felt that way."* *"Greenlight was the only thing that got to matter and because of that everyone who wasn't part of Greenlight had it harder."*	**Education Phase** Create dedicated screening events, workshops, and industry showcases specifically for non-Greenlight & non-GHP productions.

Table 1a

Student Experience	Symbolic Annihilation Component	Supporting Theoretical Framework(s)	Key Finding/Evidence	EMERGE Framework Connection
Production Leadership	**Condemnation:** Students observe that men's suggestions appear to carry more weight in creative and practical discussions.	Stereotype Threat Intersectionality Black Feminist Thought Standpoint Theory	*"Anything men had to say always seemed smarter, or it carried more weight than what a woman would suggest practically or creatively."* *"Yes, white men were primarily in the leadership roles... When this happened, sometimes it would lead to that production being almost completely male-led."*	**Empowerment Phase** Develop leadership rotation requirements for major productions to diversify who holds decision-making roles.
Guest Speakers	**Omission:** Students report limited engagement with diverse industry professionals and below-the-line workers.	Culturally Responsive Teaching Hidden Curriculum Epistemology of Ignorance	*"We had little engagement with industry professionals who are people of color or genderfluid... We had practically no interaction with below-the-line industry professionals. We had no information about unions."* *"I wish we had more 'below the line' guest speakers and professors... It would have been more useful, especially in the skills set I could present out of college."*	**Experiences Phase** "Why My Degree Matters" Campaign: Student-led initiative documenting career paths and success stories from all degree programs. Create industry mentorship program connecting students with diverse professionals
Educational Value	**Trivialization:** Students report faculty and guest speakers questioning the necessity of degrees they are pursuing.	Institutional Resistance Epistemology of Ignorance Emotional Labor Critical Media Literacy	*"Some guest speakers weren't supportive of graduate students, telling us we don't need a masters degree. Some even told us we don't need a degree at all - even professors told us this."*	**Education Phase** Develop partnerships with unions and professional organizations for practical industry knowledge.
Representation in Curriculum	**Condemnation:** Students report concepts like Bechdel Test introduced by only one Black female professor among screenwriting faculty.	Critical Media Literacy Hidden Curriculum Culturally Responsive Teaching Feminist Thought	*"My black female professor was the only one that brought up concepts such as the Bechdel Test, DuVernay Test, and a greater emphasis on how characters being written and representation can have a long-lasting effect on society."*	**Media Literacy Phase** Develop leadership rotation requirements for major productions to diversify who holds decision-making roles.

Table 1b

Student Experience	Symbolic Annihilation Component	Supporting Theoretical Framework(s)	Key Finding/Evidence	EMERGE Framework Connection
Technical Skills	**Omission:** Students report post-production taught with cursory coverage and limited emphasis on set safety protocols.	Hidden Curriculum Institutional Resistance Culturally Responsive Teaching	*"Post-production was something that was not taught very well in the required courses. Very cursory and basic skills without much expansion."* *"Safety on set (should be the first thing we learn!), etc... you're not forced to know how to create good lighting, or the job of an AD."*	**Experiences Phase** Design technical curriculum with safety-first approach and comprehensive post-production training.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: Autoethnographic Insights on Symbolic Annihilation

How can autoethnographic analysis of my experiences as a Black woman educator inform counter-narrative pedagogical approaches?

The autoethnographic critical incidents were analyzed using a systematic framework that identified symbolic annihilation components, supporting theoretical frameworks, key findings, and connections to EMERGE phases. Table 2 presents this analytical framework, demonstrating how each narrative illuminates specific dimensions of symbolic annihilation while informing EMERGE components. The following critical incidents reveal patterns that informed the development of EMERGE's five phases.

Critical Incident 1: First Semester Office Hours Visit

Narrative

In my office the first semester teaching Single Camera Production, four women from the class visited during office hours. My mind immediately raced through that day's lesson, wondering if I had said or done something to upset the students. These were the quiet ones, the students whose voices I had never heard during class discussions, who seemed to fade into the background during equipment demonstrations.

The silence broke when one of them finally spoke: "We've never had a female production professor before." Her words opened a floodgate of stories that revealed the layered impact of symbolic annihilation in their educational experience. They described how in previous production classes, they had been systematically omitted from technical discussions, their questions about camera operation and lighting often going unacknowledged or redirected to their male peers.

The trivialization of their technical interests emerged as another student shared how she was consistently steered toward producing roles during group projects. “They assume because I’m organized, that’s all I can contribute,” she said, her frustration evident. “No one asks if I want to learn about the camera or direct.” The others nodded, sharing similar experiences of being pigeonholed into stereotypically feminine roles.

The most revealing stories centered around condemnation: the subtle ways they were made to feel out of place in technical spaces. One student described how male classmates would take equipment out of her hands during demonstrations, assuming she needed help. Another mentioned the dismissive looks she received when asking questions about lighting techniques.

Their collective presence in my office that day revealed something profound. They hadn’t come because of a problem, but because they finally recognized an authority figure who would advocate for them. In me, they saw someone who could navigate both the technical and creative aspects of production, who understood their experiences, who could help them find their voices in an industry that too often tried to silence and belittle them.

This moment became a turning point in my understanding of my role not just as a professor, but as a visible challenge to the patterns of symbolic annihilation they had experienced throughout their education. Their visit wasn’t just about seeking mentorship. It was about finally finding a space where their technical aspirations could be acknowledged, validated, and nurtured.

Analysis

This critical incident demonstrates how symbolic annihilation in media education operates beyond curriculum content to shape student experiences, classroom dynamics, and professional identity formation. The patterns these students described (systematic omission from technical discussions, trivialization of their creative ambitions, and subtle condemnation of their

presence in production spaces) mirror the industry disparities documented by Smith and Pieper (2023), revealing how educational environments may inadvertently prepare students to accept rather than challenge professional inequities.

The narrative also illuminates the power of representation. These students had never encountered a female production professor, an absence that reinforced implicit messages about who possesses technical authority in media production. My presence disrupted their prior educational experiences, creating space for them to articulate barriers they had previously navigated in isolation. This moment demonstrated how symbolic annihilation functions partly through isolation: when students don't see themselves reflected in positions of authority, they may internalize that their aspirations are illegitimate rather than recognizing systemic exclusion. Marian Wright Edelman the founder of the Children's Defense Fund once said, "If our children can't see it, how can they be it?" Representation matters.

Critical Incident 2: Living Intersectionality in Academia

Narrative

These theoretical frameworks move from abstract concepts to lived reality through my daily navigation of academic and professional spaces. As a Black woman who simultaneously occupies the roles of professor, doctoral student, wife, and mother, I experience firsthand how intersecting identities create unique challenges that cannot be understood through single-axis analysis.

In faculty meetings, I observe how my White colleagues lean back in their chairs with an ease I have never known. Their ideas receive thoughtful nods, their expertise goes unquestioned, their authority is assumed. When I speak, I feel the familiar tension, the need to be twice as prepared, twice as articulate, twice as credible. I catch myself code-switching mid-sentence, my

voice dropping an octave to sound more authoritative, my syntax becoming more formal to match expectations of academic discourse.

This pattern of questioned authority extended even into my doctoral coursework, where professors dismissed my work as “not academic” simply because they couldn’t comprehend the intersection of academic theory and professional practice. My industry experience, rather than being valued as an asset that enriched my scholarly perspective, was deemed incompatible with rigorous academic inquiry. This reflects what Mills (1997) describes as willful ignorance: the active choice not to understand or value knowledge that doesn’t fit within traditional academic frameworks.

The patterns of symbolic annihilation I navigate as a Black woman faculty member become even more frustrating when I observe colleagues actively perpetuating them while claiming pedagogical neutrality. In a colleague’s screenwriting class, I observed as they consistently praised student scripts that reinforced racial and gender stereotypes as examples of “good character development” or “realistic conflict.” When students wrote more nuanced, non-stereotypical characters, this colleague steered them away from those choices as "unrealistic" or “too political.”

What makes this particularly insidious is that the colleague frames all feedback as neutral craft advice, never acknowledging how their “professional standards” encode specific assumptions about whose experiences constitute universal human stories and whose require special justification. Students internalize these messages, learning that authentic representation of marginalized experiences somehow violates principles of good storytelling. This is condemnation operating through pedagogy that claims to be apolitical while actively policing which stories and representations are deemed acceptable.

When I've raised concerns about these patterns with the colleague, they insist they're simply teaching students to write "marketable" scripts and can't be blamed for industry realities. This response exemplifies epistemology of ignorance in action. They refuse to recognize how their pedagogy doesn't just prepare students for industry bias but actively trains them to replicate it, treating exclusionary industry patterns as natural constraints rather than constructed systems that education could challenge.

The intersectionality of my identities becomes most apparent when my roles as professor, doctoral student, wife, and mother collide within the confines of daily life. At home, I transition from analyzing cinematic narratives to helping with homework, from grading projects to preparing dinner, from writing about media representation to ensuring my own children see themselves reflected positively in the world around them. As a doctoral student myself, I'm simultaneously taking multiple classes while teaching full-time, adding yet another layer to an already complex balancing act.

The emotional labor proves exhausting. I often find myself crying in the shower at night, hidden from my family. In those moments, I realize just how alone I am in carrying the weight of being a role model, a trailblazer, a caretaker, a scholar, and a student all at the same time. This isolation illuminates how intersectionality operates not just as an analytical tool, but as a lived experience that shapes every aspect of professional and personal life.

Even within my marriage, the complexities of intersectional experience become apparent. My husband, a high-ranking military officer and doctor, understands professional pressures and the weight of being one of the few Black faces in predominantly White spaces. He experiences the burden of representation, the code-switching, and the constant performance of excellence.

Patients sometimes question whether he's a "real doctor," and colleagues challenge his medical decisions in ways they wouldn't with White counterparts.

However, his experience as a Black man in clearly hierarchical institutions creates blind spots regarding the gendered dimensions of my struggles. While he faces what Steele and Aronson (1995) identify as stereotype threat (the psychological burden of potentially confirming negative stereotypes about his racial group), the intersection of race and gender creates different dynamics than what he encounters. His military rank commands automatic respect. His medical degree carries weight even when questioned. He sometimes struggles to understand why my expertise gets questioned not just because I'm Black, but because I'm a Black woman, or why my research gets dismissed as "subjective" while his clinical judgment, though questioned, is never labeled emotional or personal.

These intersectional challenges extend beyond university walls into the film and television industry I study and engage with professionally. When I reached out to local filmmakers in Oklahoma with ideas about better preparing students for feature film work, I wasn't just ignored. I was underestimated. They looked at me as if I were playing dress-up in academia, as if I couldn't understand the "real world" of filmmaking.

My response was to demonstrate rather than argue. I produced the first feature film at the University of Oklahoma: three semesters, almost twenty thousand dollars, countless hours coordinating students, crew, equipment, and post-production. When we premiered to a sold-out crowd of 600 people in the largest movie theater in Oklahoma, those same filmmakers who had dismissed me suddenly wanted conversations. My success forced them to reckon with their assumptions about what a Black woman professor could accomplish.

Yet even this victory felt bittersweet. I had to prove my worth through extraordinary achievement: not just making a film but making one that packed the state's biggest theater. I had to demonstrate competence through spectacle, credibility through box office numbers. My White male colleagues don't require sold-out premieres for their expertise to be taken seriously.

This pattern continues to manifest in subsequent projects. Despite proven success, I still struggle for support on new initiatives. A TV pilot proposal, another university first with half the feature's budget, faced resistance that my previous success should have eliminated. The success of that project still has not changed my status much. I realized that for my ideas to gain traction, I must invite (not that I mind, but it's the principle) my White male counterpart to planning meetings where he simply repeats proposals I have already presented. Suddenly, those same ideas become worthy of consideration. The symbolic annihilation I study in media representation plays out in my professional life: I'm either invisible in conversations about filmmaking opportunities, or my proven expertise remains questionable, my successes framed as fortunate accidents rather than earned achievements.

Analysis

This extended narrative demonstrates how symbolic annihilation operates through intersectionality in ways that single-axis analysis cannot capture. As Crenshaw (1991) theorizes, my overlapping identities as a Black woman create unique forms of marginalization distinct from what Black men or White women experience. The comparison with my husband's professional navigation illustrates this clearly. While we both face racialized questioning of our expertise, the gendered dimensions of my experience (being dismissed as "emotional," having industry credentials devalued, requiring extraordinary proof of competence) create additional barriers he doesn't encounter.

The narrative also reveals how epistemology of ignorance (Mills, 1997) functions in academic contexts. When professors dismiss my industry experience as "not academic," they actively choose not to recognize forms of knowledge that challenge traditional hierarchies privileging theoretical over practical expertise. This willful ignorance serves to maintain existing power structures where certain forms of knowledge (typically those possessed by White men) are valid while others are delegitimized.

The screenwriting class example reveals how symbolic annihilation operates through supposedly neutral pedagogy that claims to teach "craft" while enforcing specific cultural assumptions about whose stories deserve to be told and how. This connects directly to what Giroux and Penna (1979) describe as hidden curriculum, the implicit messages transmitted through pedagogical choices that shape students' understanding of what constitutes legitimate knowledge and acceptable practice. When faculty praise stereotypical representations as "realistic" while dismissing nuanced portrayals as "inauthentic," they teach students that marginalized people can only be represented through dominant culture's limited frameworks. This pedagogical pattern directly informs EMERGE's Education Phase, which emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching in media production must explicitly address how "industry standards" and "professional conventions" often encode bias that perpetuates symbolic annihilation.

The emotional labor described in this narrative connects to what Carstarphen (2021) terms the "pedagogy of pain." The crying in the shower, the isolation, the exhaustion of simultaneously proving competence while mentoring students, conducting research, and managing family responsibilities all exemplify how marginalized educators carry burdens their privileged colleagues never experience. As Carstarphen (2021) powerfully states, "I am African

American, a female with rank of professor, and I should not exist" (p. 144). This pain cannot be separated from pedagogy. It shapes what I teach, how I teach, and why this work matters beyond academic exercise.

Finally, the industry validation narrative reveals how symbolic annihilation requires extraordinary performance for basic recognition. The sold-out premiere functioned as what I call "spectacle credibility": proof so undeniable that dismissal becomes impossible. Yet even this extraordinary achievement didn't eliminate ongoing barriers, demonstrating how symbolic annihilation operates systemically rather than individually. Each new project requires renewed proof, renewed performance, renewed justification of my presence and expertise.

Critical Incident 3: The Oscar Discussion and Hidden Curriculum

Narrative

The discussion began innocently enough. We were talking about recent Oscar nominations, and I began to mention films none of the students had ever heard of before. I'm notorious in my classes for getting very frustrated with students who do not study our craft of filmmaking. That means to me studying films that are considered classics and including those from diverse filmmakers. I always mention documentaries like *Hollywoodism: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (1998), and *Classified X* (1998) by Melvin Van Peebles.

For context, the entire class is White except for one international student. The silence in the room was deafening as I gave a quick impromptu lecture. Finally, a student said, "I'm a senior and I have never heard anything about this side of the industry." Other students joined in. I sighed and just shook my head. Questions just kept coming. I could see there was a real interest in the things I was saying. And then the question finally came: "Why aren't they teaching us this?"

The discussion deepened as students began to engage with these revelations. One student mentioned discovering Dolemite on streaming services. “Only one of the most influential independent films of the 70s,” I explained.

“Rudy Ray Moore basically created his own film empire outside the Hollywood system. But it’s not just him. There were so many Black filmmakers and actors making incredible films during that era.”

I covered the 70’s film era as best I could in the short time I had, explaining how Hollywood was in financial trouble during this time and the blaxploitation era basically saved it. Then a student interjected: “New Hollywood, Scorsese, Coppola...”

“That’s exactly the point,” I responded.

“You learned all about *Mean Streets* and *The Godfather*, but nothing about *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* or *Cotton Comes to Harlem* just to name a few. These films were making millions and influencing the entire industry, but somehow they don’t make it into your curriculum.”

The students began pulling out their phones, eager to look up these films they’d never heard of. I watched their expressions change as they discovered entire chapters of film history that had been absent from their education.

“But why wouldn’t we learn about this?” a student asked, genuinely confused. “If these films were successful and influential...”

“This is what we call hidden curriculum,” I explained. “It’s not just about what we actively teach, but what we omit. These omissions send powerful messages about what’s considered important or ‘legitimate’ in film history.”

I continued, “And it’s not just historical. When we discuss independent film today, why don’t you know about Melvin Van Peebles who produced the highest grossing independent film prior to Fahrenheit 9/11?”

The international student nodded, perhaps recognizing similar omissions in how global cinema was taught. The White students were discovering that their supposedly comprehensive film education had significant blind spots, ones that reflected deeper systemic issues in how film history is curated and taught.

“This is making me question everything,” one student admitted. “What other parts of film history are we missing?”

“That’s exactly what you should be asking,” I replied. “Once you start seeing these gaps, you start questioning everything. And that’s what we should be doing as filmmakers.”

When class ended, the students remained engaged, sharing recommendations and discussing the possibility of screening some of the films mentioned. What began as a typical discussion about the Oscars had transformed into a crucial lesson about representation, cultural validation, and the politics of curriculum. More importantly, it had inspired my students to question the very foundations of their film education and seek out these hidden histories themselves.

As I packed up my materials, I felt a mix of frustration and hope. Frustration that these vital parts of film history remained marginalized in film education, but hope that these students, at least, were now awakening to the need to look beyond the standard curriculum.

Analysis

This narrative illustrates how hidden curriculum (Giroux & Penna, 1979) operates through systematic omission. The students’ shocked discovery that entire movements in film

history (Blaxploitation cinema, independent Black filmmaking) were absent from their supposedly comprehensive education reveals how curricula encode ideological messages about whose creative work matters. As Giroux and Penna (1979) argue, what is not taught sends messages as powerful as what is taught. By omitting commercially successful, culturally influential films by Black creators while centering White male auteurs like Scorsese and Coppola, traditional film curricula implicitly teach that creative genius and legitimate film history are White and male.

The student question "Why aren't 'they' teaching us this?" reveals the moment when hidden curriculum becomes visible. Until this discussion, students had accepted their education as comprehensive rather than recognizing it as curated through particular ideological lenses. The senior student's admission of never hearing about "this side of the industry" despite four years of study demonstrates how thoroughly symbolic annihilation can operate through curricular omission.

The narrative also reveals how epistemology of ignorance functions institutionally. Faculty colleagues who design curricula omitting these films are not ignorant accidentally. They actively choose not to know or teach this material, often framing such omissions as maintaining "standards" or focusing on "the canon." (the official material). This willful ignorance preserves White dominance in film history while appearing neutral and merit based.

My role in this incident exemplifies what hooks (1994) describes as engaged pedagogy: using the classroom as a site for consciousness-raising and transformation. By making hidden curriculum visible and providing students with tools to question what they've been taught (and not taught), I challenged the reproductive function of traditional education. The students' immediate engagement with their phones to research these films, their expressions of wanting to

question everything, suggests that critical consciousness can be cultivated when students are given frameworks for recognizing systemic patterns rather than individual gaps.

Critical Incident 4: The KSU Studio Lockout and Strategic Navigation

Narrative

This narrative explores how willful ignorance operates through the lens of my experience as the sole woman and person of color in an undergraduate radio and television production program at Kent State University, and then later as a professor at the same institution. As an undergraduate, I occupied a unique position as the producer of two significant Black media programs: “Family Tree” (television) and “Ebony Waves” (radio). These programs represented vital spaces for Black voices in an otherwise homogeneous media landscape. However, the physical and social construction of the studio environment revealed deeply embedded systems of exclusion.

The practice of locking me out of the studio after the news program, a seemingly impersonal act, exemplified how structural racism operates through plausible deniability. The White students’ behavior demonstrated what philosopher Charles Mills (2007) terms “white ignorance”: a socially constructed and maintained system of not knowing that preserves white privilege while appearing procedural rather than personal (Mills, 2007).

To counter this exclusion, I had to get strategic. I couldn’t just show up on time and do my job like everyone else. I had to be smarter, sneakier. I started arriving during the news production, timing my entrance so I’d already be in the studio before they could lock me out. It was calculated, exhausting, and completely unfair. This is what marginalized people do: we become experts not just in our actual work, but in the elaborate survival strategies required to

access spaces that should be available to us in the first place. I had to study their schedule, anticipate their moves, and outmaneuver exclusion that dressed itself up as business as usual.

Six years later, the dynamics shifted yet remained familiar. As a professor, I encountered the same news director, now controlling all campus studios. His continued hostility, despite the time to grow up and be professional, highlights how epistemological ignorance can persist even when social positions evolve. The ritual of making me wait in his office, a power play that forced me to "perform" patience, exemplifies what Patricia Hill Collins describes as the "politics of containment" (Collins, 1998; Baldwin, 2021).

My response (choosing to "kill him with kindness") represents a sophisticated understanding of what W.E.B. Du Bois called "double consciousness": the awareness of how one is perceived by the dominant culture and the strategic navigation of those perceptions (Du Bois, 1903). Eventually, I was able to walk in his office unannounced, and he would fulfill any request, as long as I was involved.

My approach to transformation wasn't merely tactical. It represented a profound understanding of the epistemology of ignorance, even if I could not name it at the time. By consistently engaging with humanity (asking about his day, maintaining composure), I challenged the very foundation of his ignorance: the ability to maintain distance and difference. The year-long transformation from antagonism to friendship demonstrates how unrelenting human connection can disrupt the comfortable patterns of not-knowing that support systemic inequality. This wasn't merely about gaining access to resources. It was about creating a crack in the structure of institutional racism through persistent, humanizing interaction.

Analysis

This narrative demonstrates how epistemology of ignorance (Mills, 1997) operates through both individual and institutional mechanisms. The studio lockout functioned as what Mills terms "white ignorance": a systematic not-knowing that allows White individuals to maintain privilege while claiming innocence (Mills, 1997). The White students could claim they were simply following protocol (locking the studio after their program ended) while the effect systematically excluded the Black woman producing programs immediately after theirs. This plausible deniability exemplifies how racism operates through structures that appear neutral.

My strategic response illustrates what Collins (1990) identifies as the necessity for marginalized individuals to develop sophisticated knowledge of dominant systems in order to navigate them. I had to learn not just production skills (the formal curriculum) but also the unwritten rules and strategic timing necessary for resource access (the hidden curriculum). This double burden, where marginalized students must master both technical content and navigation strategies, represents additional labor that privileged students never perform.

The later encounter as professor reveals how interpersonal dynamics reflect structural power even when formal positions shift. Despite becoming a professor, I still faced exclusion from the same individual who had participated in my undergraduate marginalization. His continued control over studio access demonstrates how structural power can persist regardless of individual credential accumulation. My strategic choice to engage with persistent humanity rather than confrontation represents what I call "disruptive kindness" (Williams, 2024): the use of consistent human connection to challenge the distance that epistemology of ignorance requires.

The year-long transformation from antagonism to access demonstrates that individual relationships can sometimes create cracks in structural barriers, but this success required exhausting emotional labor. I had to perform patience, kindness, and professionalism despite facing hostility, a burden my White colleagues never carried. While this strategy succeeded in this instance, it cannot serve as a model for systemic transformation. Individual charisma and emotional labor cannot substitute for institutional policies ensuring equitable access. The fact that I needed to strategically befriend a gatekeeper to access resources that should have been available based on my position reveals the inadequacy of relying on interpersonal solutions to structural problems.

Critical Incident 5: Stereotype Threat Across the Pipeline

Narrative

The weight of stereotype threat didn't start when I became a professor. It started in my undergraduate production classes, where I was often the only person of color, and always the only woman. Not once during my entire undergraduate career did I work on a team project. Not once. While my White classmates formed crews, built relationships, and learned collaboration, I worked alone. Whether this isolation happened because no one wanted to work with me or because I recognized the futility of trying to break into established White social networks, the result was the same: I learned production in isolation while everyone else learned it as a collective experience.

I became what people love to call a "good Black" (which was said to my face). You know the type. Quiet. Nonthreatening. Competent enough to not embarrass anyone. I learned to shrink myself, to not take up too much space, to be grateful for the crumbs of acknowledgment

when they came. I performed the role of the model minority student who proved the system worked, even as the system was actively failing me.

The irony is that this isolation probably made me technically stronger. When you can't rely on a crew, you learn every role. When you can't divide labor, you master the entire production process. But I shouldn't have had to become excellent in isolation. I shouldn't have had to trade collaborative learning and community for technical competence born out of necessity.

Now, as a professor walking into my own classroom each semester, I carry all of that history with me. I also carry the weight of being a Black woman teaching film production, a role so rare that the four women students who visited my office had never experienced it before. The simple act of entering the room as a Black woman faculty member becomes a moment where my identity collides with every assumption students have absorbed about who possesses technical authority in media production.

I watch their faces on day one. The averted gazes. The surprise. Sometimes the visible disappointment. I know what they're thinking because I can see the calculation happening: Can she actually teach me? Does she know what she's talking about? Is this going to be a "diversity hire" situation?

So, I do what I learned to do as an undergraduate: I perform. I establish legitimacy through a ritual my White male colleagues never face. I recite my credentials. I list my industry experience. I name-drop projects. I demonstrate expertise before I've even taken attendance. It's exhausting. Every semester, I prove I belong at the head of my own classroom. My White colleagues walk in and start teaching. I walk in and start auditioning.

