Still Standing, Still Here: Lessons Learned from Mediated Mentors in my Academic Journey

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While driving to work one spring morning after surviving a rather lengthy and brutal winter, I became enthralled at the sight of the beautiful purple shrubs and plants that aligned a street. This breathtaking display reminded me of an unforgettable moment in Steven Spielberg's *The Color Purple,* an adaptation of Alice Walker's 1983 novel of the same title. *The Color Purple* is an epic tale spanning forty years in the life of Celie Harris Johnson, an African American woman living in the rural south who survives incredible physical and psychological abuse at the hands of her stepfather. Celie's abusive father gives her to an equally abusive man in the community, Albert Johnson, who Celie simply acknowledged as "Mister" because he was a man and she was a mere child. After Mister separated her from her sister Nellie, Celie is left isolated and helpless, seeking companionship anywhere she could while holding on to the belief that she and Nellie would one day be reunited.

Such were the daily experiences of Celie to the extent that she didn't know that any other life for a Black woman was possible until she met Shug Avery, a jazz singer who was also her husband's mistress. After a degrading introduction, Shug befriends Celie and helps her to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth.

In a touching scene, Celie and Shug are walking through a field when Shug proclaims: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."

The Popular Culture Studies Journal, Vol. 3, No. 1&2

> Celie: "Are you saying God is vain?"
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> Shug: "Naw, naw, not vain, just want to share a good thing."
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> Celie: "Are you saying it just want to be loved, just like the bible say?"
>
> Shug: "Yes, Celie. Everything wants to be loved."

I often smile when recalling this touching scene and wonder whether it has anything to do with my obsession with the color purple. I am drawn to purple because this deep majestic hue radiates boldness, encourages dignity and exclaims *do not ignore me; do not typecast me nor disrespect me. I am somebody and I am here!* This has been my mantra as well as my struggle as an African American female professor at predominately white institutions (PWIs), a career that has spanned more than twenty-five years. The treatment of African American women in PWIs mirrors the treatment of African American women in U. S. American society. As cultural scholar bell hooks notes:

> No other group in America has had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of a larger group, "women" in this culture…When black people are talked, the focus tends to be on black men, and when women are talked about, the focus tends to be on white women. (7)

Constance Carroll relates hooks' argument to the academy when she argues that there is not a more isolated subgroup in academe than African American women. "There is no one with whom to share experiences and gain support, no one with whom to identify, no one of whom an African American woman can model herself" (120). Not being privy to mentoring nor formal and informal networks, many African American female faculty

exist in isolation. Not only can this feeling of isolation have a detrimental effect on the faculty member's morale and self-esteem, but can also be associated with the faculty member's research interests and level of productivity. Mentoring, notes Vance, often involves career socialization, inspiration, and belief in each other, and promoting excellence and passion for work through guidance, protection, support, and networking (7). Most often a senior colleague can provide support, feedback, information, and advocacy to a junior or less experienced colleague. However, peer mentoring (colleagues of the same rank) is also an important type of mentoring. Some of the benefits to those who are mentored include insight into the academy, skill development, enhanced intellectual abilities; opportunities for career enhancement and access to "reality checks," advice, encouragement, and honest feedback. Literature (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, Galindo; Stanley; Tillman; Turner and Myers; Wilson) has supported the argument that a significant factor necessary for contributing to the survival and success of African American women in the academy is having a mentor to lessen the feelings of isolation, and to advance and enhance their careers.

The lack of mentoring has been cited as the primary reason why predominantly white institutions have difficulty recruiting and retaining African American women (Blackwell). Although Stanley argues that cross race faculty mentoring relationships aid retention, Jackson, Kite and Branscomb's research found that African American females overwhelmingly prefer African American female mentors. Participating in a mentoring relationship with someone who looks like them, who has similar personal, professional and scholarly interests, and who is devoted to their holistic experience as well as their personal success is important to African American faculty (68). Because many African Americans in academia are the only African Americans or African American females in their departments (and sometimes the college), they might seek mentoring,

friendships, and scholarly collaborations outside of their departments and universities (Tillman).