And it doesn't stop at the classroom door. In industry interactions, the performance continues in even more absurd ways. When I talk to someone on the phone before meeting them in person, I watch their eyes scan past me when we finally meet face to face. They're looking for someone else. They're looking for whoever they imagined on the phone, and that person clearly isn't this Black woman standing in front of them. I can see the confusion, the recalibration. Sometimes they ask perplexed, "You're Traci, right?" Yes. I'm the person you just spoke with. The person whose ideas you praised on the phone. The person you were excited to collaborate with. But now that you can see me, suddenly there's doubt.

So, the performance starts again. More credentials. More name-dropping. More proving that yes, I am actually the person you spoke to, and yes, I actually know what I'm doing. It's like my voice on the phone writes a check my Black female body can't cash. Every professional interaction becomes a credibility test I didn't know I was taking.

The four women students who came to my office understood this immediately. They'd been navigating the same dynamics I had navigated as a student. Being overlooked. Having equipment taken from their hands. Receiving dismissive looks when asking technical questions. They came to me not because I made class easier but because they finally saw someone who had survived what they were surviving. They needed to know it was possible to be a woman and claim technical authority.

But here's what keeps me up at night: I succeeded despite the system, not because of it. I became technically excellent because isolation forced me to master everything alone. I learned to navigate White spaces because I had no choice. I developed thick skin because thin skin wouldn't have let me survive. And now I teach in that same system, trying to transform it from the inside while it continues to mark me as an outsider.

Every semester, I prove my expertise. Every industry meeting, I prove I'm the person they spoke to on the phone. Every interaction, I name-drop and credential-drop and perform competence that should be assumed but never is. Every time, I transform their stereotype threat into my pedagogical opportunity, making visible how media representation has shaped their expectations about who belongs in positions of creative and technical authority. I turn my marginalization into a teaching moment because what else can I do? But I shouldn't have to. None of us should have to.

Analysis

This extended narrative reveals how stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) operates across the entire education-to-industry pipeline, shaping experiences from undergraduate student to professional educator to industry collaborator. Steele and Aronson's (1995) research demonstrates that individuals from stereotyped groups experience psychological burden when they fear their performance might confirm negative stereotypes about their group. When stereotype threat is activated, this cognitive burden interferes with performance on the task at hand. In my experience navigating multiple educational and professional contexts as a Black woman, this burden manifests differently at different career stages but maintains consistent effects: isolation, hypervigilance, and the exhausting labor of constantly proving competence.

The undergraduate experience illuminates what I term "excellence through isolation." When collaborative learning opportunities are denied, marginalized students face a cruel choice: fail to develop skills because they lack team-based learning or develop skills through solitary mastery. I became technically proficient precisely because I couldn't rely on collaboration. But this success came with isolation, loneliness, and the internalization that I was somehow different from my peers who learned collectively.

The “good Black” performance represents a specific manifestation of what Du Bois (1903) termed “double consciousness.” To survive predominantly White educational spaces, I learned to monitor constantly how I was perceived and adjust my behavior accordingly. Being “good” meant being nonthreatening, grateful, not too confident, not too angry, not too much. This performance required immense emotional labor and the suppression of authentic self-expression.

Stereotype threat persists across career stages, requiring different performances but maintaining consistent psychological burdens. As a student, I performed the “good Black” to gain access. As a professor, I perform the “credentialed expert” to gain legitimacy. As an industry professional, I perform the “I’m actually the person you spoke to on the phone” to overcome the cognitive dissonance White collaborators experience when my voice doesn’t match my visible identity. The phone-to-in-person meeting dynamic reveals a particularly insidious form of stereotype threat. When my voice on the phone presumably sounds “professional” (read: white, or at least race-ambiguous), I’m treated as a credible collaborator. But when my Black female body becomes visible, suddenly that credibility evaporates. People literally look past me, searching for “the real” person they spoke with, demonstrating how deeply ingrained these associations are between Blackness and lack of authority.

The contrast between “My White colleagues walk in and start teaching. I walk in and start auditioning” captures the additional labor stereotype threat imposes. While White faculty focus cognitive resources on content delivery, I must simultaneously manage stereotype threat, read student responses, establish credibility, and teach. This divided attention creates terms “spotlight anxiety” (Steele & Aronson,1995, p. 809), where the cognitive load of managing

anxiety can impair performance, creating a cruel irony where pressure to disprove stereotypes makes disproving them more difficult.

However, the narrative also reveals my strategic transformation of stereotype threat into pedagogical opportunity. Rather than pretending the tension doesn't exist, I name it explicitly. I connect students' initial discomfort to cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1980), helping them recognize how consuming countless media texts positioning White men as technical experts has shaped their assumptions about who possesses both technical and creative authority and expertise. By making my navigation of stereotype threat visible, I demonstrate how symbolic annihilation in media content shapes real-world professional dynamics.

The statement "I succeeded despite the system, not because of it" captures a crucial insight that challenges meritocratic narratives. My success is often held up as evidence that the system works, that talent and hard work overcome barriers. But this narrative erases the psychological toll of succeeding through isolation, the relationships I didn't build, the collaborative skills I developed in other environments, the professional opportunities lost because people couldn't reconcile my voice with my face, and most critically, the students who faced similar barriers but didn't survive them. Survivor bias treats individual persistence as proof of systemic fairness while ignoring all those the system excluded.

Finally, the narrative's conclusion ("I shouldn't have to. None of us should have to") refuses to celebrate resilience born from oppression. While I have developed sophisticated strategies for navigating stereotype threat and transforming it into pedagogy, the fact that such strategies are necessary represents failure, not success. EMERGE's Empowerment Phase emerges directly from this recognition: rather than training each generation to independently develop survival strategies, education should create environments where such strategies become

unnecessary because all students enter spaces designed to affirm rather than question their presence and potential. This critical incident demonstrates why stereotype threat must be understood not as individual psychological experience but as systemic dynamic requiring institutional intervention. Individual resilience cannot substitute for transformed structures. The goal is not to help more Black women or all women perfect the performance, but to dismantle the stages that demand it.

Table 2

Personal Narrative Analysis: Symbolic Annihilation in Media Education

Framework for Autoethnographic Data Analysis

Personal Narrative	Symbolic Annihilation Component	Supporting Theoretical Framework(s)	Key Finding	EMERGE Framework Connection
Studio Lockout at KSU	**Omission** - Structural exclusion from production spaces.	• Epistemology of Ignorance • Intersectionality • Standpoint Theory	• Institutional "not-knowing" perpetuates exclusion while maintaining plausible deniability.	• **Empowerment Phase:** Creating inclusive access to resources and spaces.
Four Women Students' Office Visit	**Omission** - Absence of female authority figures in production education.	• Stereotype Threat • Culturally Responsive Teaching • Standpoint Theory	• Students had never experienced validation of their technical interests from female faculty.	• **Empowerment Phase:** Providing diverse role models and mentorship.
Hidden Curriculum Film Discussion	**Omission -** Erasure of diverse film history from curriculum.	• Hidden Curriculum • Epistemology of Ignorance • Critical Media Literacy • Standpoint Theory	• Students unaware of significant gaps in their education; eager to learn when exposed.	• **Media Literacy Phase:** Expanding representational knowledge base.
Colleague's Screenwriting Class	**Condemnation** - Encouragement of harmful stereotypes as "good storytelling."	• Critical Media Literacy • Hidden Curriculum • Epistemology of Ignorance	• Faculty claiming neutrality while actively perpetuating harmful representations.	• **Education Phase:** Implementing critical analysis of representational choices.
Questioning of Teaching Authority	**Trivialization/ Condemnation** - Constant need to prove expertise and legitimacy.	• Stereotype Threat • Intersectionality • Black Feminist Thought • Standpoint Theory	• Black women faculty face additional burden of establishing credibility.	• **Empowerment Phase:** Addressing stereotype threat in learning environments.
Industry Validation Challenges	**Trivialization -** Success requiring extraordinary proof for recognition.	• Intersectionality • Culturally Responsive Teaching • Stereotype Threat • Epistemology of Ignorance	• Professional achievements questioned/minimized until undeniably successful.	• **Experiences Phase:** Preparing students for industry navigation strategies.
Feature Film Production Success	**Resistance to Omission -** Creating visibility through unprecedented achievement.	• Culturally Responsive Teaching • Experiential Learning • Critical Media Literacy	• Illustrating how hands-on learning environments can center previously marginalized voices and stories.	• **All Phases:** Demonstrates integrated framework in action.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: Women Faculty Experiences and Resistance Strategies

How do women media educators nationally and internationally experience and resist symbolic annihilation in their professional roles?

Faculty Survey Demographics

The survey of women media production educators produced 12 valid responses, revealing how gender and race shape their teaching experiences and professional challenges. The respondents were 80% female (n=11), 13%, and 7% gender fluid (n=1). Racial/ethnic information, 67% (n=8) were Black or African American, 25% (n=3) were White, and 8% (n=1) preferred not to say. Many respondents were women of color, positioning them at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. Most taught at 4-year public universities (83%, n=10), with the remaining split between community colleges and 4-year private institutions. While 92% weren't the sole woman or person of color in their departments, the fact that any were speaks to ongoing isolation issues.

Identity Influences on Teaching

Every single respondent said industry experience influenced their teaching. Gender came next at 83%, followed by educational background at 67%. Race, age, and socioeconomic background each influenced about 58% of their teaching approaches. All participants managed to incorporate their lived experiences into teaching, though the freedom to do so varied significantly.

While 75% could design diverse curriculum when creating new courses, only a third had successfully modified inherited courses to be more inclusive, and a quarter faced outright resistance when trying to diversify content. The women supplemented where they could: 58% added diverse examples to official materials, and half created entirely new courses to fill

representation gaps. These findings reveal that inclusive pedagogy often depends on individual faculty initiative and strategic navigation rather than institutional support.

Inclusive Pedagogical Strategies

These educators employed extensive inclusive strategies despite institutional barriers. Everyone used personal storytelling from their industry experience. Over 90% brought in diverse guest speakers and showcased work by diverse professionals. They taught critical media analysis (83%) and used project-based learning (83%).

When dealing with harmful representations, 92% critically analyzed stereotypes in mainstream media, 83% invited community members from underrepresented groups to share perspectives, and 75% facilitated discussions about who gets portrayed as "normal" versus "other." They weren't just teaching technique. They were actively deconstructing harmful industry practices through their pedagogy.

Professional Challenges and Marginalization

The professional challenges these women faced were pervasive. Three-quarters had to prove their credentials more than male colleagues. Two-thirds had their technical expertise questioned and faced student resistance to their authority based on gender. Their creative work received less institutional support (58%), and half experienced backlash when challenging traditional approaches.

The qualitative responses painted an even starker picture. Women described having ideas stolen by male colleagues, being denied conference funding that men received, and facing promotion inequities. One respondent said she was "marginalized daily" and couldn't give a single example because it would "minimize the systemic nature of the problem." Another

described being called a "bully" by a White female colleague she had supported for promotion, highlighting how race and gender intersect in workplace dynamics.

Invisible Labor and Institutional Recognition

The invisible labor issue was substantial: 64% performed unrecognized diversity work, while only 18% had this work formally acknowledged. Departments valued their industry expertise (92%) but barely recognized their mentoring of underrepresented students (58%) or pedagogical innovations (33%). One woman revealed administrators told her she shouldn't be so involved with mentoring diverse students, suggesting that such work was viewed as detracting from "real" faculty responsibilities.

Recommendations for Change

Faculty recommendations for change focused on practical needs: updated equipment access, more women in leadership, and critically examining the historical biases embedded in media production curricula. They wanted rotation models ensuring young women could lead projects, financial support for work-based learning, and mandatory equity training for all faculty.

Despite facing daily marginalization and performing uncompensated labor, these women were transforming media education through sheer determination and innovative pedagogy. Their collective responses document both the barriers women faculty face and the sophisticated strategies they employ to create inclusive learning environments within resistant institutional contexts.

Faculty Interview Findings: Four Profiles of Resistance and Resilience

While the survey data revealed broad patterns across women media educators nationally, the four in-depth interviews provided deeper insight into how symbolic annihilation operates in specific institutional contexts and what resistance strategies prove effective. The following

profiles examine experiences across community college, international university, R1 public university, and HBCU contexts, revealing both consistent patterns and context-specific challenges.

Analytical Framework for Faculty Interview Data

The four in-depth faculty interviews were analyzed to identify how symbolic annihilation operates across diverse institutional contexts and what resistance strategies prove effective. Table 3 presents the thematic analysis framework, revealing consistent patterns of exclusion alongside sophisticated navigation strategies. The following profiles provide detailed examination of each faculty member's experiences and resistance approaches.

Table 3

Faculty Interview Thematic Analysis:
Patterns of Symbolic Annihilation Across Institution Types

Faculty	Symbolic Annihilation Component	Theme	Key Finding/Evidence	EMERGE Framework Connection
Faculty A Community College Midwest Region **African American Woman**	**Omission:** Practical skills marginalized in favor of traditional academic approaches.	**Institutional Resistance** Culturally Responsive Teaching **Stereotype Threat** Hidden Curriculum	*"4-year battle to create film production program. White female colleagues with MFAs tried to force use of outdated humanities courses instead of hands-on production."*	**Experiences Phase** Professional networks support teaching.
Faculty B International University Middle East **African American Woman**	**Condemnation:** Innovative approaches treated as rule-breaking.	**Institutional Resistance** Culturally Responsive Teaching **Stereotype Threat** Critical Media Literacy	*"I will play by the rules... but within the rules, guess what? I'm gonna disrupt that shit."*	**Education Phase** Resources for innovative curriculum development.
Faculty C R1 Public University South Central Region **White Woman**	**Omission:** Voice silenced in curricular discussions.	**Institutional Resistance** Epistemology of Ignorance **Intersectionality** Standpoint Theory	*"Absolutely not [a man wouldn't face this pushback]... I'm the first woman to be in this position."*	**Media Literacy Phase** Encouraging communities of practice for faculty support.
Faculty D HBCU Southern Region **African American Woman**	**Trivialization:** Professional achievements minimized.	**Institutional Resistance** Epistemology of Ignorance **Culturally Responsive Teaching**	*"Despite multiple Emmy awards, colleagues questioned: 'What paper have you written? What panels have you been on?*	**Empowerment Phase** Industry expertise balanced with academic credentials.
Faculty A Community College Midwest Region **African American Woman**	**Condemnation:** Emotional responses to systematic exclusion.	**Emotional Labor** Standpoint Theory **Stereotype Threat** Black Feminist Thought	*"I had some days where I cried... I got pissed off and said, 'I will shut all this shit down."*	**Empowerment Phase** Innovation supported and resourced.
Faculty B International University Middle East **African American Woman**	**Trivialization:** Qualifications repeatedly questioned.	**Emotional Labor** Standpoint Theory **Stereotype Threat** Black Feminist Thought **Intersectionality**	*"This life... trying to do your thing, and it's like, I got the experience, I have the skills"*	**Empowerment Phase** Diverse pedagogical approaches encouraged.

Table 3a

Faculty	Symbolic Annihilation Component	Theme	Key Finding/Evidence	EMERGE Framework Connection
Faculty C R1 Public University South Central Region White Woman	**Condemnation:** Assertiveness punished, confidence eroded.	Institutional Resistance Emotional Labor Stereotype Threat Epistemology of Ignorance	*"It has beaten me down... I've always been a very assertive person in a newsroom, and what has happened with me... it has beaten me down"*	**Experiences Phase** Recognizing the psychological toll of systematic harassment
Faculty D HBCU Southern Region African American Woman	**Condemnation & Trivilization:** Building realistic expectations about what resistance looks like in institutional contexts.	Emotional Labor Standpoint Theory Stereotype Threat Epistemology of Ignorance Intersectionality	*"There are compromises, and forgive yourself for the times that you may not have stood as boldly"*	**Empowerment Phase & Experiences** Acknowledging the reality of having to make compromises within oppressive systems.

Faculty Interview Thematic Analysis: Patterns of Symbolic Annihilation Across Institution Types. This framework maps faculty experiences across community college, international university, R1 public university, and HBCU contexts, identifying consistent patterns of omission, trivialization, and condemnation alongside connections to EMERGE phases.

Faculty A: Community College, Midwest Region, African American Woman

Institutional Context and Barriers

Faculty A navigated a four-year battle to create a hands-on film production program at her community college in the Midwest. Her White female colleagues with MFAs attempted to force the use of outdated humanities courses instead of practical production training, exemplifying how omission operates through curricular gatekeeping. The resistance she faced

reflected institutional preference for traditional academic approaches over industry-relevant skill development, a pattern that systematically marginalizes practical knowledge in favor of theoretical frameworks.

Symbolic Annihilation and Emotional Labor

Faculty A experienced condemnation through emotional responses to systematic exclusion. As she described, "I had some days where I cried... I got pissed off and said, 'I will shut all this shit down.'" This candid acknowledgment reveals the emotional toll of challenging entrenched institutional norms, particularly for Black women faculty who must navigate both racial and gendered dimensions of resistance. The fact that proposing industry-aligned curriculum provoked such intense institutional pushback demonstrates how educational systems protect traditional hierarchies that privilege certain forms of knowledge over others.

Resistance Strategies and Outcomes

Faculty A's successful strategy involved strategic industry partnership development. Rather than continuing to argue within academic frameworks that devalued her industry expertise, she brought in external validation from film professionals whose authority the institution couldn't dismiss. This approach illustrates what I term "strategic legitimation": leveraging external credibility to overcome internal resistance. After four years of persistence, her program was approved and implemented.

The validation came through student outcomes. Faculty A documented that her students gained industry employment while students from the traditional humanities-focused program struggled to find work. This evidence-based justification proved undeniable, demonstrating that inclusive, experiential pedagogy produces better professional preparation than traditional approaches. Her experience informed EMERGE's Experiences Phase, which emphasizes

building industry partnerships and documenting student success as strategies for overcoming institutional resistance.

Faculty B: International University, Middle East, African American Woman

Institutional Context and Strategic Disruption

Faculty B teaches at an international university in the Middle East, navigating cultural contexts where both her race and innovative pedagogical approaches face scrutiny. She experienced condemnation as her innovative teaching methods were treated as rule-breaking rather than pedagogical advancement. Traditional structures positioned her culturally responsive approaches as violations of established norms rather than improvements to outdated practices.

Philosophy of Resistance

Faculty B articulated a sophisticated resistance philosophy: "I will play by the rules... but within the rules, guess what? I'm gonna disrupt that shit." This strategy of working within institutional structures while subverting their exclusionary functions represents what I call "strategic compliance." She used curriculum autonomy afforded to individual instructors to implement inclusive practices that department-level policies might have blocked. By framing her innovations as falling within existing guidelines, she avoided direct confrontation while achieving substantive transformation.

Navigating Credibility Challenges

Faculty B also faced trivialization of her qualifications. Despite extensive industry experience and academic credentials, she encountered constant questioning: "This life... trying to do your thing, and it's like, I got the experience, I have the skills." The repetition of having to prove competence despite demonstrated expertise exemplifies how stereotype threat operates for Black women faculty across international contexts. Her experience shows that symbolic

annihilation transcends national boundaries, operating through similar mechanisms regardless of geographic location.

EMERGE Connections

Faculty B's approach informed EMERGE's Education Phase, which emphasizes that individual faculty can implement culturally responsive pedagogy even within resistant institutional structures. Her strategy demonstrates that transformation doesn't always require top-down support; strategic use of existing autonomy can create meaningful change. However, her experience also highlights the exhaustion this approach requires, as individual faculty bear the burden of innovation without institutional recognition or support.

Faculty C: R1 Public University, South Central Region, White Woman

Institutional Context and Gender Dynamics

Faculty C serves as the first woman in a leadership position within her program at an R1 public university in the South-Central region. Despite this historic appointment, she experienced omission as her voice was systematically silenced in curricular discussions. When asked if a man would face the same pushback she encountered when proposing changes, she responded definitively: "Absolutely not [a man wouldn't face this pushback] ... I'm the first woman to be in this position."

The Toll of Systematic Harassment

Faculty C provided perhaps the most visceral account of how condemnation operates through sustained institutional hostility. She described being "beaten down" by systematic harassment: "It has beaten me down... I've always been a very assertive person in a newsroom, and what has happened with me... it has beaten me down." This statement captures how institutional resistance in the newsroom and the academy as institutions function not just through

overt barriers but through erosion of confidence and energy over time. The transformation she describes, from assertive professional to someone worn down by constant opposition, illustrates the psychological costs of challenging entrenched power structures.

The Reality of Compromise

Faculty C's experience illuminates a crucial dimension often absent from transformation narratives: the necessity of acknowledging limits. While she continued advocating for students and inclusive practices, she also recognized that individual faculty cannot sustain indefinite resistance against hostile systems. Her honesty about being "beaten down" challenges narratives that celebrate only uncompromising resistance, instead validating that surviving hostile environments sometimes requires strategic retreat and self-preservation.

EMERGE Connections

Faculty C's experience informed EMERGE's attention to sustainability and the psychological toll of transformation work. Her narrative demonstrates why the framework includes guidance on setting boundaries, building community support, and recognizing that individual faculty cannot single-handedly dismantle systemic inequities. The Experiences Phase's emphasis on recognizing when resistance becomes unsustainable emerged directly from understanding that transformation requires collective effort rather than individual heroism.

Faculty D: HBCU, Southern Region, African American Woman

Institutional Context and Credential Hierarchies

Faculty D teaches at an HBCU in the Southern region, where she navigates the complex dynamics of balancing industry expertise with academic credential expectations. Despite multiple Emmy awards validating her professional excellence, colleagues questioned her qualifications: "What paper have you written? What panels have you been on?" This

trivialization of professional achievements in favor of traditional academic markers exemplifies how institutional structures devalue diverse forms of expertise.

Wisdom of Sustainable Resistance

Faculty D offered crucial guidance about the reality of navigating oppressive systems: "There are compromises and forgive yourself for the times that you may not have stood as boldly." This advice recognizes that resistance under oppressive conditions is exhausting work that cannot be sustained at full intensity indefinitely. Her wisdom reflects a deep understanding of Carstarphen's (2021) "pedagogy of pain," acknowledging that educators carry the accumulated weight of systemic violence, discrimination, and daily survival into their professional work. Faculty D's words challenge narratives that demand constant, unwavering resistance without acknowledging the toll such demands exact. When the pain of navigating racist and sexist institutions becomes overwhelming, self-forgiveness isn't weakness but a survival strategy that allows educators to persist over time rather than burning out from unsustainable expectations.

EMERGE Connections

Faculty D's experiences and insights informed multiple EMERGE components. Her emphasis on balancing industry expertise with academic credentials shaped the Empowerment Phase's guidance on helping students develop both practical skills and institutional legitimacy. Most critically, her wisdom about sustainable resistance influenced EMERGE's acknowledgment that individual faculty cannot transform systems alone and that self-preservation enables long-term change more effectively than unsustainable heroism. Her recognition that "there are compromises" validates the reality that educators working within

oppressive systems must sometimes choose strategic retreat to maintain their capacity for long-term advocacy.

CHAPTER 5: ROUGH CUT TO PICTURE LOCK: THE EMERGE FRAMEWORK

Empowering Media Education through Responsive Growth Experiences

"Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence…In other words, students have to believe they can succeed in learning tasks and be willing to pursue success relentlessly until mastery is obtained"

Geneva Gay

Section 1: Introduction - From Findings to Framework

The findings presented in Chapter 4 reveal a consistent pattern: symbolic annihilation operates systematically across multiple levels of media production education, affecting students, faculty, curriculum, and institutional structures. Students described being overlooked in class discussions, assigned stereotypical roles in group projects, and excluded from leadership opportunities. Faculty interviews documented how women educators face institutional resistance when attempting to implement inclusive pedagogical practices, have their industry expertise devalued in favor of traditional academic credentials, and experience emotional exhaustion from constantly proving their competence. My own autoethnographic narratives illustrated how these patterns manifest in daily interactions, from the four women students who had never seen a female production professor to the hostile gatekeeping I encountered when proposing innovative production courses.

These findings confirm what Chapter 2's literature review established: media production education replicates rather than challenges the industry inequities documented by Smith and Pieper (2023) and Hunt and Ramón (2025). When educational environments systematically omit diverse voices from curriculum, trivialize alternative creative approaches, and condemn those who challenge traditional hierarchies, they prepare students to accept rather than transform

industry barriers. The education-to-industry pipeline operates as a closed loop, with each system reinforcing the exclusionary patterns of the other.

Yet the findings also revealed something equally important: resistance is possible, and it can work. Faculty A's four-year battle to create a hands-on film production program succeeded when she strategically brought in industry partners to validate her approach. Faculty B disrupted institutional norms by using curriculum autonomy to implement innovative teaching methods. Faculty D balanced industry expertise with academic credentials to create space for culturally responsive pedagogy at an HBCU. My own feature film production at the University of Oklahoma, despite institutional skepticism, premiered to a sold-out audience of 600 people and demonstrated that student-led, experiential learning produces both technical excellence and transformative educational experiences.

These patterns of both exclusion and resistance informed the development of EMERGE (Empowering Media Education through Responsive Growth Experiences), a comprehensive pedagogical framework for countering symbolic annihilation in media production education. The framework synthesizes theoretical insights from intersectionality, epistemology of ignorance, stereotype threat, hidden curriculum research, culturally responsive pedagogy, and experiential learning theory into five interconnected phases: Empowerment, Media Literacy, Education, Responsive Growth Assessment, and Experiences. Each phase addresses specific dimensions of symbolic annihilation (omission, trivialization, and condemnation) through concrete, theoretically grounded strategies.

Why Existing Approaches Are Insufficient

Current frameworks for inclusive media education, while significant, have noteworthy limitations that prevent widespread implementation. Culturally responsive teaching (CRT)

provides crucial principles for centering diverse students' experiences and cultural knowledge (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, most CRT scholarship focuses on K-12 education, leaving higher education faculty with limited guidance for adapting these principles to college-level media production courses. Furthermore, CRT frameworks typically address classroom dynamics and curriculum content but do not specifically address the technical, collaborative, and industry-facing dimensions unique to production education. When a cinematography student faces gendered assumptions about her technical aptitude, or when a Black student's creative vision is dismissed as "too niche" for mainstream audiences, CRT principles alone do not provide production faculty with concrete intervention strategies.

Experiential learning theory emphasizes learning through doing, reflection, and application (Kolb, 1984), which aligns naturally with production education's hands-on approach. However, traditional experiential learning models do not explicitly address how power dynamics, stereotype threat, and hidden curriculum operate within collaborative creative work. A student can gain extensive hands-on experience while still being systematically excluded from leadership roles, having their creative contributions minimized, or internalizing industry biases about whose stories matter. Without deliberate attention to equity, experiential learning can inadvertently reproduce the same hierarchies' students will encounter professionally.

Media literacy frameworks help students critically analyze representation and identify patterns of symbolic annihilation in media texts (Kellner & Share, 2007). However, media literacy education typically focuses on consumption and analysis rather than production and creation. Students can become sophisticated critics of media representation while still producing work that replicates exclusionary patterns, because they lack systematic guidance for translating critical analysis into inclusive production practices.

Institutional diversity initiatives, when they exist, often focus on demographic representation (hiring diverse faculty, recruiting diverse students) without addressing the pedagogical and curricular changes necessary to create truly equitable learning environments. Moreover, such initiatives are vulnerable to political shifts and budget constraints, leaving individual faculty to create inclusive classrooms regardless of institutional support or commitment. As Faculty C's experience demonstrates, being the first woman in a leadership position does not automatically grant decision-making authority or institutional support. Representation without transformation of power structures and pedagogical practices leaves diverse faculty isolated and overburdened. Media educators need strategies that work even when institutional support is absent or withdrawn.

Most critically, no existing framework integrates these approaches specifically for media production education while systematically addressing all three dimensions of symbolic annihilation: omission, trivialization, and condemnation. Media educators need more than theoretical principles. They need concrete, actionable strategies that can be implemented within existing institutional constraints, adapted across diverse contexts (community colleges, R1 universities, HBCUs, international institutions), and assessed for effectiveness in preparing students to both succeed within and transform the entertainment industry.

Introducing EMERGE: A Comprehensive Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework

EMERGE provides media educators with a systematic, theoretically grounded, and practically actionable framework for countering symbolic annihilation through pedagogy. Developed through the integration of autoethnographic insights, student experiences, faculty interviews, and extensive theoretical analysis, EMERGE translates the complex theoretical

frameworks presented in Chapter 2 into five interconnected pedagogical phases that guide both course design and classroom practice.

The framework's name reflects its dual purpose: helping students EMERGE as confident, skilled media professionals while helping the field of media production education EMERGE from its historical patterns of exclusion. Each letter represents a distinct but interconnected phase:

E — Empowerment Phase: Establishing foundations for inclusive learning environments where all students see themselves reflected, valued, and capable of creative leadership.

M — Media Literacy Phase: Developing critical consciousness about representation, industry structures, and the mechanisms through which symbolic annihilation operates.

E — Education Phase: Providing scaffolded, culturally responsive learning experiences that build technical skills while honoring diverse creative approaches.

R — Responsive Growth Assessment: Implementing evaluation methods that measure authentic learning, cultural competency, and creative development rather than conformity to narrow industry standards.

E — Experiences Phase: Creating real-world production opportunities that prepare students for professional success while equipping them to challenge industry inequities.

EMERGE differs from existing frameworks in several crucial ways: First, it is specifically designed for media production education, addressing the unique challenges of teaching collaborative, creative, technical work in an industry with documented patterns of exclusion. Unlike general pedagogical frameworks that must be adapted to production contexts, EMERGE begins with the realities of production classrooms: equipment access, role assignments, critique dynamics, industry networking, and portfolio development.

Second, it systematically addresses all three dimensions of symbolic annihilation. Each phase includes explicit strategies for countering omission (through representation and inclusion), trivialization (through validation and resource allocation), and condemnation (through supportive environments and advocacy). By naming these mechanisms explicitly, EMERGE helps educators recognize how symbolic annihilation operates in their own classrooms and provides targeted interventions.

Third, it integrates multiple theoretical frameworks (intersectionality, epistemology of ignorance, stereotype threat, hidden curriculum, culturally responsive teaching, experiential learning) into a coherent pedagogical system rather than treating them as separate considerations. Educators do not need to become experts in each theory independently; EMERGE synthesizes these insights into practical strategies.

Fourth, it incorporates the HRDQ Experiential Learning Model's seven-stage cycle (focusing, experiencing, reflecting, thinking, modifying, practicing, integrating), providing a validated implementation structure (HRDQ, 1992). Throughout Section 2, each EMERGE phase indicates how it aligns with HRDQ stages, demonstrating how this established experiential learning framework provides systematic guidance for implementing anti-symbolic annihilation pedagogy.

Fifth, it acknowledges institutional realities and provides implementation guidance for diverse contexts. Drawing on faculty interviews across community colleges, R1 universities, HBCUs, and international institutions, EMERGE recognizes that what works in one setting may require adaptation in another. The framework provides both core principles and flexible strategies that individual faculty can implement even without full departmental support, while also offering guidance for departments seeking comprehensive curricular transformation.

How EMERGE Works: Framework Overview

EMERGE functions as both a developmental sequence and an interconnected system. The five phases proceed in a general arc, from foundational work to real-world application, yet they also unfold through repeated cycles and nested layers. Students reengage the cycle multiple times, achieving increasing sophistication in technical craft and in equity-centered media practice. The framework can be implemented at multiple scales:

Individual assignment level: A single project can move through all five EMERGE phases, such as a short documentary that begins with empowerment activities (researching diverse documentary filmmakers), develops media literacy (analyzing representation in existing documentaries), provides education (teaching documentary techniques), uses responsive assessment (evaluating based on authentic storytelling and technical growth), and creates experiences (screening for community audiences).

Course level: An entire production course can be structured around EMERGE phases, with early weeks focused on empowerment and media literacy, mid-semester emphasizing education and skill development, and later weeks providing experiences and advanced application.

Curriculum level: A media production program can sequence courses to progressively deepen engagement with EMERGE principles, with introductory courses establishing foundations and advanced courses providing increasingly complex experiences.

Program culture level: Departments can adopt EMERGE as a shared pedagogical philosophy that shapes not just individual courses but also program policies, hiring practices, industry partnerships, and assessment methods.

Each implementation scale requires different resources, institutional support, and time commitments. Recognizing that many faculty (particularly contingent faculty and faculty at under-resourced institutions) face significant constraints, this framework provides guidance for implementing EMERGE at whatever scale is feasible, while also articulating what comprehensive implementation would require.

Regardless of implementation scale, several principles guide effective EMERGE adoption. Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can. Perfect implementation is neither possible nor necessary. Faculty facing significant constraints can implement elements of EMERGE that fit their contexts while working toward expanded implementation over time.

Document outcomes: Track student employment, festival acceptances, portfolio development, and self-reported confidence. Evidence of effectiveness helps secure resources and overcome resistance. As Faculty A discovered, demonstrating that her students gained employment while traditionally trained students struggled created undeniable justification for her approach.

Build community: Connect with other educators implementing inclusive practices through professional organizations (AEJMC, BEA), online networks, and informal relationships. Faculty D's advice to "forgive yourself for the times that you may not have stood as boldly" recognizes that isolation intensifies the challenge. Mutual support, shared strategies, and collective advocacy strengthen individual efforts.

Center student voices: Gather feedback about what's working and what needs adjustment. Students experiencing the framework can identify gaps faculty might miss and offer insights for improvement.

Maintain sustainability: As Faculty C's narrative about being "beaten down" by systemic harassment reveals, transformation work exacts emotional tolls that can lead to burnout. Prioritize self-care, set boundaries, and recognize that individual faculty cannot single-handedly dismantle systems built over decades. Strategic, sustainable resistance

Framework Limitations and Boundaries

EMERGE, has limitations that must be acknowledged: *First,* the framework develops from specific contexts. My experiences as a Black woman educator at predominantly White institutions in the United States, student data from a single university, and faculty interviews primarily from U.S. higher education contexts all shaped this framework. While theoretical foundations suggest transferability to other contexts, EMERGE's specific strategies reflect these origins. International educators, those working in community media or non-profit contexts, or those teaching in secondary education may need to adapt strategies substantially. Future research should examine how EMERGE operates across varied national, cultural, and institutional contexts.

Second, EMERGE focuses on production education rather than media studies, journalism, or other related fields. While some principles may transfer to adjacent disciplines, the framework's emphasis on collaborative creative work, technical skill development, and industry preparation reflects production education's specific dynamics. Scholars in other media education contexts should evaluate which components translate and which require modification.

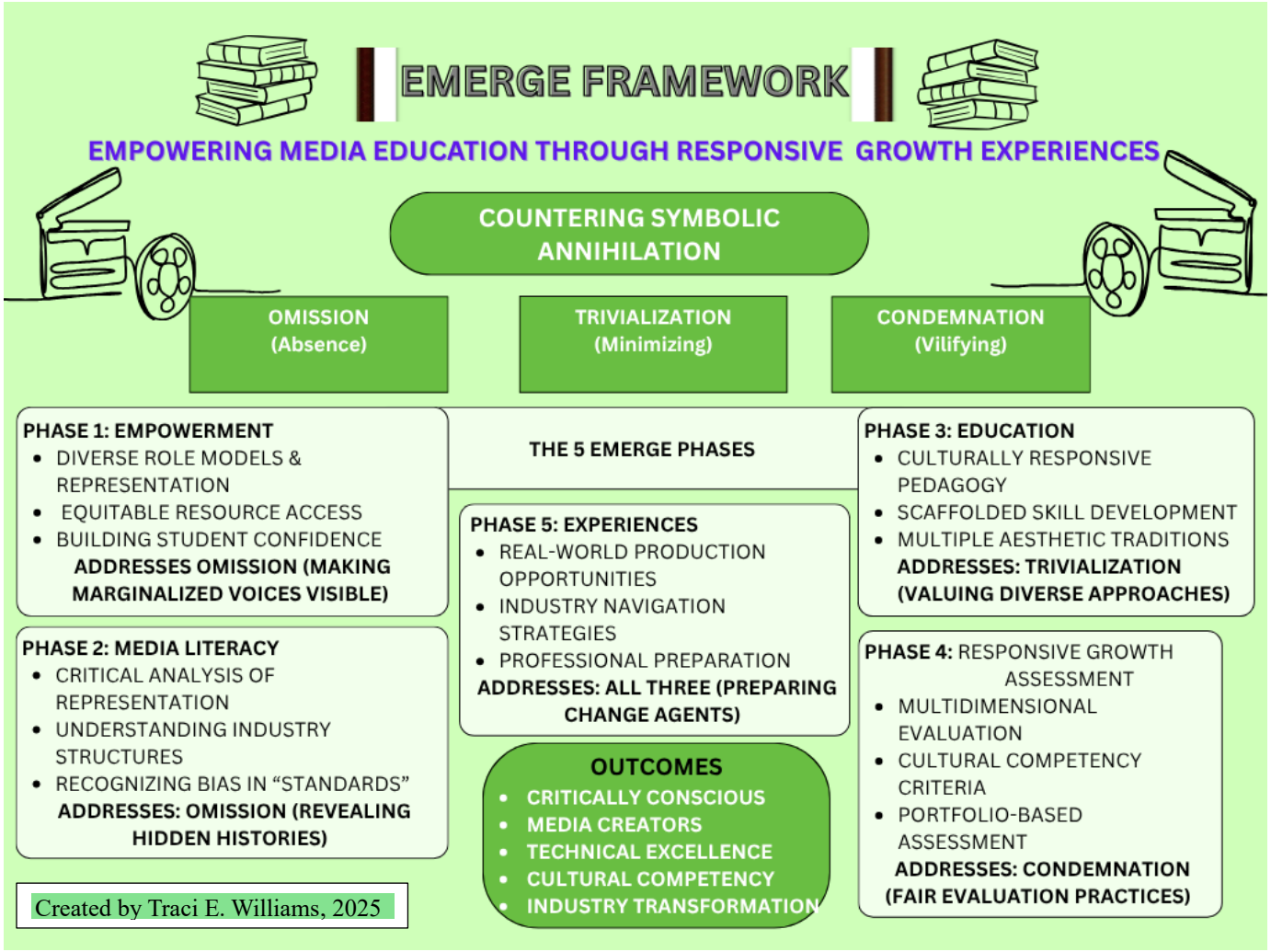
Third, the framework cannot address all forms of exclusion or identity-based marginalization. While intersectionality is integrated throughout, EMERGE primarily addresses race and gender dynamics because these were most prominent in the research data. Disability, class, sexuality, religion, age, and other identity factors receive less explicit attention. Educators

working with students facing marginalization based on these identities should consider how EMERGE strategies might be adapted or expanded.

Fourth, EMERGE assumes some baseline resources. The framework assumes access to equipment, space, time, and institutional permission to teach. Faculty at severely under-resourced institutions or those facing explicit administrative hostility to inclusive pedagogy may find implementation challenging. While the framework offers strategies for constrained contexts, there are limits to what individual faculty can accomplish within hostile or resource-starved environments. Institutional transformation requires institutional will and resources, not just faculty commitment.

Fifth, the framework's effectiveness has not been systematically evaluated beyond the contexts studied. While grounded in established theory and validated through faculty interviews and student data, EMERGE requires rigorous assessment of outcomes across diverse implementations. Do students taught through EMERGE demonstrate measurably different professional trajectories than those from traditional programs? Do they create work that more effectively challenges symbolic annihilation? Do they persist in media careers at higher rates? These empirical questions require longitudinal research.

Table 4.


EMERGE FRAMEWORK
EMPOWERING MEDIA EDUCATION THROUGH RESPONSIVE GROWTH EXPERIENCES
COUNTERING SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION
OMISSION (Absence)
TRIVIALIZATION (Minimizing)
CONDEMNATION (Vilifying)
PHASE 1: EMPOWERMENT
• DIVERSE ROLE MODELS & REPRESENTATION
• EQUITABLE RESOURCE ACCESS
• BUILDING STUDENT CONFIDENCE
ADDRESSES OMISSION (MAKING MARGINALIZED VOICES VISIBLE)
PHASE 2: MEDIA LITERACY
• CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF REPRESENTATION
• UNDERSTANDING INDUSTRY STRUCTURES
• RECOGNIZING BIAS IN "STANDARDS"
ADDRESSES: OMISSION (REVEALING HIDDEN HISTORIES)
Created by Traci E. Williams, 2025
THE 5 EMERGE PHASES
PHASE 5: EXPERIENCES
• REAL-WORLD PRODUCTION OPPORTUNITIES
• INDUSTRY NAVIGATION STRATEGIES
• PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION
ADDRESSES: ALL THREE (PREPARING CHANGE AGENTS)
OUTCOMES
• CRITICALLY CONSCIOUS
• MEDIA CREATORS
• TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE
• CULTURAL COMPETENCY
• INDUSTRY TRANSFORMATION
PHASE 3: EDUCATION
• CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY
• SCAFFOLDED SKILL DEVELOPMENT
• MULTIPLE AESTHETIC TRADITIONS
ADDRESSES: TRIVIALIZATION (VALUING DIVERSE APPROACHES)
PHASE 4: RESPONSIVE GROWTH ASSESSMENT
• MULTIDIMENSIONAL EVALUATION
• CULTURAL COMPETENCY CRITERIA
• PORTFOLIO-BASED ASSESSMENT
ADDRESSES: CONDEMNATION (FAIR EVALUATION PRACTICES)

Chapter 6. CLOSING CREDITS

The Journey from Exclusion to EMERGE

This dissertation began with my high school DECA teacher's advice: "Never wake up every day and go to a job you hate." What Sam Guarino couldn't have known was that following his guidance would lead me through the exclusionary machinery of Hollywood, into the challenging terrain of academia as a Black woman professor, and ultimately toward developing a framework that could help transform the very systems that tried to diminish me. The personal journey from that teenage co-host on a FOX show to a doctoral candidate developing an Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework represents more than individual career trajectory. It illuminates how lived experience, when examined through rigorous theoretical lenses and validated through systematic research, can generate knowledge that challenges oppressive systems.

The path wasn't linear. Sleeping in my car between sixteen-hour shoot days in Los Angeles taught me about exploitation disguised as opportunity. Navigating unwanted touches on set and "industry culture" that normalized harassment taught me about condemnation. Being locked out of the Kent State studio taught me about epistemology of ignorance and strategic resistance. Watching four women students' faces light up when they finally met a female production professor taught me about the power of representation. Producing the University of Oklahoma's first feature film to a sold-out 600-person premiere taught me that transformation is possible despite institutional skepticism. Each experience became data. Each barrier revealed systemic patterns. Each moment of resistance demonstrated that change requires both individual courage and systematic strategies.

This dissertation translates those experiences, combined with extensive theoretical analysis, industry data, student voices, and faculty insights, into a comprehensive framework that media educators can implement to counter symbolic annihilation in their classrooms. EMERGE (Empowering Media Education through Responsive Growth Experiences) represents the synthesis of personal narrative, scholarly rigor, and practical application (a combination that autoethnography uniquely enables). The framework provides what existing scholarship has failed to deliver: concrete, actionable strategies for recognizing and challenging the patterns of omission, trivialization, and condemnation that perpetuate inequity in media production education.

Synthesis of Research Questions and Key

This study investigated four interconnected research questions, each revealing crucial dimensions of how symbolic annihilation operates in media production education and how it can be systematically challenged.

Research Question 1 examined how symbolic annihilation manifests in student experiences within the University of Oklahoma's Creative Media Production program. Student questionnaire data (N=27) and open-ended responses revealed patterns consistent with Tuchman's (1978) framework. Students, particularly women and students of color, reported being overlooked in class discussions, having their ideas dismissed, being assigned stereotypical roles in group projects, and facing limited access to leadership opportunities. The quantitative data showed disparities in how students from different backgrounds experienced representation in course materials, participation in learning activities, and consideration for creative leadership. These findings confirm that symbolic annihilation operates not just in media content but in the educational processes preparing future media professionals. When students experience

marginalization in classrooms, they internalize messages about whose voices matter, whose technical capacity is assumed, and whose creative visions deserve resources and support.

Research Question 2 explored how autoethnographic analysis of my experiences could inform counter-narrative pedagogical approaches. Six critical incidents revealed how symbolic annihilation operates across multiple contexts (industry workplaces, academic institutions, classroom interactions) and through intersecting identity factors (race, gender, professional status). The narrative of four women students visiting my office during the first semester exposed how systematic omission from technical discussions, trivialization of creative ambitions, and subtle condemnation of their presence in production spaces had shaped their educational experiences prior to encountering a female professor. My own navigation of being locked out of the KSU studio demonstrated how epistemology of ignorance functions to maintain exclusion while appearing procedural rather than discriminatory. These autoethnographic insights provided the experiential foundation for understanding how symbolic annihilation feels, how it operates subtly, and what forms of resistance prove effective. The autoethnographic methodology validated the epistemic privilege that comes from navigating marginalization (Collins, 1990), transforming lived experience into scholarly knowledge that illuminates systemic patterns invisible to those who have not faced similar barriers.

Research Question 3 investigated how women media educators nationally and internationally experience and resist symbolic annihilation, drawing on questionnaire data (N=12) and in-depth interviews (N=4). Faculty experiences revealed consistent patterns across diverse institutional contexts (community colleges, R1 universities, HBCUs, international institutions). Women faculty described having their industry expertise devalued in favor of traditional academic credentials, facing resistance when proposing innovative pedagogical

approaches, being assigned disproportionate service labor, and experiencing emotional exhaustion from constantly proving competence. However, the research also documented sophisticated resistance strategies: Faculty A's four-year battle to create a hands-on film production program succeeded through strategic industry partnerships. Faculty B "played by the rules while disrupting from within," using curriculum autonomy to implement inclusive practices. Faculty D balanced industry expertise with academic credentials to create space for culturally responsive pedagogy. Faculty C, despite being "beaten down" by systemic harassment, continued advocating for students while acknowledging the need for self-forgiveness when resistance felt impossible. These faculty counter-narratives demonstrated that transformation is possible but requires strategic action, institutional navigation skills, community support, and sustainable approaches that prevent burnout.

Research Question 4 addressed how symbolic annihilation and its reinforcing barriers could be systematically countered through framework development. The EMERGE framework emerged from integrating findings from Research Questions 1 through 3 with the extensive theoretical analysis presented in Chapter 2. By synthesizing symbolic annihilation theory, intersectionality, epistemology of ignorance, stereotype threat, hidden curriculum research, culturally responsive teaching, and experiential learning theory, EMERGE provides a comprehensive pedagogical system. The framework's five phases (Empowerment, Media Literacy, Education, Responsive Growth Assessment, Experiences) address omission, trivialization, and condemnation through concrete strategies validated by both theoretical foundations and empirical evidence. Integration with the HRDQ Experiential Learning Model provides implementation structure, ensuring EMERGE translates from theoretical concept to actionable practice. The framework acknowledges diverse institutional contexts and provides

guidance for implementation at multiple scales (individual faculty, departments, institutions), recognizing that transformation must be both principled and pragmatic.

Theoretical Contributions to Scholarly Knowledge

This dissertation makes several significant theoretical contributions that extend existing scholarship: *First,* it develops the first comprehensive Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework specifically designed for media production education. While Tuchman's (1978) symbolic annihilation framework has been extensively applied to analyze media content, and Ortega (2024) extended it to educational contexts, no previous scholarship has systematically translated symbolic annihilation theory into concrete pedagogical strategies for production education. EMERGE bridges the gap between critical analysis and practical application, providing educators with tools to recognize how omission, trivialization, and condemnation operate in their classrooms and implement systematic counter-strategies. This contribution moves symbolic annihilation scholarship from diagnosis to intervention.

Second, this dissertation demonstrates how autoethnography can generate pedagogical knowledge that coincides and is validated with traditional research methods like qualitative surveys and interviews. By positioning lived experience as valid data and analyzing personal narratives through rigorous theoretical frameworks, autoethnographic methodology reveals the subtle, everyday mechanisms through which symbolic annihilation operates. The critical incidents documented in Chapter 4 illuminate dynamics (microaggressions in equipment access, dismissive critique, strategic navigation of hostile spaces, emotional labor of resistance) that might remain invisible in surveys or observational studies. This methodological contribution validates autoethnography's capacity to generate actionable knowledge for pedagogical transformation, not just personal storytelling.

Third, the research integrates multiple theoretical frameworks (intersectionality, epistemology of ignorance, stereotype threat, hidden curriculum, culturally responsive teaching, experiential learning) into a coherent system rather than treating them as separate analytical lenses. Previous scholarship has examined these theories independently or in limited combinations but EMERGE demonstrates how they interconnect to explain and address systemic exclusion. For example, the framework shows how epistemology of ignorance (institutions actively choosing not to know about diverse media histories) creates omission, which intensifies stereotype threat (students lacking role models doubt their capacity), which hidden curriculum reinforces (implicit messages about who belongs), which intersectionality compounds (overlapping marginalized identities face intensified barriers). This synthetic theoretical approach provides more comprehensive understanding than single-theory analyses could achieve.

Fourth, the dissertation extends Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital framework by systematically analyzing how all three forms of capital (embodied, objectified, institutionalized) operate specifically within media production education and the education-to-industry pipeline. Chapter 2's analysis revealed how embodied capital (aesthetic dispositions), objectified capital (equipment access, industry networks), and institutionalized capital (credentials, institutional recognition) convert into one another in ways that either accelerate privilege or multiply barriers. This application demonstrates how cultural capital theory illuminates specific mechanisms through which educational systems reproduce rather than challenge industry inequities. EMERGE strategies directly address each capital form, ensuring intervention targets structural dynamics rather than treating inequity as individual deficit.

Fifth, the research contributes to feminist standpoint theory and Black feminist thought by demonstrating how marginalized positionality generates an epistemological perspective that enriches pedagogical knowledge. My standpoint as a Black woman educator who navigated Hollywood's exclusionary systems and now teaches in predominantly White academia provides analytical insights that scholars without these experiences might not develop. This dissertation validates Collins' (1990) argument that those occupying marginalized positions possess unique knowledge about how power operates, knowledge that becomes crucial for transforming systems. This contribution reinforces the importance of diversifying not just who is in classrooms (students and faculty demographics) but whose knowledge and perspectives shape pedagogical frameworks.

Practical Contributions for Media Educators and Institutions

Beyond theoretical contributions, this dissertation provides substantial practical resources for educators working to transform media production education. EMERGE offers the first comprehensive, ready-to-implement pedagogical framework for countering symbolic annihilation in production classrooms. Each of the five phases includes concrete strategies with implementation guidance, examples from practice, and attention to institutional constraints. Educators can adopt EMERGE components individually (implementing structured critique protocols, adding cultural competency to rubrics, requiring equipment rotation) or comprehensively (redesigning entire programs around the framework). This flexibility recognizes that media educators work in vastly different contexts with varying resources and support.

This body of work provides validated assessment approaches that move beyond traditional evaluation methods. The Responsive Growth Assessment phase offers alternatives to

grading systems that inadvertently perpetuate privilege by recognizing only narrow aesthetic standards and privileging students with pre-existing cultural capital. Multidimensional rubrics, portfolio assessment, and peer/community feedback integration provide assessment methods that measure authentic learning while honoring diverse forms of excellence. These tools can be immediately adopted by individual faculty without requiring departmental approval.

This research documents successful resistance strategies employed by women faculty navigating hostile or unsupportive institutional environments. Faculty A's strategic industry partnership development, Faculty B's "playing by the rules while disrupting," Faculty D's balancing of industry expertise with academic credentials, and Faculty C's acknowledgment that self-forgiveness is necessary when resistance becomes unsustainable all provide models for educators facing similar challenges. These strategies, grounded in real experiences across diverse institutions, offer more pragmatic guidance than idealized transformation narratives that ignore institutional realities.

Presented in this research are evidence-based arguments for advocating institutional support for inclusive pedagogy. The UCLA Hollywood Diversity Report data demonstrating that diverse content performs well commercially, research showing students trained through experiential learning achieve better employment outcomes, and Faculty A's documentation that her students gained industry employment while traditionally trained students struggled all provide justification for resource allocation. Educators seeking administrative support or colleagues facing resistance can draw on this evidence to demonstrate that inclusive pedagogy serves institutional missions and student success metrics, not just equity commitments.

Finally, this framework offers institutions a roadmap for transformation beyond individual course changes. The implementation guidance addresses curriculum revision, hiring

practices, resource allocation, industry partnerships, assessment policies, and support structures. Institutions committed to preparing students for diverse, global media industries can use EMERGE as a comprehensive guide for change rather than bit-by-bit interventions that fail to challenge underlying structures.

Implications for Media Production Education

This research has far-reaching implications for how media production education understands its mission, practices, and relationship to industry: Media production education must recognize itself as actively shaping industry culture, not merely responding to it. The education-to-industry pipeline operates as a cycle where industry inequities are reproduced through educational practices that train students to accept rather than challenge exclusion. When programs center only Western narrative structures, provide preferential equipment access to privileged students, evaluate work through narrow aesthetic standards, and fail to develop students' critical consciousness about representation, they prepare graduates to perpetuate symbolic annihilation professionally. EMERGE demonstrates that education can disrupt this cycle by preparing students to recognize industry barriers, develop strategies for navigating them, and position themselves as change agents.

Production education must move beyond adding diverse content to fundamentally transforming pedagogy. Simply including films by women directors or people of color in screenings, while significant, proves insufficient when classroom dynamics, assessment practices, and resource allocation are aligned with current industry culture. Transformation requires attention to the hidden curriculum, stereotype threat, epistemology of ignorance, and intersectionality, the systemic forces that shape learning beyond explicit content.

Media programs must evaluate their effectiveness not just through job placement rates but through the diversity of roles graduates assume and their capacity to create inclusive work environments. Traditional metrics measuring whether graduates gain industry employment fail to assess whether education prepared diverse students to sustain careers, advance to creative leadership, or challenge workplace inequities. More meaningful assessment would track: Do graduates from diverse backgrounds achieve similar career trajectories as privileged peers? Do they create media challenging symbolic annihilation? Do they establish inclusive production cultures? Do they persist in media careers despite industry barriers? These questions should shape program evaluation.

Faculty development must prepare educators to implement culturally responsive pedagogy. Most media production faculty were themselves trained in traditional programs emphasizing technical mastery and industry standards without critical examination of whose standards these are or whose interests they serve. My own training at a journalism school within a predominantly white institution exemplifies this gap: had I not simultaneously engaged with the Department of Pan-African Studies at the same institution, I would have received technical training devoid of culturally competent pedagogy or critical consciousness about representation. This experience illuminates how traditional media education can produce technically skilled educators who lack the frameworks necessary to challenge symbolic annihilation. Professional development supporting pedagogical transformation becomes essential, particularly as media industries increasingly recognize that diverse content succeeds commercially and critically. Programs preparing future faculty should integrate EMERGE principles, ensuring the next generation of educators enters teaching equipped to challenge rather than reproduce symbolic annihilation.

Implications for Industry Transformation

While this dissertation focuses on educational transformation, it has important implications for media industry change. The documented patterns of symbolic annihilation in both education and industry reveal that disconnected diversity initiatives prove insufficient. Simply hiring more diverse creators without transforming how resources are allocated (the budget disparities documented in Chapter 2's Figures 1-3), how creative authority is distributed (the directing opportunity gaps in Figure 4), or how professional development occurs will not produce equitable outcomes. Systemic change requires addressing: the structural mechanisms, development deal gatekeeping, budget allocation patterns, festival selection processes, and distribution networks. These all perpetuate exclusion even when diverse creators gain entry-level access.

Students trained through EMERGE represent a potential workforce that could gradually transform industry culture. Graduates who possess critical consciousness about representation, experience in inclusive collaboration, understanding of industry structures, and skills in navigating bias while maintaining authentic creative voices bring capacities that can challenge workplace norms. As these graduates assume hiring positions, develop projects, and build production companies, they have potential to implement more equitable practices. However, this transformation requires solidarity and sufficient representation. As my own Hollywood experience demonstrated, lone diverse professionals entering hostile environments face pressures to conform or risk professional survival. Education cannot single-handedly transform industry structures, but it provides essential preparation for graduates who, working together in sufficient numbers, can challenge exclusionary norms from within.

The entertainment industry's documented interest in diverse content (driven by both audience demand and evidence that it performs well commercially) creates an opening for graduates trained through inclusive pedagogy. Students who can authentically tell diverse stories, work effectively across difference, and recognize symbolic annihilation in development provide value to companies seeking commercially successful diverse content. EMERGE graduates enter the industry positioned to meet this demand while avoiding the tokenism, stereotyping, and cultural appropriation that occur when diverse stories are told by creators lacking cultural competency or critical consciousness.

Personal Reflections: Weaving Scholar, Educator, and Advocate

Completing this dissertation represents the convergence of multiple identities I inhabit: scholar, educator, industry professional, Black woman, mother, wife, survivor of systems that tried to exclude me. Each identity shaped the research. My industry experience provided insider knowledge of Hollywood's exclusionary mechanisms. My teaching revealed how symbolic annihilation operates in educational spaces. My doctoral training provided theoretical frameworks for analyzing lived experiences. My identity as a Black woman illuminated intersectional dynamics that single-axis analysis would miss. My role as mother and wife reminded me daily that transformation work must be sustainable, not just heroic.

The four women students who visited my office that first semester changed my understanding of what teaching means. They didn't need a professor who would make coursework easier or provide emotional support, though both have value. They needed someone who would equip them with skills, critical consciousness, and strategies for navigating an industry that would question their technical capacity, trivialize their creative visions, and condemn their presence in decision-making roles. That moment crystallized my mission: not just

to teach production techniques but to prepare students to transform the systems that tried to exclude me and will try to exclude them.

The OU feature film production validated that transformation is possible within institutional constraints. When colleagues dismissed the project as "too ambitious" and suggested focusing on smaller projects, I recognized the same gatekeeping I'd faced in Hollywood disguised as academic cautiousness. The sold-out 600-person premiere demonstrated what students can accomplish when given resources, trust, and pedagogical support. More importantly, it showed students that their diverse perspectives and collaborative approaches could produce professional-quality work that audiences valued. That validation matters profoundly for students who've been told their stories are "too big" or their technical capacity is at a non-professional level.

The emotional labor of this work cannot be understated. Faculty C's description of being "beaten down" by systemic harassment resonated deeply. There have been moments of crying in the shower, wondering whether individual resistance can challenge institutional disinterest, questioning whether the cost to my health and family relationships justifies the potential impact. Faculty D's advice to "forgive yourself for the times that you may not have stood as boldly" became essential wisdom. Transformation is marathon, not sprint. Sustainability matters more than martyrdom. Individual faculty cannot dismantle decades of structural inequity alone. Community, strategic action, and self-compassion enable continued work.

Yet, hope persists. Every student who tells me they finally feel they belong in production spaces. Students who walk out of my class saying thank you. The students of color who look at me and give me the cultural nod (if you know, you know). Every graduate who reports challenging workplace inequities, every institution that questions traditional practices

demonstrates that change is happening. Slow, uneven, requiring constant vigilance and renewed commitment, yes. But happening, nonetheless.

Call to Action: What Now?

This dissertation concludes with a call to action for multiple constituencies. For individual media production faculty, begin implementing EMERGE components in your courses tomorrow. Revise syllabi to include diverse practitioners. Implement equipment rotation. Add cultural competency to rubrics. Use structured critique protocols. Explicitly teach the unwritten rules of industry navigation. You don't need permission or institutional support to start creating more equitable learning environments. Document what you do and the outcomes. Build evidence. Connect with other educators doing similar work. Prioritize sustainability over perfection.

For departments and programs, evaluate curricula, pedagogy, and assessment through symbolic annihilation lenses. Where is omission occurring? What gets trivialized? Who faces condemnation? Use EMERGE as a diagnostic tool and transformation roadmap. Invest in faculty development supporting culturally responsive pedagogy. Hire diverse faculty and create conditions where they can thrive rather than merely survive. Allocate resources equitably. Build industry partnerships with diverse professionals. Make inclusive pedagogy a valued component of tenure and promotion.

For institutions and administrators, recognize that preparing students for diverse, global media industries requires more than demographic diversity in enrollment. It requires pedagogical transformation, resource investment, and institutional commitment. Support faculty implementing inclusive practices through course releases, professional development funding, equipment budgets, and recognition in evaluation processes. Challenge the metrics that measure

program success only through job placement rather than the diversity of roles students assume and their capacity to create inclusive work environments.

For researchers and scholars, keep pushing this work forward. Test EMERGE in your own contexts and tell us what works and what doesn't. Follow graduates over time to see if this training makes a difference in their careers and the content they create. Expand the framework to address forms of marginalization I didn't fully explore here: disability, class, sexuality, age. See if EMERGE translates to journalism programs, game design education, advertising courses. Take it international and examine how it needs to adapt for different cultural contexts. We need assessment tools that can measure whether students are developing cultural competency and critical consciousness, not just technical skills. Partner with industry folks who'll help us track whether graduates trained this way build different workplace cultures than their traditionally trained peers. That evidence matters. It's what will convince skeptical colleagues, resistant administrators, and nervous committee members that this work is worth the investment.

For students, demand education that prepares you not just to enter media industries as they are but to transform them into what they should be. Seek faculty who challenge symbolic annihilation rather than reproduce it. Build communities with peers committed to inclusive collaboration. Develop critical consciousness alongside technical skills. Remember that your diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and cultural knowledge are assets, not deficits. The industry needs the stories you can tell, if you're prepared to tell them authentically despite pressure to conform.

For the media industry, recognize that the documented disparities in representation, budget allocation, and creative authority harm not just equity but also creative excellence and commercial success. Diverse content performs well when given adequate resources and support.

Partner with educational institutions implementing inclusive pedagogy to build talent pipelines. Examine your own gatekeeping mechanisms: development deals, budget allocation patterns, hiring practices, promotion pathways. Transformation requires more than entry-level diversity; it requires equitable resource distribution and advancement opportunities.

Final Thoughts: From Symbolic Annihilation to Emergence

The title of this dissertation, EMERGE, reflects both destination and journey. It names the framework (Empowering Media Education through Responsive Growth Experiences) while also describing what the framework enables: the emergence of students as confident, critically conscious, technically skilled media professionals prepared to tell authentic stories that reflect our complex world.

But emergence is also metaphor for transformation itself. Systems of exclusion seem immovable until they're not. Industries seem resistant to change until they aren't. Education seems trapped in traditional practices until it transforms. Emergence happens gradually, through accumulated small actions that build until transformation becomes inevitable. Each faculty member who implements EMERGE strategies, each student who develops critical consciousness, each institution that questions traditional practices contributes to emergence.

My high school teacher Sam Guarino told me never to wake up hating my job. I found work I love, work that matters: preparing students to tell stories that challenge the symbolic annihilation I experienced and that they will encounter. This dissertation represents one contribution to the ongoing, collective work of transforming media education and, through it, the media industries that shape how we see ourselves, each other, and our world.

The stories we tell matter. Who gets to tell them matters more. Change requires courage, strategy, community, and persistence. This dissertation offers all four: the courage to name

symbolic annihilation operating in our own classrooms, strategic frameworks for challenging it, a community of educators committed to transformation, and evidence that persistence yields results. The work continues. The emergence is underway. Media educators hold essential tools for shaping the future of storytelling. How we use those tools will determine whose stories emerge. Fade to black. Roll credits.

List of Abbreviations

AEJMC — Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

BEA — Broadcasters Education Association

BIPOC — Black Indigenous People of Color

CRT — Culturally Responsive Teaching

DECA — Distributive Education Clubs of America

EMERGE — Empowering Media Education through Responsive Growth Experiences

MENA — Middle East & North African

MM — Movie Magic

POC — People of color

JMC — Journalism & Mass Communication

CMP — Creative Media Production

GCS — Greenlight Creative Studios

GCP — Greenlight Creative Productions

FDX — Final Draft File

PWI — Predominately White Institution(s)

OU — The University of Oklahoma

KSU — Kent State University

KSUIF — Kent State University Independent Films

EL — Experiential Learning

UCLA — University of California Los Angeles

USC — University of Southern California

Appendix A
Faculty questionnaire

Figure 1.

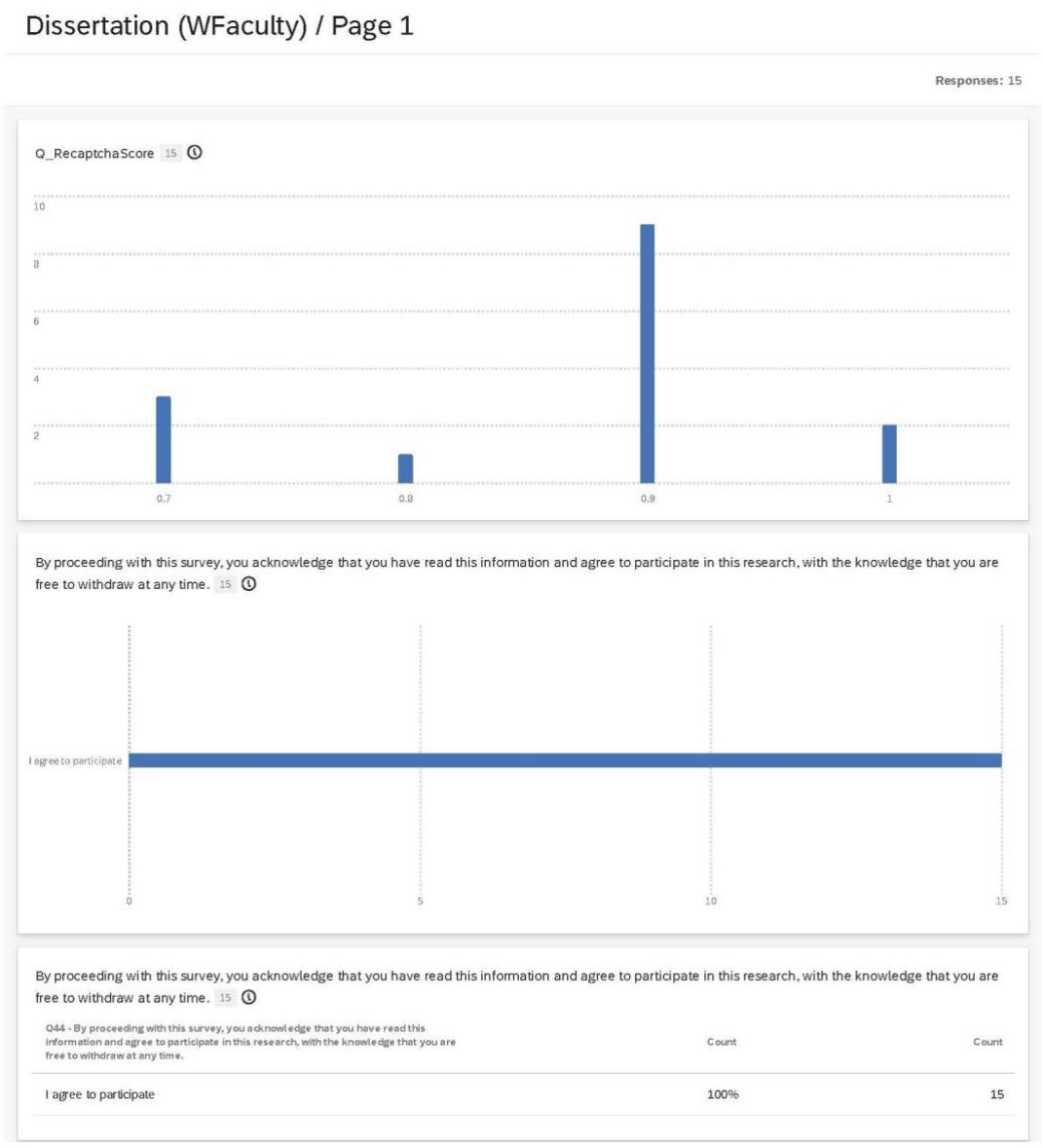
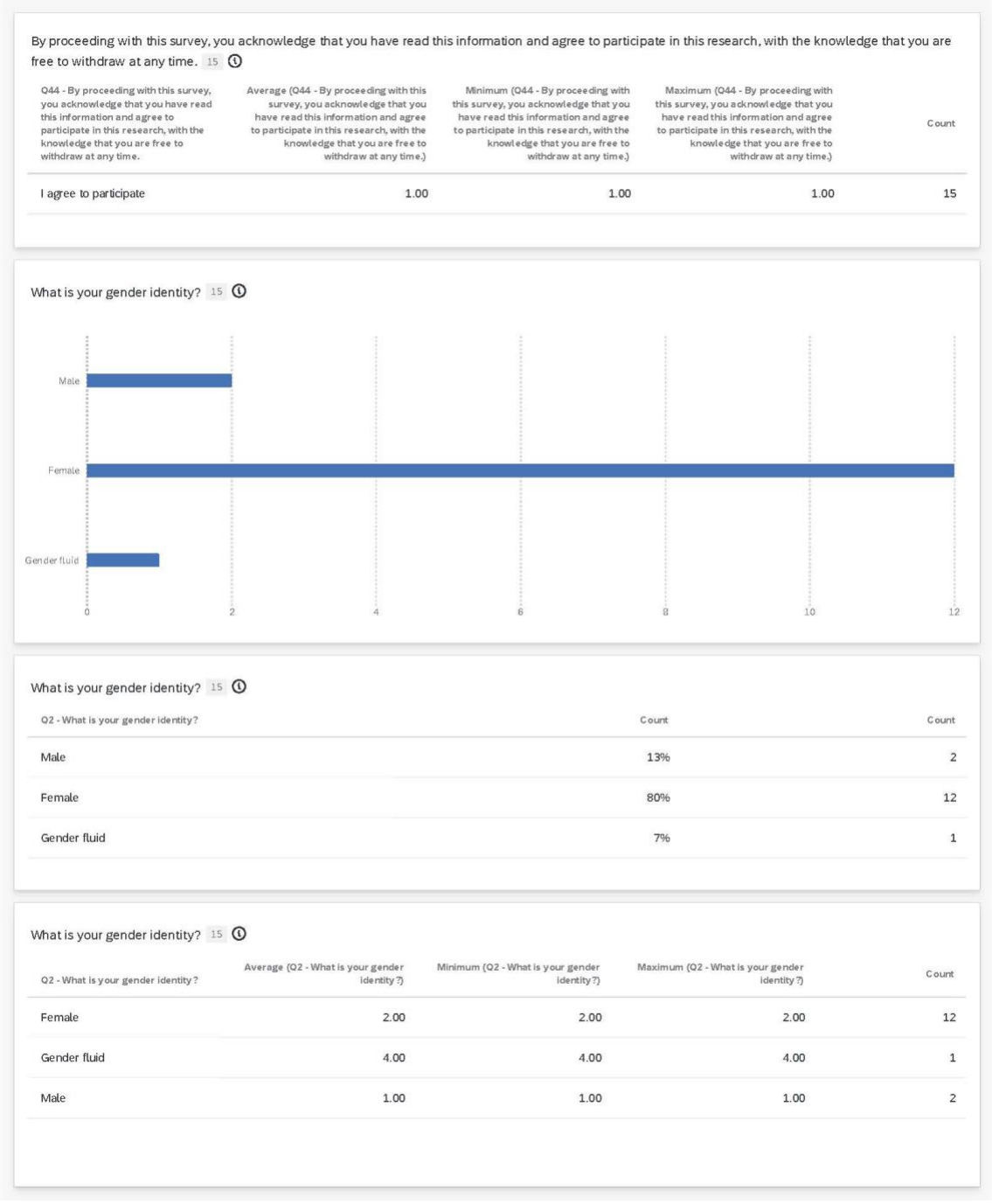


Figure 1b.



By proceeding with this survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw at any time. 15

Q44 - By proceeding with this survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw at any time.	Average (Q44 - By proceeding with this survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw at any time.)	Minimum (Q44 - By proceeding with this survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw at any time.)	Maximum (Q44 - By proceeding with this survey, you acknowledge that you have read this information and agree to participate in this research, with the knowledge that you are free to withdraw at any time.)	Count
I agree to participate	1.00	1.00	1.00	15

What is your gender identity? 15

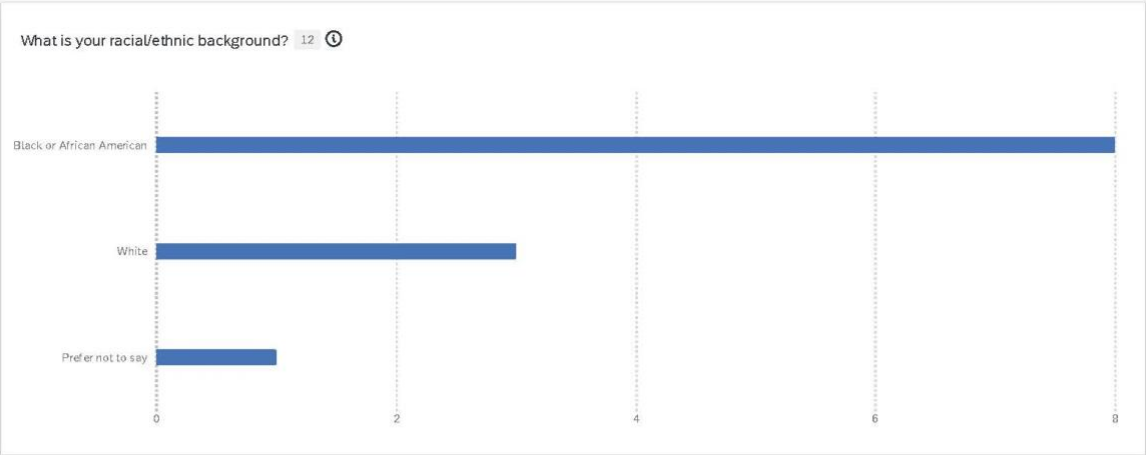
What is your gender identity? 15

Q2 - What is your gender identity?	Count	Count
Male	13%	2
Female	80%	12
Gender fluid	7%	1

What is your gender identity? 15

Q2 - What is your gender identity?	Average (Q2 - What is your gender identity?)	Minimum (Q2 - What is your gender identity?)	Maximum (Q2 - What is your gender identity?)	Count
Female	2.00	2.00	2.00	12
Gender fluid	4.00	4.00	4.00	1
Male	1.00	1.00	1.00	2

Figure 1c.



What is your racial/ethnic background? 12

Q3 - What is your racial/ethnic background?	Count	Count
Black or African American	67%	8
White	25%	3
Prefer not to say	8%	1

What is your racial/ethnic background? 12

Q3 - What is your racial/ethnic background?	Average (Q3 - What is your racial/ethnic background?)	Minimum (Q3 - What is your racial/ethnic background?)	Maximum (Q3 - What is your racial/ethnic background?)	Count
Black or African American	3.00	3.00	3.00	8
Prefer not to say	9.00	9.00	9.00	1
White	7.00	7.00	7.00	3

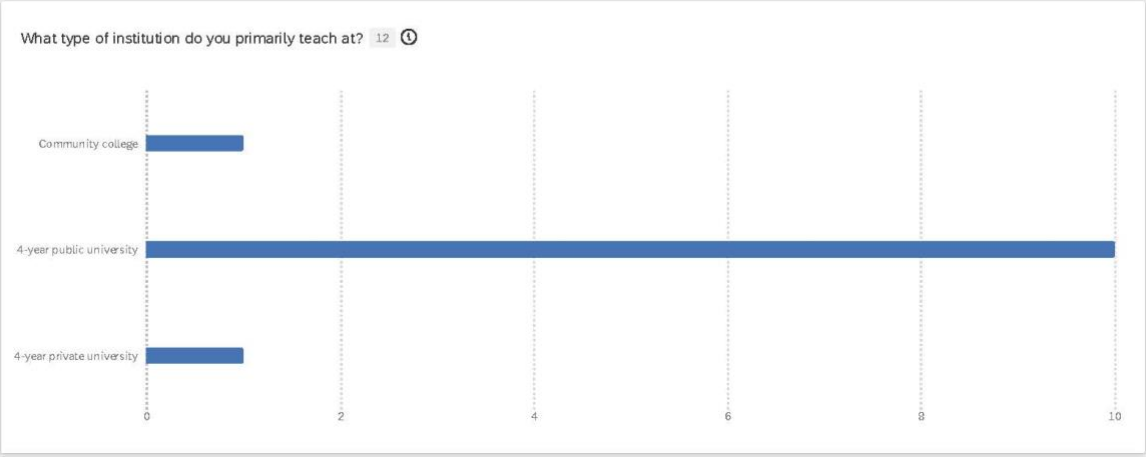
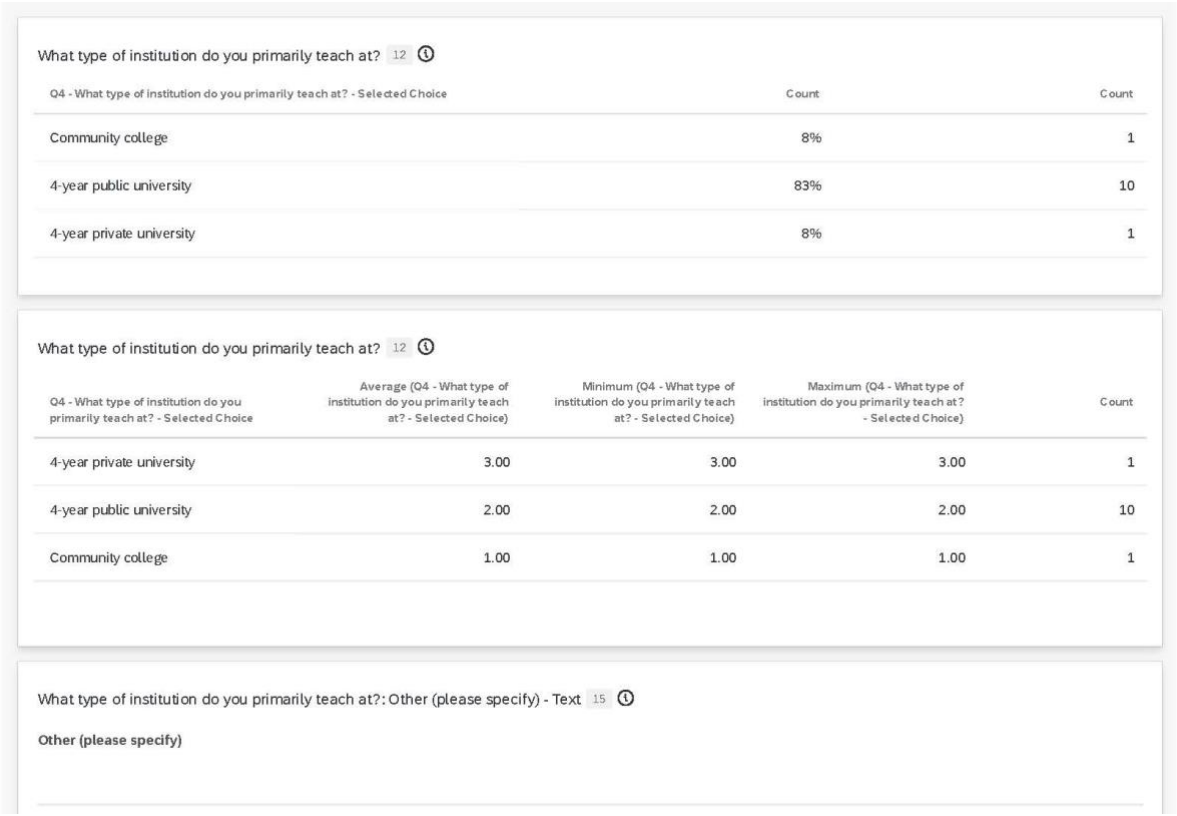


Figure 1d.



What type of institution do you primarily teach at? 12

Q4 - What type of institution do you primarily teach at? - Selected Choice	Count	Count
Community college	8%	1
4-year public university	83%	10
4-year private university	8%	1

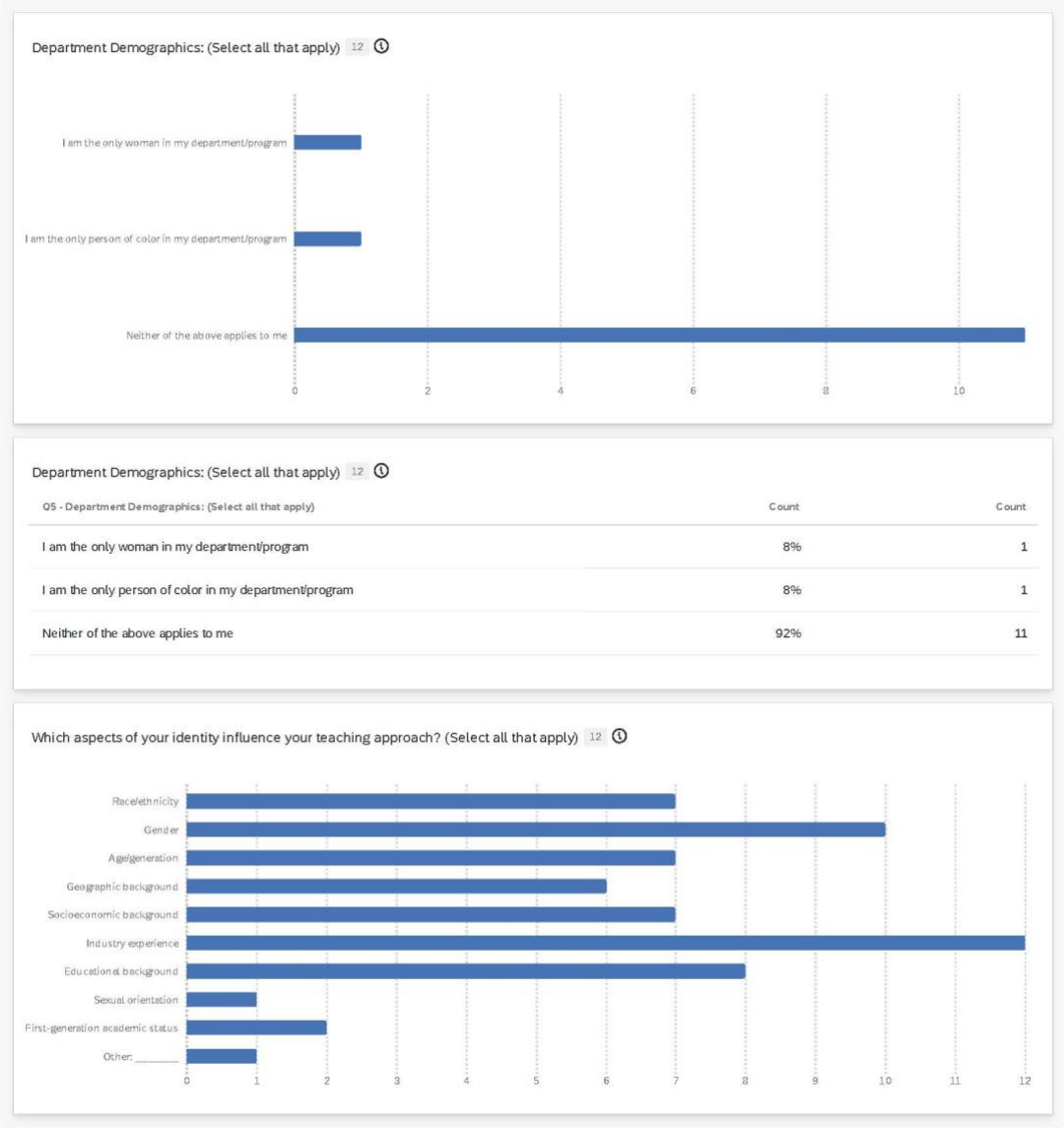
What type of institution do you primarily teach at? 12

Q4 - What type of institution do you primarily teach at? - Selected Choice	Average (Q4 - What type of institution do you primarily teach at? - Selected Choice)	Minimum (Q4 - What type of institution do you primarily teach at? - Selected Choice)	Maximum (Q4 - What type of institution do you primarily teach at? - Selected Choice)	Count
4-year private university	3.00	3.00	3.00	1
4-year public university	2.00	2.00	2.00	10
Community college	1.00	1.00	1.00	1

What type of institution do you primarily teach at?: Other (please specify) - Text 15

Other (please specify)

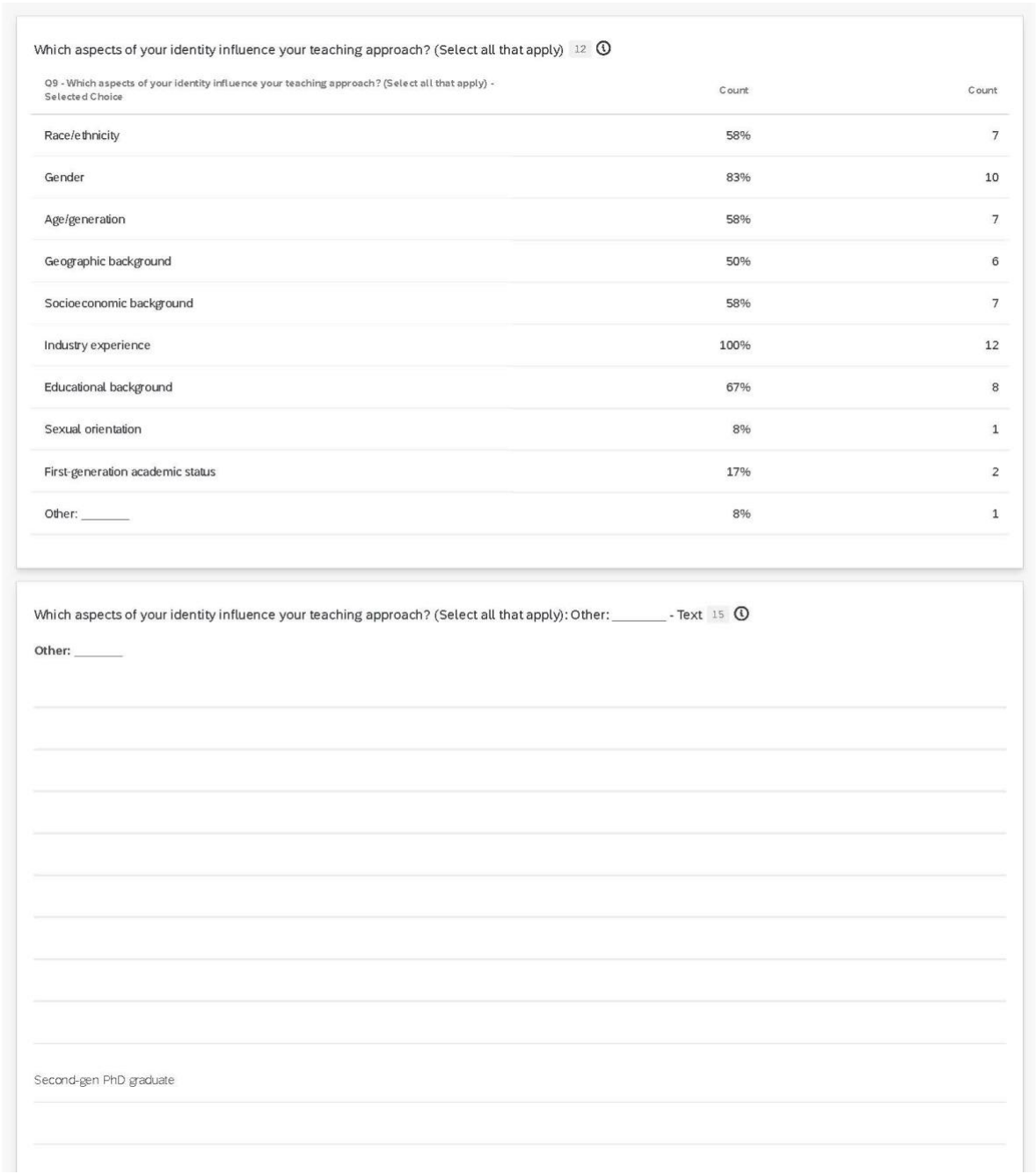
Figure 1e.



Department Demographics: (Select all that apply) 12

Q5 - Department Demographics: (Select all that apply)	Count	Count
I am the only woman in my department/program	8%	1
I am the only person of color in my department/program	8%	1
Neither of the above applies to me	92%	11

Figure 1f.



Which aspects of your identity influence your teaching approach? (Select all that apply) 12

Q9 - Which aspects of your identity influence your teaching approach? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice	Count	Count
Race/ethnicity	58%	7
Gender	83%	10
Age/generation	58%	7
Geographic background	50%	6
Socioeconomic background	58%	7
Industry experience	100%	12
Educational background	67%	8
Sexual orientation	8%	1
First-generation academic status	17%	2
Other: _____	8%	1

Which aspects of your identity influence your teaching approach? (Select all that apply): Other: _____ - Text 15

Other: _____

Second-gen PhD graduate

Figure 1g.



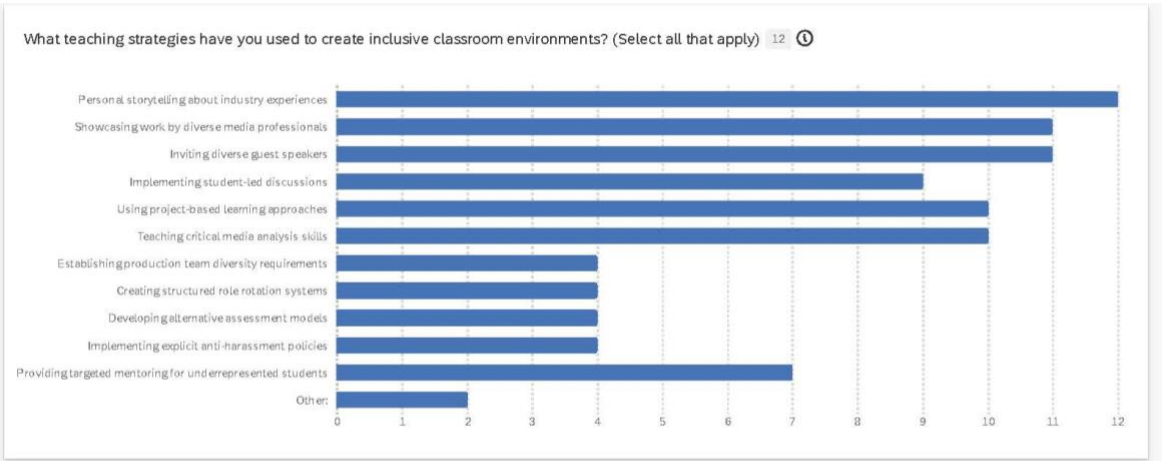
Teaching Approach: (Select all that apply to your experience) 12

Q7 - Teaching Approach: (Select all that apply to your experience) - Selected Choice	Count	Count
I have been able to incorporate my lived experiences into my teaching	100%	12
I regularly adjust my teaching approach to fit institutional expectations	58%	7
I have freedom to design curriculum that reflects diverse industry realities	75%	9
I have significantly modified the curriculum I inherited to be more inclusive	33%	4
I face resistance when attempting to diversify course content	25%	3
I supplement official materials with more diverse example	58%	7
I have created new courses specifically to address representation gaps	50%	6

Teaching Approach: (Select all that apply to your experience): Other: - Text 15

Other:

Figure 1h.



What teaching strategies have you used to create inclusive classroom environments? (Select all that apply) 12

Q8 - What teaching strategies have you used to create inclusive classroom environments? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice	Count	Count
Personal storytelling about industry experiences	100%	12
Showcasing work by diverse media professionals	92%	11
Inviting diverse guest speakers	92%	11
Implementing student-led discussions	75%	9
Using project-based learning approaches	83%	10
Teaching critical media analysis skills	83%	10
Establishing production team diversity requirements	33%	4
Creating structured role rotation systems	33%	4
Developing alternative assessment models	33%	4
Implementing explicit anti-harassment policies	33%	4
Providing targeted mentoring for underrepresented students	58%	7
Other:	17%	2

Figure 1i.

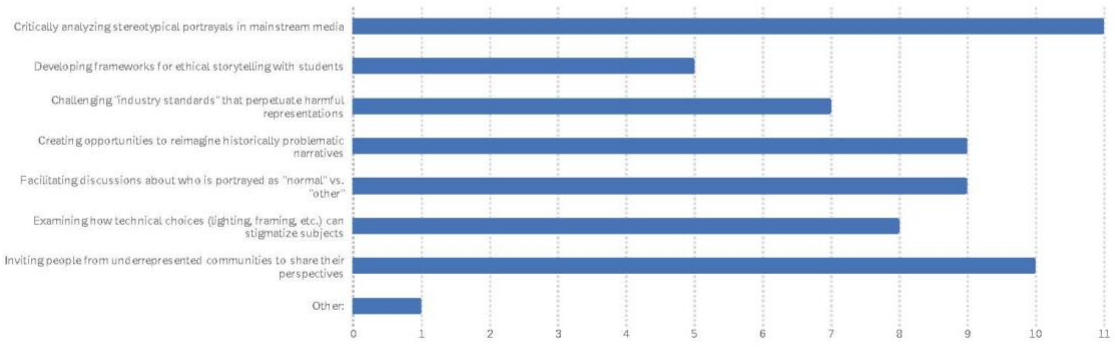
What teaching strategies have you used to create inclusive classroom environments? (Select all that apply): Other: - Text 15

Other:

feminist pedagogy

I strive to create a ln environment where students feel safe, seen, and heard.

How have you addressed potentially harmful representations in your teaching? (Select all that apply) 12



How have you addressed potentially harmful representations in your teaching? (Select all that apply) 12

Q10 - How have you addressed potentially harmful representations in your teaching? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice	Count	Count
Critically analyzing stereotypical portrayals in mainstream media	92%	11

Figure 1j.

Q10 - How have you addressed potentially harmful representations in your teaching? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice	Count	Count
Developing frameworks for ethical storytelling with students	42%	5
Challenging "industry standards" that perpetuate harmful representations	58%	7
Creating opportunities to reimagine historically problematic narratives	75%	9
Facilitating discussions about who is portrayed as "normal" vs. "other"	75%	9
Examining how technical choices (lighting, framing, etc.) can stigmatize subjects	67%	8
Inviting people from underrepresented communities to share their perspectives	83%	10
Other:	8%	1

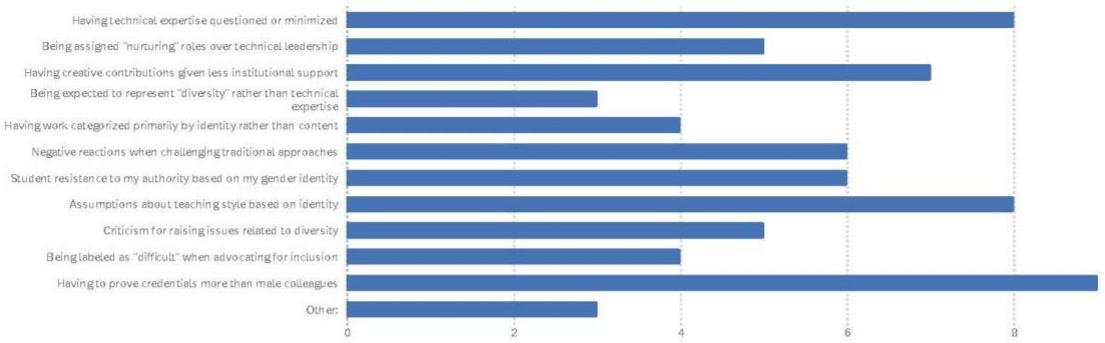
How have you addressed potentially harmful representations in your teaching? (Select all that apply): Other: - Text 15

Other:

Discussing ethical storytelling with students

Figure 1k.

Professional Experiences: Which of the following have you experienced? (Select all that apply) 12



Professional Experiences: Which of the following have you experienced? (Select all that apply) 12

Q12 - Professional Experiences: Which of the following have you experienced? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice	Count	Count
Having technical expertise questioned or minimized	67%	8
Being assigned "nurturing" roles over technical leadership	42%	5
Having creative contributions given less institutional support	58%	7
Being expected to represent "diversity" rather than technical expertise	25%	3
Having work categorized primarily by identity rather than content	33%	4
Negative reactions when challenging traditional approaches	50%	6
Student resistance to my authority based on my gender identity	50%	6
Assumptions about teaching style based on identity	67%	8
Criticism for raising issues related to diversity	42%	5
Being labeled as "difficult" when advocating for inclusion	33%	4
Having to prove credentials more than male colleagues	75%	9
Other:	25%	3

Professional Experiences: Which of the following have you experienced? (Select all that apply): Other: - Text 15

Other:

Not Applicable

Figure 1l.

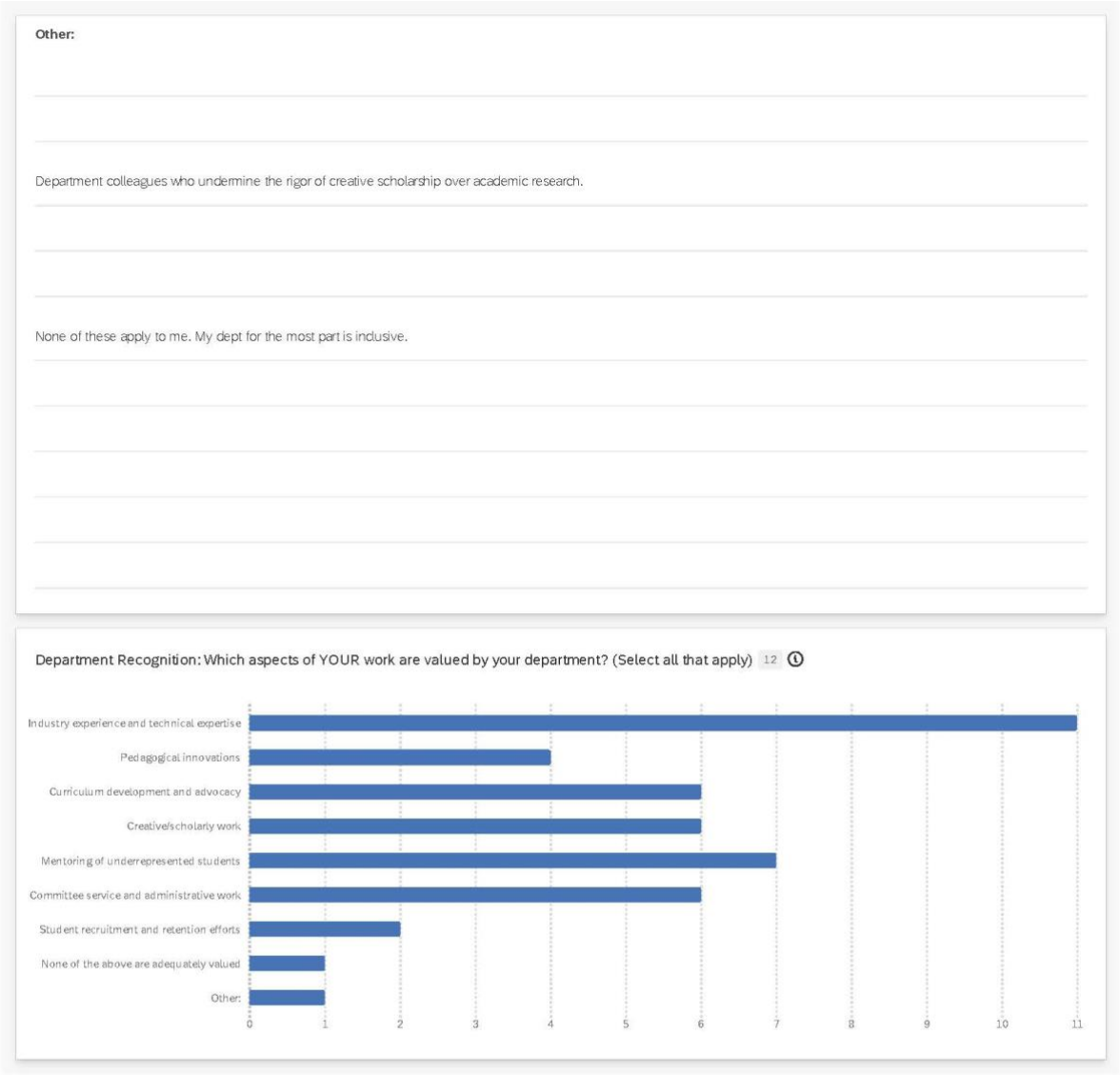
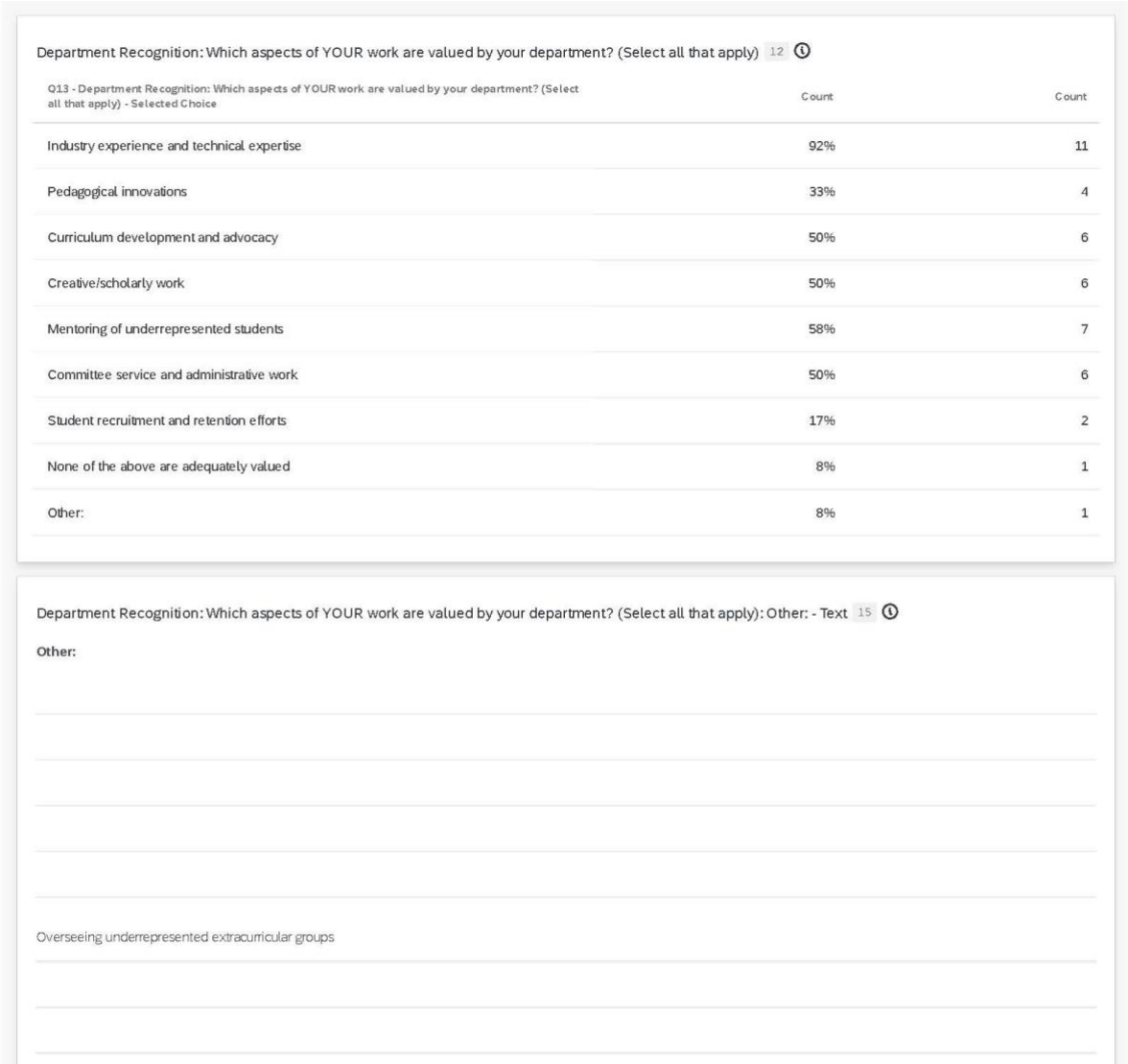

Other:
Department colleagues who undermine the rigor of creative scholarship over academic research.
None of these apply to me. My dept for the most part is inclusive.
Department Recognition: Which aspects of YOUR work are valued by your department? (Select all that apply) 12
Industry experience and technical expertise
Pedagogical innovations
Curriculum development and advocacy
Creative/scholarly work
Mentoring of underrepresented students
Committee service and administrative work
Student recruitment and retention efforts
None of the above are adequately valued
Other:
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11

Figure 1m.



Department Recognition: Which aspects of YOUR work are valued by your department? (Select all that apply) 12

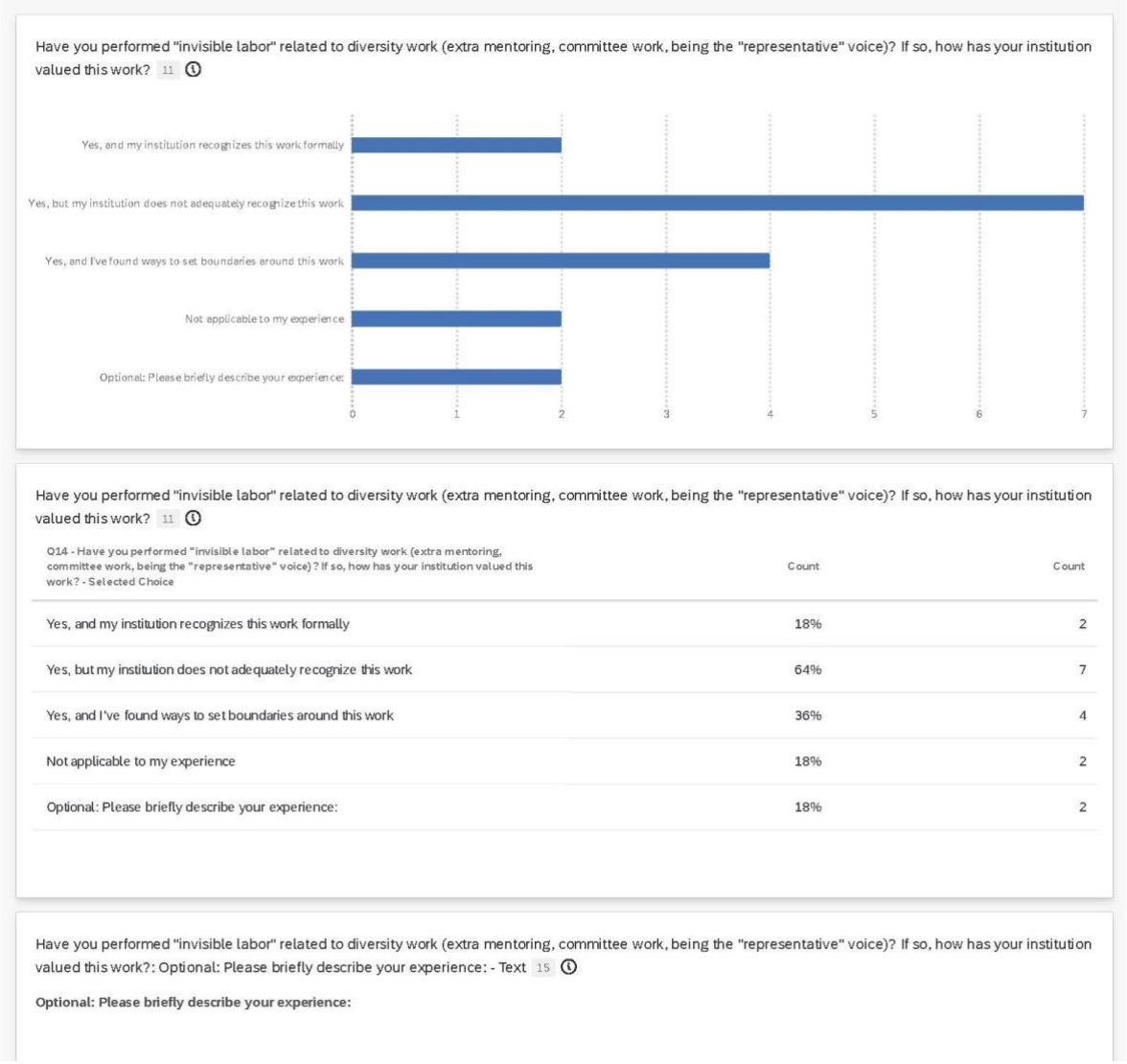
Q13 - Department Recognition: Which aspects of YOUR work are valued by your department? (Select all that apply) - Selected Choice	Count	Count
Industry experience and technical expertise	92%	11
Pedagogical innovations	33%	4
Curriculum development and advocacy	50%	6
Creative/scholarly work	50%	6
Mentoring of underrepresented students	58%	7
Committee service and administrative work	50%	6
Student recruitment and retention efforts	17%	2
None of the above are adequately valued	8%	1
Other:	8%	1

Department Recognition: Which aspects of YOUR work are valued by your department? (Select all that apply): Other: - Text 15

Other:

Overseeing underrepresented extracurricular groups

Figure 1n.



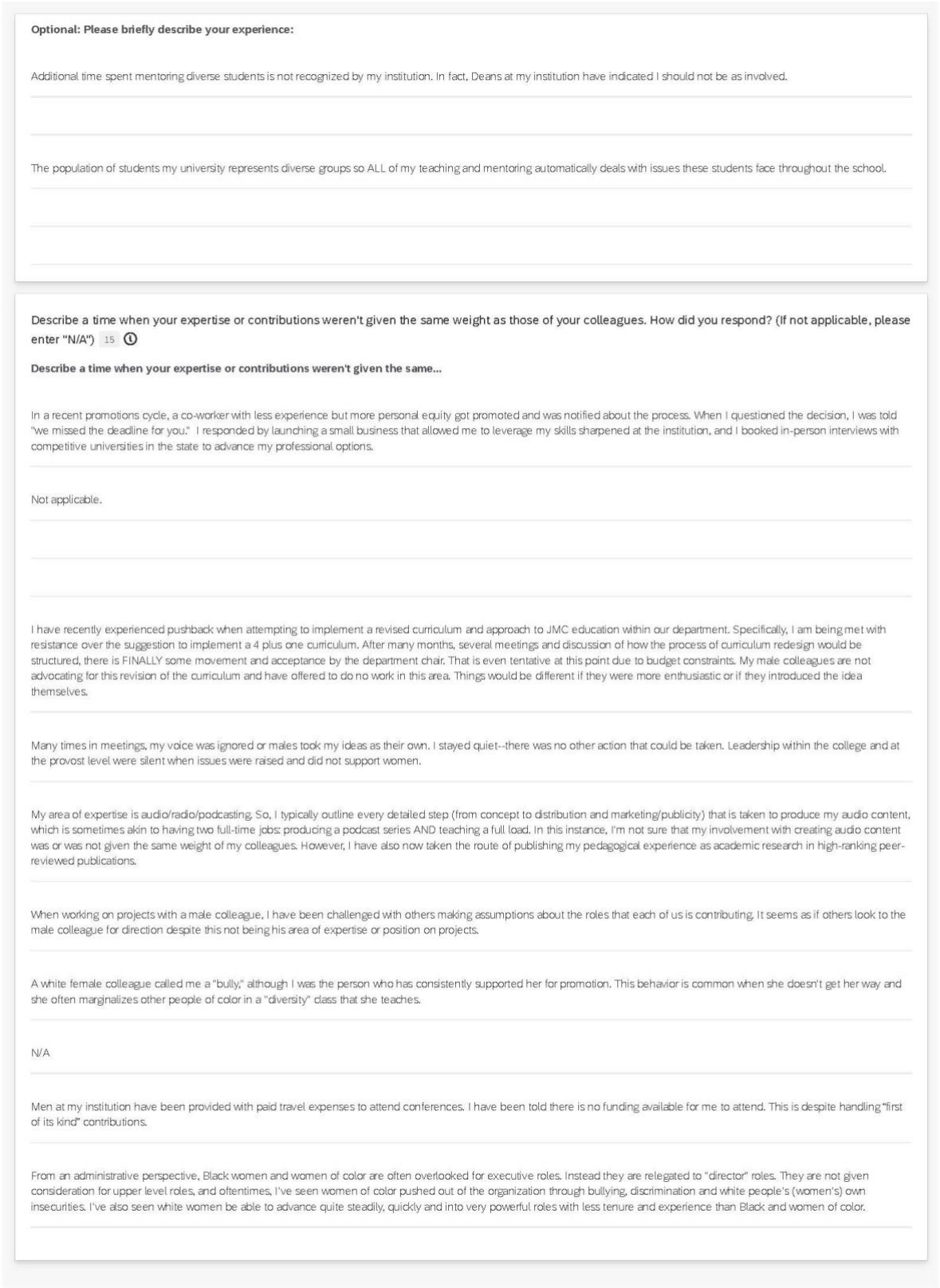
Have you performed "invisible labor" related to diversity work (extra mentoring, committee work, being the "representative" voice)? If so, how has your institution valued this work? 11

Q14 - Have you performed "invisible labor" related to diversity work (extra mentoring, committee work, being the "representative" voice)? If so, how has your institution valued this work? - Selected Choice	Count	Count
Yes, and my institution recognizes this work formally	18%	2
Yes, but my institution does not adequately recognize this work	64%	7
Yes, and I've found ways to set boundaries around this work	36%	4
Not applicable to my experience	18%	2
Optional: Please briefly describe your experience:	18%	2

Have you performed "invisible labor" related to diversity work (extra mentoring, committee work, being the "representative" voice)? If so, how has your institution valued this work?: Optional: Please briefly describe your experience: - Text 15

Optional: Please briefly describe your experience:

Figure 1o.



Optional: Please briefly describe your experience:

Additional time spent mentoring diverse students is not recognized by my institution. In fact, Deans at my institution have indicated I should not be as involved.

The population of students my university represents diverse groups so ALL of my teaching and mentoring automatically deals with issues these students face throughout the school.

Describe a time when your expertise or contributions weren't given the same weight as those of your colleagues. How did you respond? (If not applicable, please enter "N/A") 15

Describe a time when your expertise or contributions weren't given the same...

In a recent promotions cycle, a co-worker with less experience but more personal equity got promoted and was notified about the process. When I questioned the decision, I was told "we missed the deadline for you." I responded by launching a small business that allowed me to leverage my skills sharpened at the institution, and I booked in-person interviews with competitive universities in the state to advance my professional options.

Not applicable.

I have recently experienced pushback when attempting to implement a revised curriculum and approach to JMC education within our department. Specifically, I am being met with resistance over the suggestion to implement a 4 plus one curriculum. After many months, several meetings and discussion of how the process of curriculum redesign would be structured, there is FINALLY some movement and acceptance by the department chair. That is even tentative at this point due to budget constraints. My male colleagues are not advocating for this revision of the curriculum and have offered to do no work in this area. Things would be different if they were more enthusiastic or if they introduced the idea themselves.

Many times in meetings, my voice was ignored or males took my ideas as their own. I stayed quiet--there was no other action that could be taken. Leadership within the college and at the provost level were silent when issues were raised and did not support women.

My area of expertise is audio/radio/podcasting. So, I typically outline every detailed step (from concept to distribution and marketing/publicity) that is taken to produce my audio content, which is sometimes akin to having two full-time jobs: producing a podcast series AND teaching a full load. In this instance, I'm not sure that my involvement with creating audio content was or was not given the same weight of my colleagues. However, I have also now taken the route of publishing my pedagogical experience as academic research in high-ranking peer-reviewed publications.

When working on projects with a male colleague, I have been challenged with others making assumptions about the roles that each of us is contributing. It seems as if others look to the male colleague for direction despite this not being his area of expertise or position on projects.

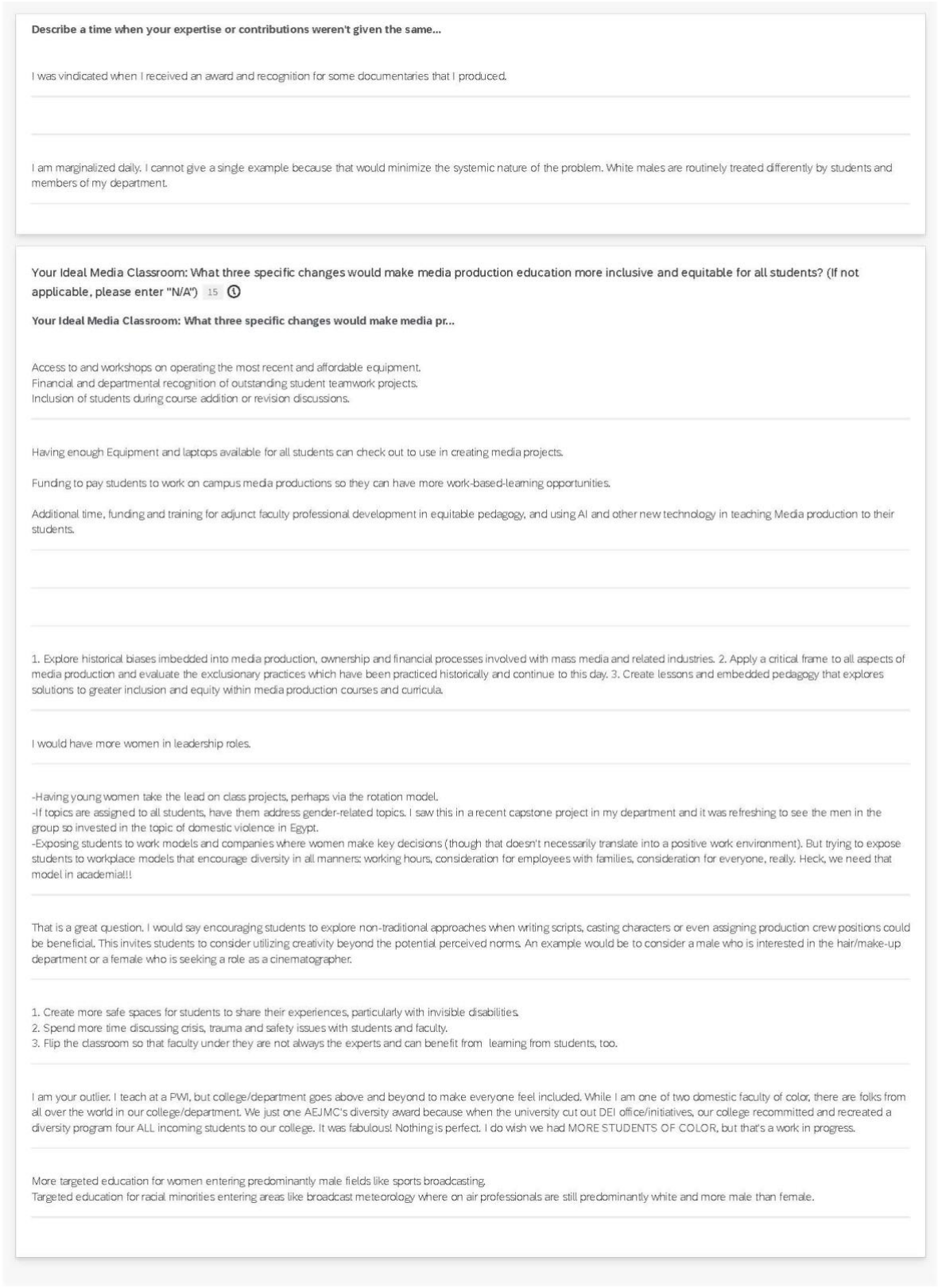
A white female colleague called me a "bully," although I was the person who has consistently supported her for promotion. This behavior is common when she doesn't get her way and she often marginalizes other people of color in a "diversity" class that she teaches.

N/A

Men at my institution have been provided with paid travel expenses to attend conferences. I have been told there is no funding available for me to attend. This is despite handling "first of its kind" contributions.

From an administrative perspective, Black women and women of color are often overlooked for executive roles. Instead they are relegated to "director" roles. They are not given consideration for upper level roles, and oftentimes, I've seen women of color pushed out of the organization through bullying, discrimination and white people's (women's) own insecurities. I've also seen white women be able to advance quite steadily, quickly and into very powerful roles with less tenure and experience than Black and women of color.

Figure 1p.



Describe a time when your expertise or contributions weren't given the same...

I was vindicated when I received an award and recognition for some documentaries that I produced.

I am marginalized daily. I cannot give a single example because that would minimize the systemic nature of the problem. White males are routinely treated differently by students and members of my department.

Your Ideal Media Classroom: What three specific changes would make media production education more inclusive and equitable for all students? (If not applicable, please enter "N/A") 15

Your Ideal Media Classroom: What three specific changes would make media pr...

Access to and workshops on operating the most recent and affordable equipment.
Financial and departmental recognition of outstanding student teamwork projects.
Inclusion of students during course addition or revision discussions.

Having enough Equipment and laptops available for all students can check out to use in creating media projects.

Funding to pay students to work on campus media productions so they can have more work-based-learning opportunities.

Additional time, funding and training for adjunct faculty professional development in equitable pedagogy, and using AI and other new technology in teaching Media production to their students.

1. Explore historical biases imbedded into media production, ownership and financial processes involved with mass media and related industries. 2. Apply a critical frame to all aspects of media production and evaluate the exclusionary practices which have been practiced historically and continue to this day. 3. Create lessons and embedded pedagogy that explores solutions to greater inclusion and equity within media production courses and curricula.

I would have more women in leadership roles.

-Having young women take the lead on class projects, perhaps via the rotation model.
-If topics are assigned to all students, have them address gender-related topics. I saw this in a recent capstone project in my department and it was refreshing to see the men in the group so invested in the topic of domestic violence in Egypt.
-Exposing students to work models and companies where women make key decisions (though that doesn't necessarily translate into a positive work environment). But trying to expose students to workplace models that encourage diversity in all manners: working hours, consideration for employees with families, consideration for everyone, really. Heck, we need that model in academia!!!

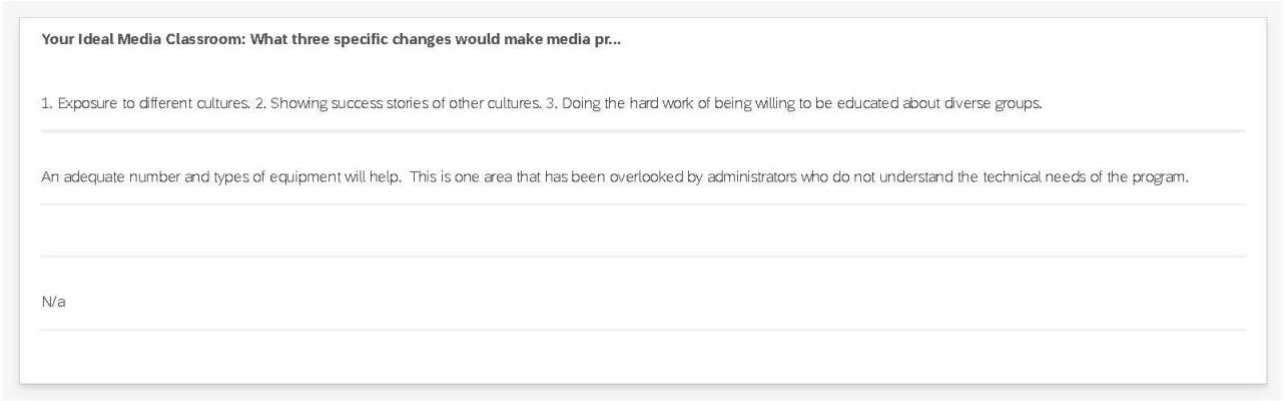
That is a great question. I would say encouraging students to explore non-traditional approaches when writing scripts, casting characters or even assigning production crew positions could be beneficial. This invites students to consider utilizing creativity beyond the potential perceived norms. An example would be to consider a male who is interested in the hair/make-up department or a female who is seeking a role as a cinematographer.

1. Create more safe spaces for students to share their experiences, particularly with invisible disabilities.
2. Spend more time discussing crisis, trauma and safety issues with students and faculty.
3. Flip the classroom so that faculty under they are not always the experts and can benefit from learning from students, too.

I am your outlier. I teach at a PWI, but college/department goes above and beyond to make everyone feel included. While I am one of two domestic faculty of color, there are folks from all over the world in our college/department. We just one AEJMC's diversity award because when the university cut out DEI office/initiatives, our college recommitted and recreated a diversity program four ALL incoming students to our college. It was fabulous! Nothing is perfect. I do wish we had MORE STUDENTS OF COLOR, but that's a work in progress.

More targeted education for women entering predominantly male fields like sports broadcasting.
Targeted education for racial minorities entering areas like broadcast meteorology where on air professionals are still predominantly white and more male than female.

Figure 1q.


Your Ideal Media Classroom: What three specific changes would make media pr...
1. Exposure to different cultures. 2. Showing success stories of other cultures. 3. Doing the hard work of being willing to be educated about diverse groups.
An adequate number and types of equipment will help. This is one area that has been overlooked by administrators who do not understand the technical needs of the program.
N/a

APPENDIX B
Student Questionnaire

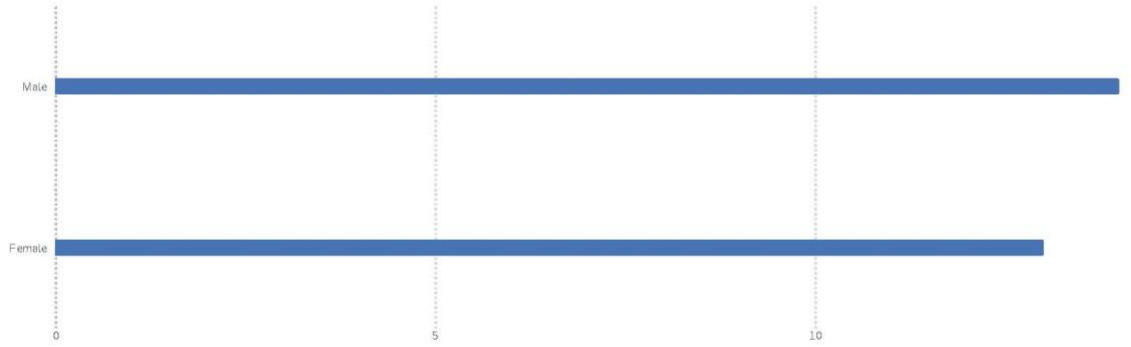
Figure 1.

Dissertation (Students) / Page 1

Filters

Responses: 27

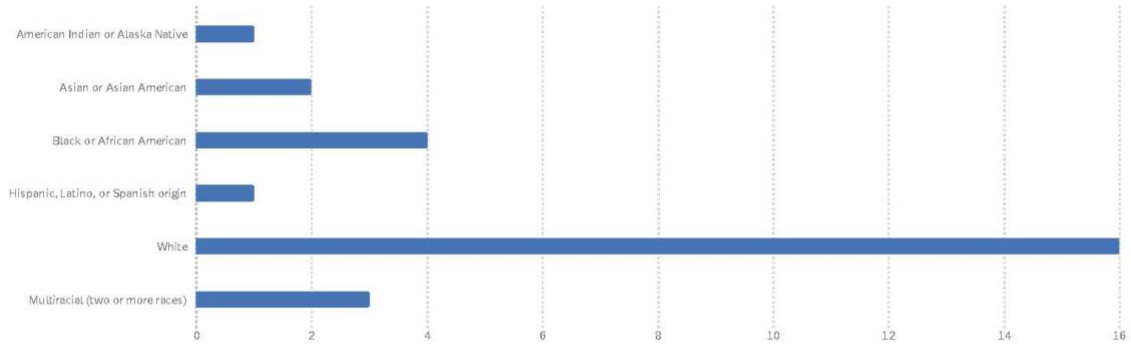
What is your gender identity? 27



What is your gender identity? 27

Q3 - What is your gender identity?	Count	Count
Male	52%	14
Female	48%	13

What is your racial/ethnic background? 27

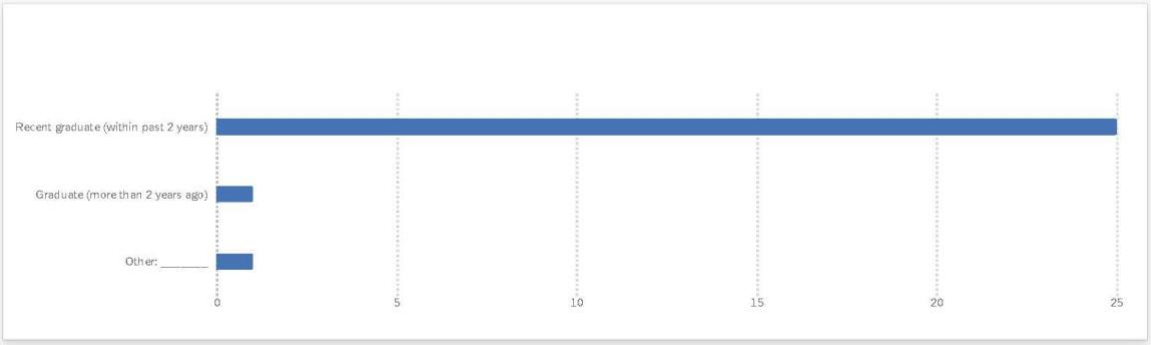


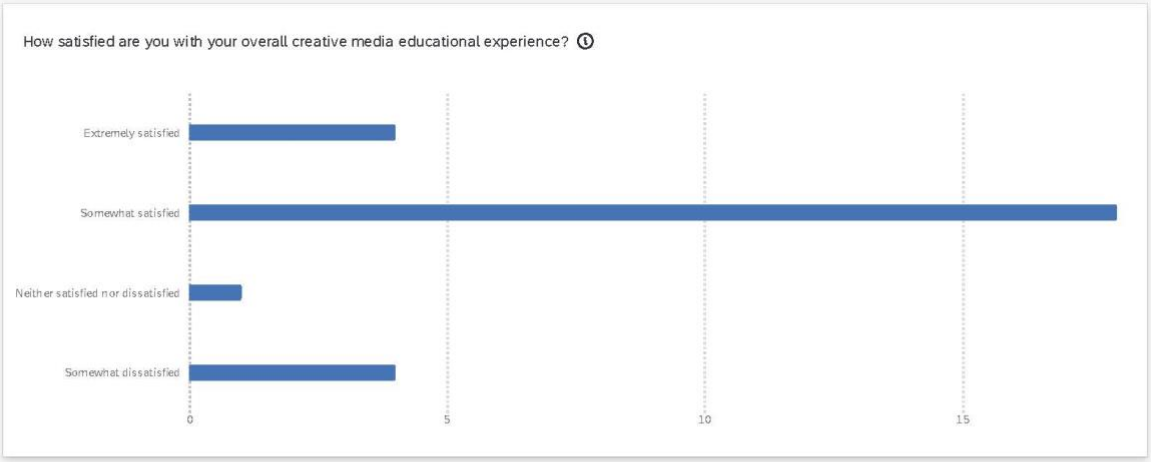
What is your racial/ethnic background? 27

Q4 - What is your racial/ethnic background?	Count	Count
American Indian or Alaska Native	4%	1
Asian or Asian American	7%	2

Figure 1a.

Q4 - What is your racial/ethnic background?	Count	Count
Black or African American	15%	4
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	4%	1
White	59%	16
Multiracial (two or more races)	11%	3





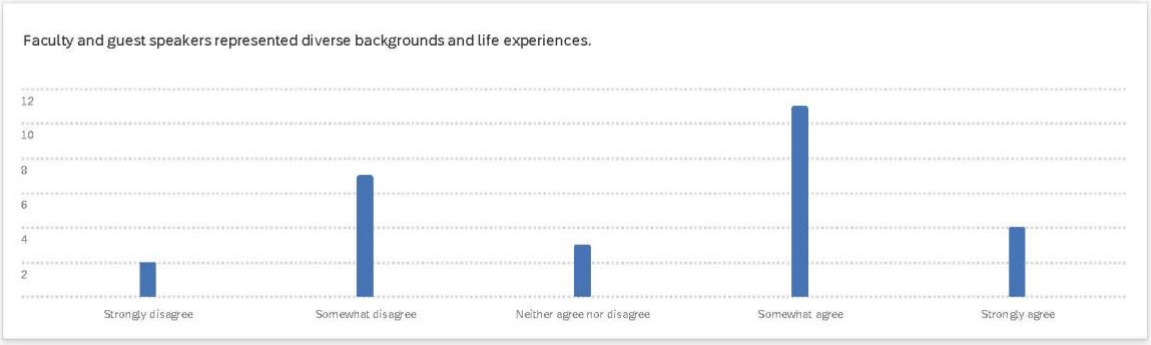


Figure 1b.


All students had equal access to leadership roles, technical resources, and production support regardless of their background or story content.
12
10
8
6
4
2
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
The media creators we studied came from varied cultural, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. 27
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
0
2
4
6
8
10
Course materials (e.g. readings, films, examples) featured diverse creators and perspectives throughout the core curriculum.
12
10
8
6
4
2
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
My ideas and contributions were valued equally to my peers' in class discussions and creative development.
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14

Figure 1c.


Which production group size provided you with a better overall learning experience?
Smaller groups (2-4 people)
Larger groups (8+ people)
No significant difference
It varied depending on the project
0
5
10
15
Diverse perspectives were respected in discussions of 'controversial' content, without dismissal or interruption.
12
10
8
6
4
2
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
Faculty actively challenged problematic tropes (e.g. recurring character stereotypes) and representations while encouraging exploration of non-mainstream approaches.
10
8
6
4
2
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
Q18 - When discussing media with potentially sensitive content related to identity (race, gender, sexuality, etc.), faculty facilitated respectful conversation rather than avoiding or sensationalizing these topics.
12
10
8
6
4
2
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree

Figure 1d.

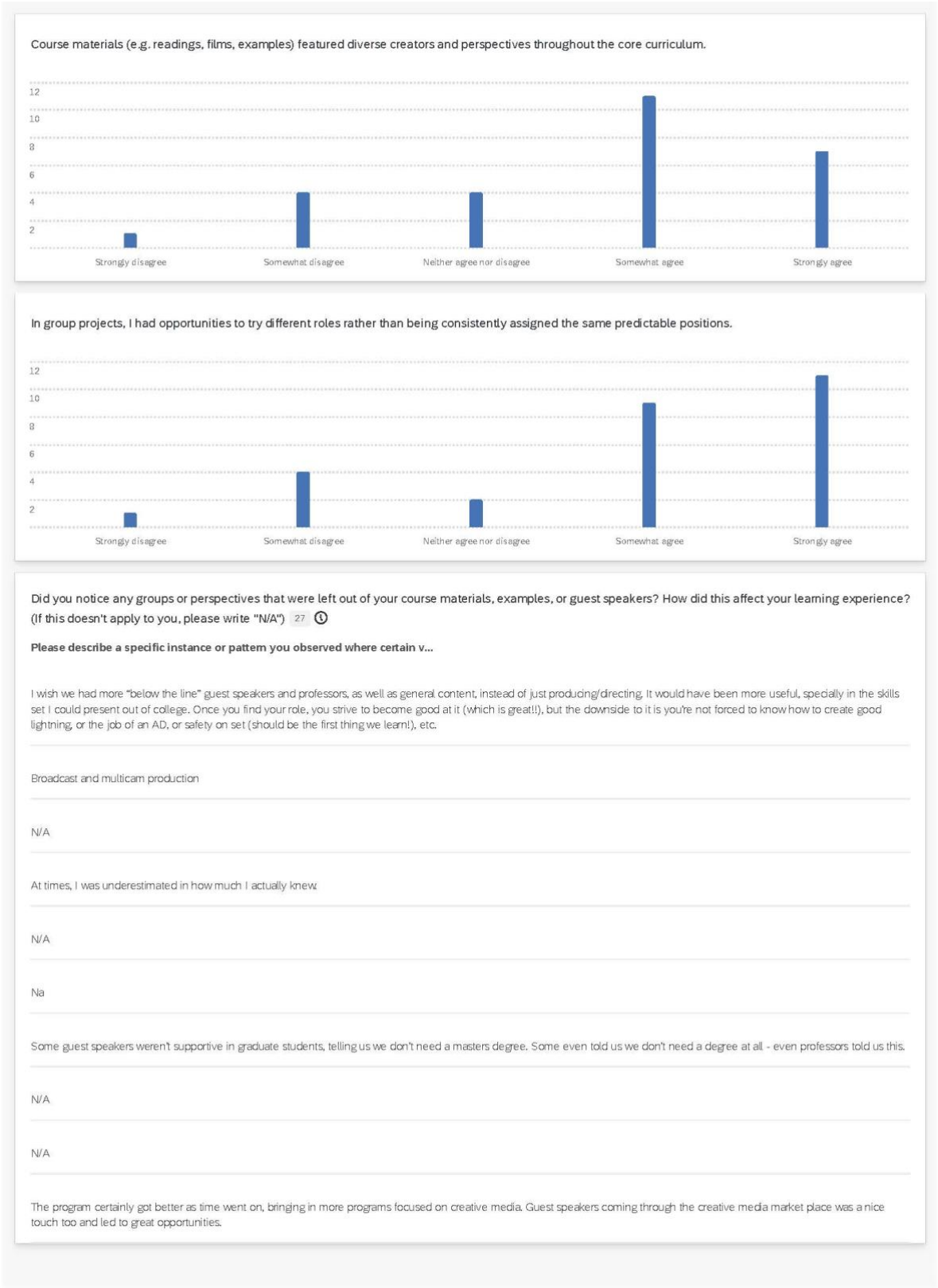
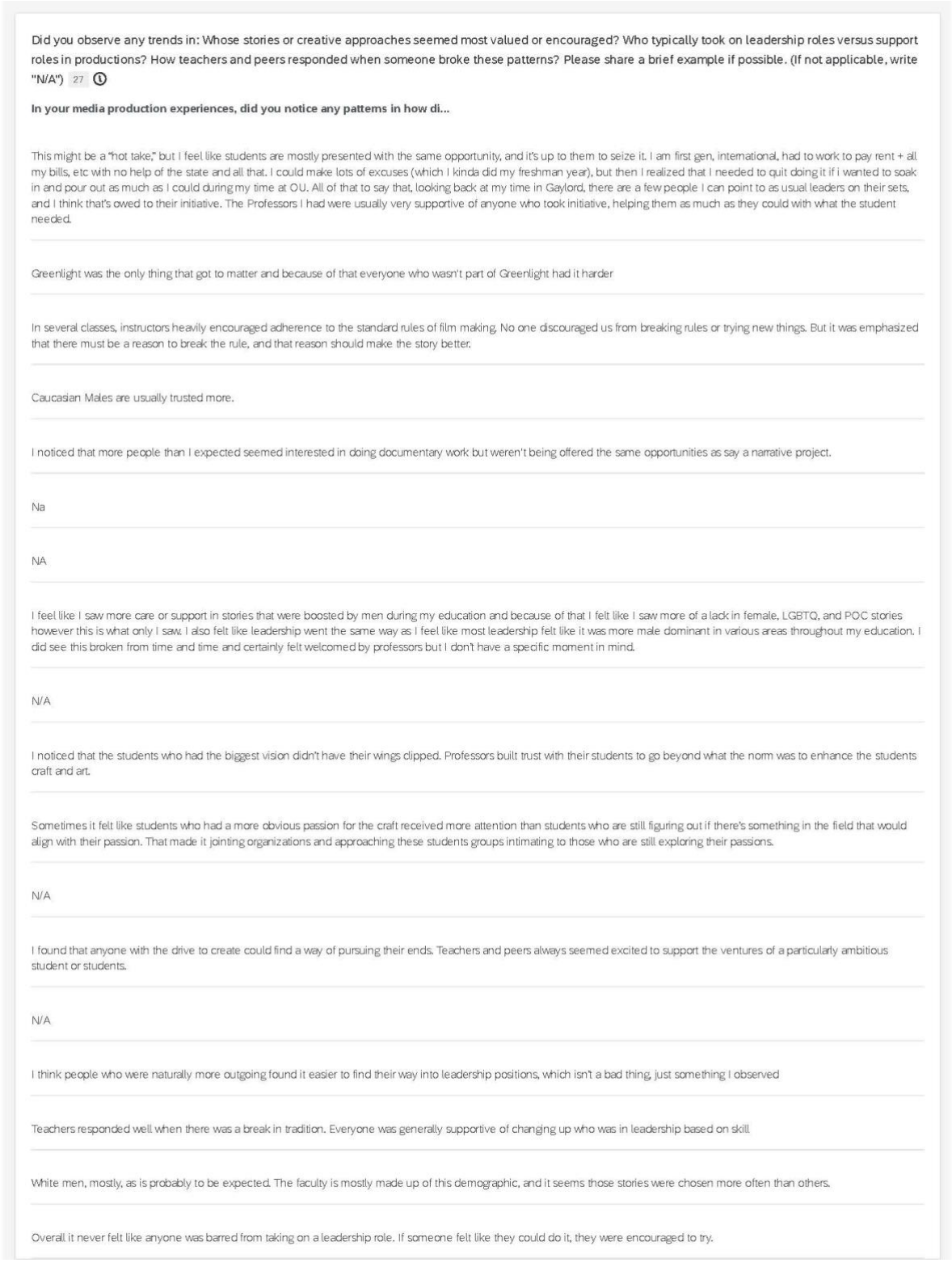

Course materials (e.g. readings, films, examples) featured diverse creators and perspectives throughout the core curriculum.
12
10
8
6
4
2
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
In group projects, I had opportunities to try different roles rather than being consistently assigned the same predictable positions.
12
10
8
6
4
2
Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
Did you notice any groups or perspectives that were left out of your course materials, examples, or guest speakers? How did this affect your learning experience? (If this doesn't apply to you, please write "N/A") 27
Please describe a specific instance or pattern you observed where certain v...
I wish we had more "below the line" guest speakers and professors, as well as general content, instead of just producing/directing. It would have been more useful, specially in the skills set I could present out of college. Once you find your role, you strive to become good at it (which is great!!), but the downside to it is you're not forced to know how to create good lightning, or the job of an AD, or safety on set (should be the first thing we learn!), etc.
Broadcast and multicam production
N/A
At times, I was underestimated in how much I actually knew.
N/A
Na
Some guest speakers weren't supportive in graduate students, telling us we don't need a masters degree. Some even told us we don't need a degree at all - even professors told us this.
N/A
N/A
The program certainly got better as time went on, bringing in more programs focused on creative media. Guest speakers coming through the creative media market place was a nice touch too and led to great opportunities.

Figure 1e.



Please describe a specific instance or pattern you observed where certain v...
There was a creative media market place workshop that touched on lighting people of color on camera that made me realize how little we talked about capturing different races in front of the camera.
When it came to studies about the history of films or analyzing certain films, there seemed to be an emphasis on American/European types. I believe the curriculum could improve by adding films/film history of different countries, regions, and/or cultures. I took 4 screenwriting courses. Of those courses, 3 were taught by white 2 male professors and 1 was taught by a black female professor. While I value and am satisfied by what I learned from a variety perspectives, my black female professor was the only that brought up concepts such as the Bechdel Test, DuVernay Test, and a greater emphasis on how characters being written and representation can have a long-lasting effect on society with implications.
post-production was something that was not taught very well in the required courses. Very cursory and basic skills without much expansion.
My most positive CMP experiences came from advanced single camera and greenlight. everything else was helpful, but felt surface level.
No
Women in leadership roles on set
N/A
n/a
N/A
N/A
I believe that the college does not interact much with international filmmaking and the curriculum remains very US centric. This does make sense considering it's a college in the US, however, I would argue that filmmaking has become more globalized over the years and engaging with different countries is also important.
Creative Media Production inherently lacks the number of examples and perspectives that Film and Media Studies has, for example. Most of the CMP staff (who have influence) are old white men, half of whom still work in the industry, and he who works makes commercial, non-narrative projects. I understand they do what they can. We had little engagement with industry professionals who are people of color or genderfluid. We had little opportunity to experiment with industry-standard equipment. We had practically no interaction with below-the-line industry professionals. We had no information about unions. We had little relevant/practical production management opportunities or software. I came out of Creative Media Production only relishing my internship and my new social skills. The program lacks any pipeline, outside of commercial, which is still small.
N/A
When I was in CMP, all of the professors were white, middle-aged or older men. It wasn't until I came back as a master's student that women were hired and not until my time as PhD that the first Black woman was hired. It hasn't been until recently that the importance of representation has been discussed in the curriculum.
Not necessarily. It's hard for me to say with my background. I felt like certain professors did a great job of showing different perspectives and groups - while others didn't mention it at all.
N/A
Not particularly

Figure 1f.



Did you observe any trends in: Whose stories or creative approaches seemed most valued or encouraged? Who typically took on leadership roles versus support roles in productions? How teachers and peers responded when someone broke these patterns? Please share a brief example if possible. (If not applicable, write "N/A") 27

In your media production experiences, did you notice any patterns in how di...

This might be a "hot take," but I feel like students are mostly presented with the same opportunity, and it's up to them to seize it. I am first gen, international, had to work to pay rent + all my bills, etc with no help of the state and all that. I could make lots of excuses (which I kinda did my freshman year), but then I realized that I needed to quit doing it if i wanted to soak in and pour out as much as I could during my time at OU. All of that to say that, looking back at my time in Gaylord, there are a few people I can point to as usual leaders on their sets, and I think that's owed to their initiative. The Professors I had were usually very supportive of anyone who took initiative, helping them as much as they could with what the student needed.

Greenlight was the only thing that got to matter and because of that everyone who wasn't part of Greenlight had it harder

In several classes, instructors heavily encouraged adherence to the standard rules of film making. No one discouraged us from breaking rules or trying new things. But it was emphasized that there must be a reason to break the rule, and that reason should make the story better.

Caucasian Males are usually trusted more.

I noticed that more people than I expected seemed interested in doing documentary work but weren't being offered the same opportunities as say a narrative project.

Na

NA

I feel like I saw more care or support in stories that were boosted by men during my education and because of that I felt like I saw more of a lack in female, LGBTQ, and POC stories however this is what only I saw. I also felt like leadership went the same way as I feel like most leadership felt like it was more male dominant in various areas throughout my education. I did see this broken from time and time and certainly felt welcomed by professors but I don't have a specific moment in mind.

N/A

I noticed that the students who had the biggest vision didn't have their wings clipped. Professors built trust with their students to go beyond what the norm was to enhance the students craft and art.

Sometimes it felt like students who had a more obvious passion for the craft received more attention than students who are still figuring out if there's something in the field that would align with their passion. That made it jointing organizations and approaching these students groups intimating to those who are still exploring their passions.

N/A

I found that anyone with the drive to create could find a way of pursuing their ends. Teachers and peers always seemed excited to support the ventures of a particularly ambitious student or students.

N/A

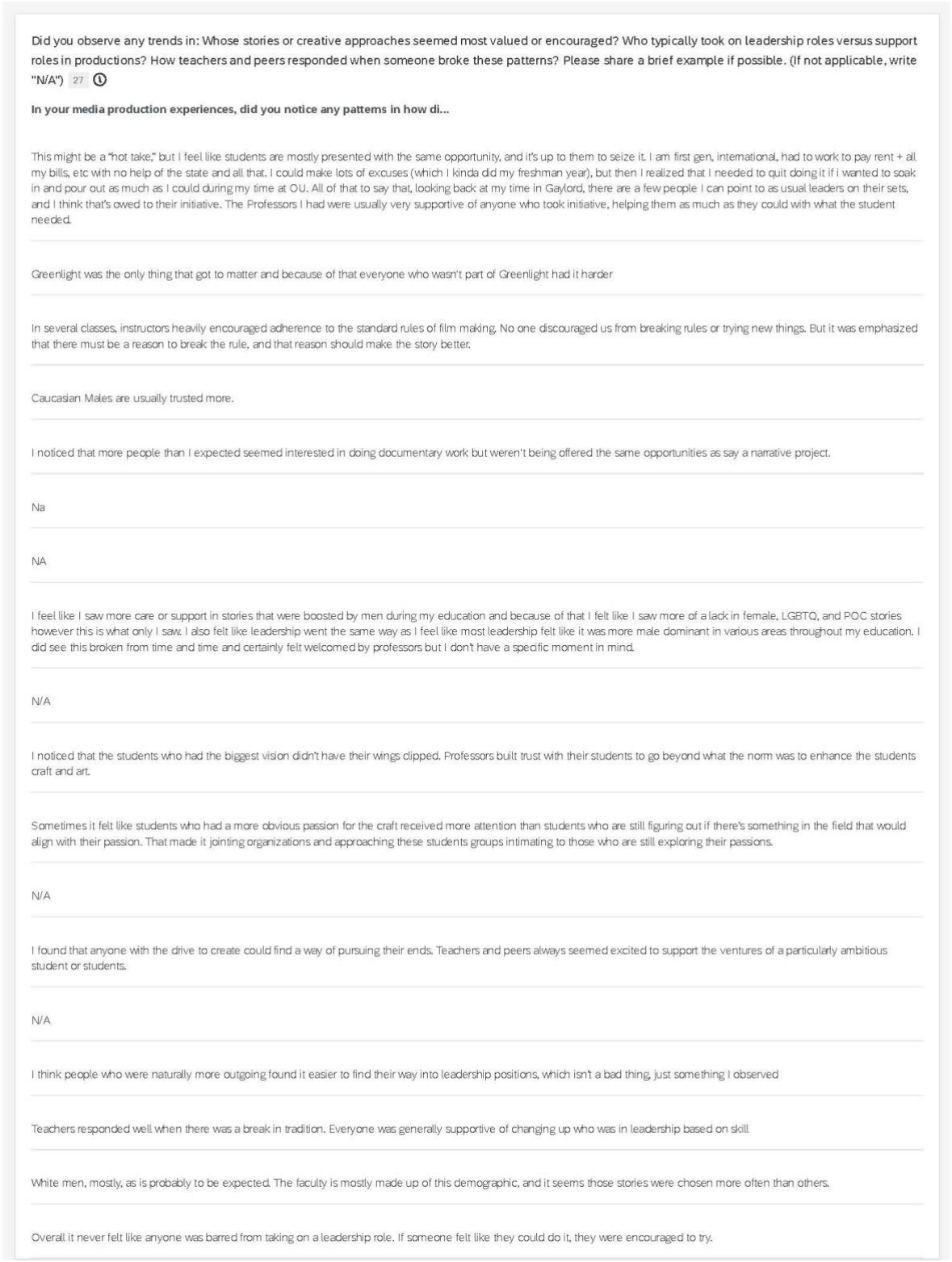
I think people who were naturally more outgoing found it easier to find their way into leadership positions, which isn't a bad thing, just something I observed

Teachers responded well when there was a break in tradition. Everyone was generally supportive of changing up who was in leadership based on skill

White men, mostly, as is probably to be expected. The faculty is mostly made up of this demographic, and it seems those stories were chosen more often than others.

Overall it never felt like anyone was barred from taking on a leadership role. If someone felt like they could do it, they were encouraged to try.

Figure 1g.



Did you observe any trends in: Whose stories or creative approaches seemed most valued or encouraged? Who typically took on leadership roles versus support roles in productions? How teachers and peers responded when someone broke these patterns? Please share a brief example if possible. (If not applicable, write "N/A") 27

In your media production experiences, did you notice any pattems in how di...

This might be a "hot take," but I feel like students are mostly presented with the same opportunity, and it's up to them to seize it. I am first gen, international, had to work to pay rent + all my bills, etc with no help of the state and all that. I could make lots of excuses (which I kinda did my freshman year), but then I realized that I needed to quit doing it if i wanted to soak in and pour out as much as I could during my time at OU. All of that to say that, looking back at my time in Gaylord, there are a few people I can point to as usual leaders on their sets, and I think that's owed to their initiative. The Professors I had were usually very supportive of anyone who took initiative, helping them as much as they could with what the student needed.

Greenlight was the only thing that got to matter and because of that everyone who wasn't part of Greenlight had it harder

In several classes, instructors heavily encouraged adherence to the standard rules of film making. No one discouraged us from breaking rules or trying new things. But it was emphasized that there must be a reason to break the rule, and that reason should make the story better.

Caucasian Males are usually trusted more.

I noticed that more people than I expected seemed interested in doing documentary work but weren't being offered the same opportunities as say a narrative project.

Na

NA

I feel like I saw more care or support in stories that were boosted by men during my education and because of that I felt like I saw more of a lack in female, LGBTQ, and POC stories however this is what only I saw. I also felt like leadership went the same way as I feel like most leadership felt like it was more male dominant in various areas throughout my education. I did see this broken from time and time and certainly felt welcomed by professors but I don't have a specific moment in mind.

N/A

I noticed that the students who had the biggest vision didn't have their wings clipped. Professors built trust with their students to go beyond what the norm was to enhance the students craft and art.

Sometimes it felt like students who had a more obvious passion for the craft received more attention than students who are still figuring out if there's something in the field that would align with their passion. That made it jointing organizations and approaching these students groups intimating to those who are still exploring their passions.

N/A

I found that anyone with the drive to create could find a way of pursuing their ends. Teachers and peers always seemed excited to support the ventures of a particularly ambitious student or students.

N/A

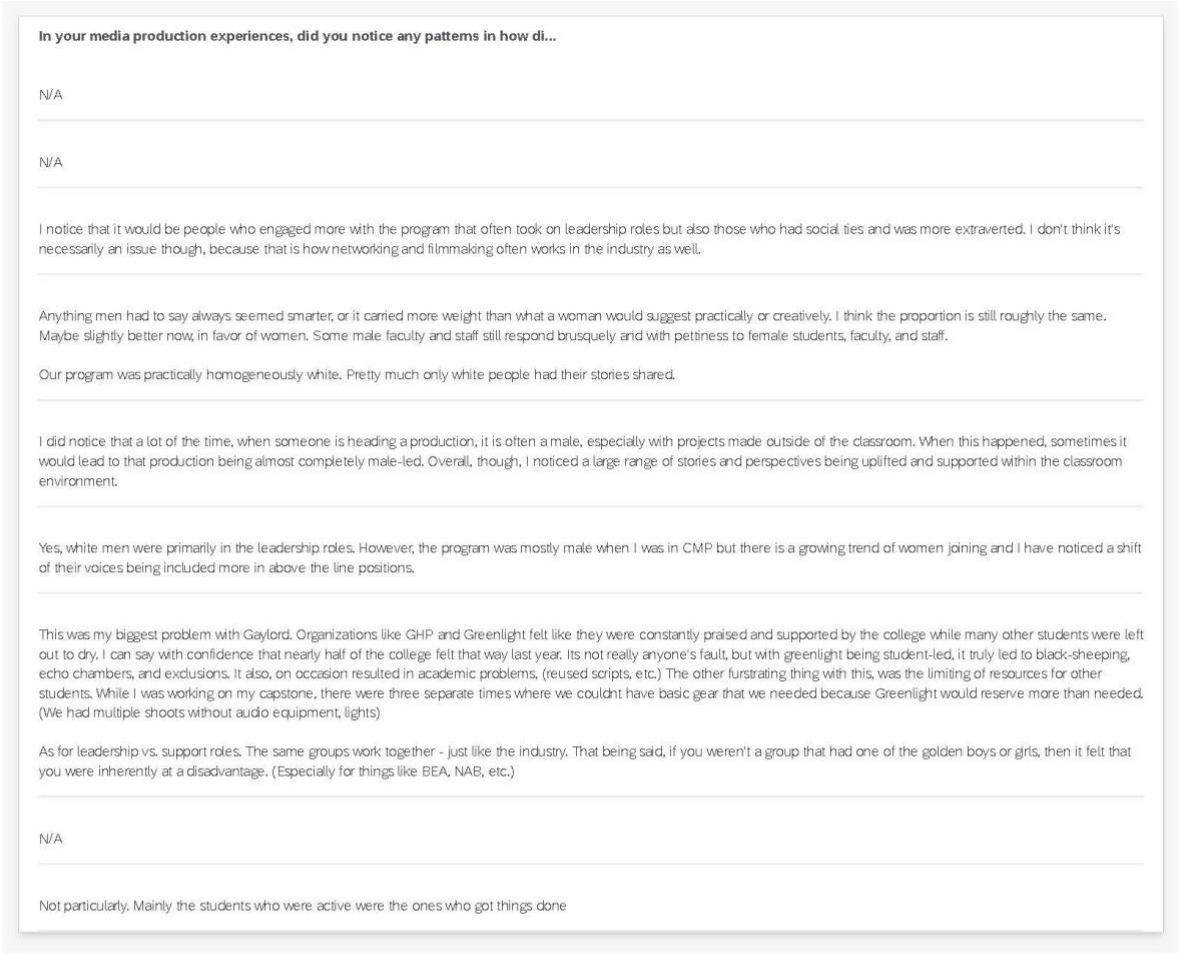
I think people who were naturally more outgoing found it easier to find their way into leadership positions, which isn't a bad thing, just something I observed

Teachers responded well when there was a break in tradition. Everyone was generally supportive of changing up who was in leadership based on skill

White men, mostly, as is probably to be expected. The faculty is mostly made up of this demographic, and it seems those stories were chosen more often than others.

Overall it never felt like anyone was barred from taking on a leadership role. If someone felt like they could do it, they were encouraged to try.

Figure 1f.



In your media production experiences, did you notice any patterns in how di...

N/A

N/A

I notice that it would be people who engaged more with the program that often took on leadership roles but also those who had social ties and was more extraverted. I don't think it's necessarily an issue though, because that is how networking and filmmaking often works in the industry as well.

Anything men had to say always seemed smarter, or it carried more weight than what a woman would suggest practically or creatively. I think the proportion is still roughly the same. Maybe slightly better now, in favor of women. Some male faculty and staff still respond brusquely and with pettiness to female students, faculty, and staff.

Our program was practically homogeneously white. Pretty much only white people had their stories shared.

I did notice that a lot of the time, when someone is heading a production, it is often a male, especially with projects made outside of the classroom. When this happened, sometimes it would lead to that production being almost completely male-led. Overall, though, I noticed a large range of stories and perspectives being uplifted and supported within the classroom environment.

Yes, white men were primarily in the leadership roles. However, the program was mostly male when I was in CMP but there is a growing trend of women joining and I have noticed a shift of their voices being included more in above the line positions.

This was my biggest problem with Gaylord. Organizations like GHP and Greenlight felt like they were constantly praised and supported by the college while many other students were left out to dry. I can say with confidence that nearly half of the college felt that way last year. Its not really anyone's fault, but with greenlight being student-led, it truly led to black-sheeping, echo chambers, and exclusions. It also, on occasion resulted in academic problems, (reused scripts, etc.) The other furstrating thing with this, was the limiting of resources for other students. While I was working on my capstone, there were three separate times where we couldnt have basic gear that we needed because Greenlight would reserve more than needed. (We had multiple shoots without audio equipment, lights)

As for leadership vs. support roles. The same groups work together - just like the industry. That being said, if you weren't a group that had one of the golden boys or girls, then it felt that you were inherently at a disadvantage. (Especially for things like BEA, NAB, etc.)

N/A

Not particularly. Mainly the students who were active were the ones who got things done

APPENDIX C
IRB Approval

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Initial Submission – Exempt from IRB Review – AP01

Date: May 30, 2025 **IRB#:** 18623

Principal Investigator: Traci E Williams

Approval Date: 05/30/2025

Exempt Category: Category 2

Study Title: EMERGE:Developing an Anti-Symbolic Annihilation Framework for Media Production Education - An Autoethnographic Study of a Black Female Professor's Journey

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed the above-referenced research study and determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications as changes could affect the exempt status determination.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Notify the IRB at the completion of the project.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB@ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

Eric Pennello, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX D

Teaching Philosophy

In my classroom as creative media educator, I aim to create an inclusive learning environment that cultivates students to critically think, by emphasizing hand-on learning experiences. I encourage my students to step outside their comfort zones to gain a deeper understanding of cinematic artistry and cultural content. I believe in the value of experiential learning, where students actively participate in complete storytelling, which includes pre-production, production and post-production. I foster an atmosphere where students feel comfortable to collaborate as a whole class or within small groups, to exchange ideas and learn from one another's diverse perspectives. In my classroom, I honor all learning differences and the full range of student backgrounds and identities. Through my passion for film and dedication to nurturing creative minds, I do my best to instill in my students a love for learning about our craft that extends beyond the classroom (Williams, 2024). Faculty at the university level cannot change the culture of the entertainment industry, but they can gather the resources to amend the culture of the courses taught, giving students the tools needed to prepare themselves for the entertainment workforce (Banks, 2019).

REFERENCES

Adams, T. E., & Herrmann, A. F. (2025). Making a case for autoethnography. Journal of Autoethnography, 6(1), 1-4. https://doi.org/10.1525/joae.2025.6.1.1

Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S. L., & Ellis, C. (Eds.). (2022). Handbook of autoethnography (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Apple, M. W. (2013). *Knowledge, power, and education: The Selected Works of Michael W. Apple*. Routledge.

Bain, K. (2004). *What the Best College Teachers do*. Harvard University Press.

Baldwin, A. N. (2021). Presumed Nonhuman: Black Women Intellectuals and the Struggle for Humanity in the Academy. Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies, 22(1). https://doi.org/https://digitalcommons.cortland.edu/wagadu/vol22/iss1/2

Banks, M. (2019). Film schools as pre-industry: Fostering creative collaboration and equity in Media Production Programs. *Media Industries Journal*, *6*(1). https://doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0006.105

Berry, G. L., & Mitchell-Kernan, C. (1982). *Television and the socialization of the minority child*. Academic Press.

Bhatt, I., & MacKenzie, A. (2019). Just google it! Digital literacy and the epistemology of ignorance. Teaching in Higher Education, 24(3), 302–317. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1547276

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (2002). Schooling in capitalist America revisited. *Sociology of Education*, 75(1), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.2307/3090251

Borgen, W., Amundson, N., Butterfield, L., Andersson, B., Nilsson, S., Butterfield, L., Borgen, W., Amundson, N., Maglio, A., Flanagan, J., & Woolsey, L. (2008). Critical incident technique. In The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods (Vol. 0, pp. -). SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n84

Bowman, C. (2021b, May 19). *Why representation matters: Symbolic annihilation and publishing, Ooligan Press*. Ooligan Press. https://www.ooliganpress.com/why-representation-matters-symbolic-annihilation-and-publishing/

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education (pp. 241-258). Greenwood Press. https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm

Bowell, T. (n.d.). *Feminist Standpoint Theory*. Internet encyclopedia of philosophy. https://iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/

Bowleg, L., del Río-González, A. M., Holt, S. L., Pérez, C., Massie, J. S., Mandell, J. E., & A. Boone, C. (2017). Intersectional epistemologies of ignorance: How behavioral and social science research shapes what we know, think we know, and don't know about U.S. black men's sexualities. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *54*(4–5), 577–603. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2017.1295300

Brandon, W. (2002). Experiential learning: A new research path to the study of Journalism Education. Journalism & Mass Communication Educator, 57(1), 59–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/107769580205700107

Bridges, M. W., DiPietro, M., Lovett, M., Norman, M. K., & Ambrose, S. A. (2023). *How learning works: Eight research-based principles for smart teaching*. Jossey-Bass.

Brown, C. A. (2021b). Symbolic annihilation of social groups as hidden curriculum in Japanese elt materials. *TESOL Quarterly*, *56*(2), 603–628. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3073

Brown-Jeffy, Shelly & Cooper, Jewell. (2011). Toward a conceptual framework of culturally relevant pedagogy: An overview of the conceptual and theoretical literature. Teacher Education Quarterly. 38. 65-84.

Buckingham, D. (2003). Media education: Literacy, learning and contemporary culture. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Byrd, C. M. (2016). Does culturally relevant teaching work? an examination from student perspectives. *SAGE Open*, *6*(3), 215824401666074. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016660744

Carstarphen, M. G (2021). Embracing a pedagogy of pain. In G. Daniels & R. Blom (Eds.), Teaching race: Struggles, strategies, & scholarship for the mass communication classroom. (1st ed., pp. 141-151). Rowman & Littlefield.

Cook, D. A., & Bryan, N. (2024). *Critical race theory and classroom practice*. Routledge.

Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G. & Thomas, K. (Eds.). (1995). Critical race theory: The key writings that formed the movement. The New Press.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Cresswell-Yeager, T. J., & Whitaker, II, R. W. (2020). Using student-centered engagement in the classroom to develop cultural intelligence. *Advances in Higher Education and Professional Development*, 262–279. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-9989-0.ch012

Daniels, G. L., & Blom, R. (2021a). *Teaching race struggles, strategies, and scholarship for the Mass Communication Classroom*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Dates, J. L., & Barlow, W. (1993). *Split image: African Americans in the mass media*. Howard University Press.

de Saxe, J., & Ker, A. (2023). Disrupting an Epistemology of White Ignorance through writing a Racial Autobiography. *Critical Education*, *14*(2). https://doi.org/https://doi-org.proxy.library.kent.edu/10.14288/ce.v14i2.186708

Deavours, D. (2023). "Sluts and nuts": influences on the symbolic annihilation of women sources in sexual assault allegation news coverage. *Feminist Media Studies*, *24*(7), 1482–1499. https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.ou.edu/10.1080/14680777.2023.2243048

Dillard, C. B. (2012). Learning to (Re)member the things we've learned to forget. Peter Lang.

Du Bois, W. E. B. (2005). The souls of Black Folks. Pocket Books.

EBSCO Information Services. (n.d.). Standpoint theory. Research Starters. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/social-sciences-and-humanities/standpoint-theory

Feagin, J., Vera, Hernan, & Imani, Nikitah. (1996). *The agony of education: Black students at white colleges and universities / Joe R. Feagin, Hernan Vera, Nikitah Imani.* New York: Routledge.

Fritze, Yvonne; Haugsbakk, Geir; Nordkvelle, Yngve: Why a formal training for TV and Filmmaking? In: Theo Hug, Tanja Kohn, Petra Missomelius (Hg.): Medien - Wissen – Bildung. Medienbildung wozu?. Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press 2016 (Medien –Wissen – Bildung), S. 257–271. DOI:

Giroux, H. A., & Penna, A. N. (1979). Social Education in the classroom: The dynamics of the hidden curriculum. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, *7*(1), 21–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.1979.10506048

Giles, J. A., & Hill, E. J. (2015). Examining our hidden curricula: powerful, visible, gendered and discriminatory. *Medical education*, *49*(3), 244–246.

Global Media Monitoring Project 2025 Highlights. Who Makes the News. (2025). https://whomakesthenews.org/

González, O. A. (2020). Does it pay to get personal? examining the prioritization of "Telling your story" In film school pedagogy and its implications for minoritized film industry aspirants. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *38*(1), 46–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2020.1851736

Green, S. L., & Green, B. (2015). If you want a revolution, the only solution, evolve: The use of culturally responsive teaching in today's classrooms. *Black History Bulletin*, *78*(1), 12–16. https://doi.org/10.1353/bhb.2015.0009

Gutsche, R. E., Kramp, L., & Chandler, M. (2022). #DiminishingDiscrimination: The symbolic annihilation of race and racism in news hashtags of 'calling 911 on Black people'. Journalism, 23(5), 1045-1062.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective. *Feminist Studies*, *14*(3), 575. https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066

Harp, D., Loke, J., & Bachmann, I. (2013). The symbolic annihilation of women in globalization discourse: The same old story in U.S. newsmagazines. Howard Journal of Communications, 24(1), 37-55.

Hollins, E. R., & Oliver, E. I. (Eds.). (1999). Pathways to success in schools: Culturally responsive teaching. Routledge.

Horn, R. A. (2003). Developing a Critical Awareness of the Hidden Curriculum through Media Literacy. *The Clearing House*, *76*(6), 298–300. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30189856

Hunt, D., & Ramón, A. (2025). Hollywood Diversity Report 2025: Part 2 Streaming. UCLA Division of Social Sciences. https://socialsciences.ucla.edu/hollywood-diversity-report/

Hunt, D., & Ramón, A.-C. (2024, March 8). *Diverse audiences prop up a struggling theatrical industry and demand diversity on screen*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/drdarnellhuntanddranachristinaramon/2024/03/07/diverse-audiences-prop-up-a-struggling-theatrical-industry-and-demand-diversity-on-screen/

Irvine, J. J. (2010). Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *Education Digest*, *75*(8), 57–61.

Industry Experiences & their role in education to work transitions. Victoria University, Australia. (2021b, December 8). https://www.vu.edu.au/mitchell-institute/pathways/industry-experiences-their-role-in-education-to-work-transitions

Jones, A. L., & Collier, R. M. (2021). Implementing and evaluating culturally responsive teaching for historical black colleges and universities (HBCU's) through study abroad programs. *Research Anthology on Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning*, 116–138. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-9026-3.ch008

Kellner, D., & Share, J. (2007). Critical media literacy, democracy, and the reconstruction of education. In D. Macedo & S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), Media literacy: A reader (pp. 3-23). New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Kelly, C., Kasperavicius, D., Duncan, D., Etherington, C., Giangregorio, L., Presseau, J., Sibley, K. M., & Straus, S. (2021). 'doing' or 'using' intersectionality? opportunities and challenges in incorporating intersectionality into knowledge translation theory and

Kezar, A., & Maxey, D. (2016). The need for leadership in contingent faculty issues. In A. Kezar & D. Maxey (Eds.), Envisioning the faculty for the twenty-first century: Moving to a mission-oriented and learner-centered model (pp. 301-320). Rutgers University Press.

Klein, H., & Shiffman, K. S. (2009). Underrepresentation and symbolic annihilation of socially disenfranchised groups ("out groups") in animated cartoons. Howard Journal of Communications, 20(1), 55-72.

Kroon, A. C., & Selm, M. van. (2024). Good Intentions Aside: Stereotype Threat in the Face of Media Strategies to Counter Age Bias. *Research on Aging*, *0*(0).

Practice. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, *20*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01509-z

Ladson-Billings, G. (2003). It's your world, I'm just trying to explain it: Understanding our epistemological and methodological challenges. *Qualitative Inquiry, 9*(1), 5–12.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! the case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, *34*(3), 159–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543675

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (2016). Toward a critical race theory of Education. *Critical Race Theory in Education*, 10–31. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315709796-2

Lapadat, J. C. (2017). Ethics in Autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *23*(8), 589–603. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417704462

Larke, P. (2013). Culturally Responsive Teaching in Higher Education: What Professors Need to Know. Counterpoints, 391, 38–50. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981435

Lauzen, M. M. (2024). Employment of Behind-the-Scenes Women on Top Grossing U.S. Films in 2023.

Luke, C. (1994). Feminist pedagogy and critical media literacy. Journal of Communication Inquiry, 18(2), 30-47. https://doi.org/10.1177/019685999401800203

Luke, C. (2004). Re-crafting media and ICT literacies. In D. E. Alvermann (Ed.), Adolescents and literacies in a digital world (pp. 132-146). New York: Peter Lang.

Maingi, N. (2017). Culturally Responsive Graduate Teaching Instructors: Lessons on Facilitating Classroom Dialogues on Racial, Ethnic, and Cultural Injustices. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate*

Journal of Qualitative Communication Research, *16*(1). https://doi.org/http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/kaleidoscope/vol16/iss1/3

Martinez, G. (2020). Law, Race, and the Epistemology of Ignorance. *Hastings Race and Poverty Law Journal*, *17*(2). https://doi.org/ https://repository.uchastings.edu/hastings_race_poverty_law_journal/vol17/iss2/9

Masterman, L. (1985/2001). Teaching the media. New York: Routledge. (Original work published 1985)

Means Coleman, R. R. M., & Yochim, E. A. C. (2008). *The symbolic annihilation of race: A review of the "blackness" literature*. CORE. https://core.ac.uk/outputs/3122060/

Merskin, D. (1998). Sending up signals: A survey of Native American media use and representation in the mass media. Howard Journal of Communication, 9(4), 333-345.

Muir, P. J. (2014). *From script to screen to syllabus: The path to curriculum design for Undergraduate Film Production Programs* (dissertation). Published by ProQuest LLC, Ann Arbor, MI.

Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *22*. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789 (Original work published 2023)

Pickett Miller, N. (2020). Narrative theory as a pedagogical strategy for culturally responsive teaching at HBCU's. *Research Anthology on Racial Equity, Identity, and Privilege*, 257–270. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-4507-5.ch014

O'Brien, T. (1990). *The screening of America: Movies and values from rocky to rain man*. Bloomsbury USA Academic.

Ortega, Y. (2024). Symbolic annihilation: Processes influencing English language policy and teaching practice. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *21*(1), 63–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/15427587.2023.2215361

Pewewardy, C. (1993). Culturally responsible pedagogy in action: An American Indian magnet school. In E. Hollins, J. King, & W. Hayman (Eds.), *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base* (pp. 77-92). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Pinto-López, I. N., Montaudon-Tomas, C. M., Muñoz-Ortiz, M., & Montaudon -Tomas, I. M. (2021). Culturally responsive teaching to empower indigenous student communities. *Research Anthology on Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning*, 203–225. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-9026-3.ch013

Sabal, Rob. (2001). Teaching Media. *Journal of Film and Video*, *53*(1), 3–8. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20688344

Sergi, M., Fitchett, C., & Fisher, D. P. (2023). University film schools at the heart of creative collaborations with industry: a case study. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, *17*(1–2), 21–36. https://doi.org/10.1080/17503175.2023.2228610

Shapiro, J. R., & Neuberg, S. L. (2007). From Stereotype Threat to Stereotype Threats: Implications of a Multi-Threat Framework for Causes, Moderators, Mediators, Consequences, and Interventions. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 11(2), 107-130.

Smith, S., & Pieper, K. (2024). *Inclusion in the director's chair*. USC Annenberg School of Journalism. https://assets.uscannenberg.org/docs/aii-inclusion-directors-chair-2022.pdf

Smith, S. L., Choueiti, M., & Pieper, K. (2016). Inclusion or Invisibility? Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment. *Institute for Diversity and Empowerment at Annenberg (IDEA)*.

Sullivan, S., & Tuana, N. (Eds.). (2007). Race and epistemologies of ignorance. State University of New York Press.

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69(5), 797-811.

Steele, C. M. (2010). Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do. W.W. Norton & Company.

Tuchman, G. (2000). The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media.

Tuana, N. (2004). Coming to understand: Orgasm and the epistemology of ignorance. *Hypatia*, *19*(1), 194–232. https://doi.org/10.1353/hyp.2004.0018

Turner, C. S. V., González, J. C., & Wood, J. L. (2008). Faculty of color in academe: What 20 years of literature tells us. Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 1(3), 139-168. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0012837

Victor, S. (2009). Telling Tales: A Review of C. K. Riessman's Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences. The Qualitative Report, 14(3), 172-176. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2009.2844

Walker, A. (1992). Possessing the secret of joy. Pocket Books.

Walker, A. (2022). A more equitable film pedagogy: Including Media Literacy in higher education film classrooms to result in Better Media Practitioners. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, *14*(1), 153–167. https://doi.org/10.23860/jmle-2022-14-1-11

Warren, K., Mitten, D., D'Amore, C., & Lotz, E. (2018). The gendered hidden curriculum of Adventure Education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *42*(2), 140–154. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825918813398

Wyatt-Nichol, H., & Antwi-Boasiako, K. B. (2008). Diversity across the Curriculum: Perceptions and Practices. *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, *14*(1), 79–90

Yardley, S., Teunissen, P. W., & Dornan, T. (2012). Experiential learning: Transforming theory into practice. *Medical Teacher*, *34*(2), 161–164. https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159x.2012.643264