I am grateful for the mentoring I have received from my mother who taught me the value of self-worth, dignity, and the power of faith in God and in myself. I am also indebted to older African American female colleagues who have traveled the professional path I now travel and have shared with me their challenges and strategies. I have a cross race mentor who offers support and friendship even though we are miles apart. And, I have been blessed to have peer mentors, four African American female professors who I refer to as my "sista circle." Although they work at different universities in different parts of the country (one is retired), over the years we have conducted numerous reality checks with each other regarding various situations in our academic and personal lives. Whether over the phone, email, texts, or face-to-face at conferences, we have vented, cried, laughed (until we cried), and prayed; shared pleasant and unpleasant experiences; celebrated victories; and offered comfort in times of defeat and despair. Critical race theorists Solorzano and Yosso might suggest that we have created *counterspaces*, a term they coined to refer to safe areas or relationships with other individuals with whom one can share common experiences and will be encouraged and nurtured. I have survived academia because of these counterspaces. Having a mentor, whether face-to-face or via social media is an asset. But, I have also discovered that mentoring and mentors can emanate from mediated characters in popular culture, as characters can provide advice, new perspectives, and inspiration for the various situations in which we find ourselves.

Horton and Wolf refer to this type of relationship as parasocial, a one-sided relationship where one person extends time, interest, and emotion toward the personae while he or she is completely unaware of the other's existence. They suggest that the viewer is free to withdraw at any moment from the relationship, as well as to choose among the different

relationships that are offered. They describe parasocial relationships as one-sided, non-dialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development. A character's persona is a part of the parasocial concept. The fictional character is the one whom the viewer develops the parasocial relationship with often resulting in the viewer's feelings as if he or she knows the personae as if they were friends. Movies and television programs are instructive and full of liberating potential. They need not be extraordinary in their technical, artistic, or conceptual presentation to exert a mentoring influence (Sinetar). In the privacy and comfort of our homes, we can recognize courage and cowardice, sincerity and self-deception, assessing the best and worst of who they are and who we are (48). This autoethnography focuses on some of my parasocial, "mediated mentors" and the lessons I have learned from them that have guided me in my academic career.

The use of autoethnography allows researchers to write a highly personalized narrative which draws on their experiences in order to extend readers' understanding about a specific phenomenon or culture. The autoethnographer uses narrative to make sense of the fragmentation and reveals how people "invent innovative ways of surviving when conventional ways fail them" (Bochner 434). Autoethnography rejects the notion that experiences can only be communicated indirectly through observations, interviews, or surveys. Autoethnographies by African Americans and other faculty of color are steadily increasing (see Allison and Broadus; Boylorn; Hamlet; Hendrix; Robinson and Clandy). In addition to illustrating the significance of this approach to research, autoethnography also serves as a valuable method for self-reflection and self-analysis within particular contexts. It is a methodology that audaciously supports the claim that personal stories matter.

My Story, My Song

When I first began my academic career path in the late 1980s I accepted a position at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest. I was the

only faculty of color, lauded by the administrators and other faculty because they had finally gotten "one." I was nearly destroyed for the same reason. My colleagues and students treated me as a novelty and they frequently expected me to live up to every stereotype they had about what an African American woman should be. When I didn't live up their stereotypes they assessed that something was terribly wrong (with me). The thought of treating me like a regular faculty member was an outlandish notion. For example, when presenting the new faculty during my first year, my name and photo was omitted from the directory. Others rarely informed me about department meetings or invited me to events, many of which were dismissed as a mere oversight with a half-hearted expression of "we're sorry." But when my white colleagues had conflicts with African American and Latino students, they had no problems remembering me and expecting me to explain and resolve the conflict. Students of color similarly expected me to be their protector when they had conflicts with their white faculty. I hated my job. I left this college after two years but it took me two additional years to get over these experiences. I even attempted to seek refuge at a predominately black institution only to discover (when I arrived for the interview) that the chair and faculty in the communication department were all white. I candidly explained to the chair why I rejected the offer. I told her that I would have difficulty being the minority in a department at a predominately black university. She understood.

Years later I continue to face many of the same issues I faced at that small college in the Midwest. Little has changed in terms of stereotyping and institutional networks. Little has changed, except for me. I extinguished a lot of the fire, the anger I felt in the 1980s. But in so doing, I also had to recognize that most administrators do not know how to deal with issues of diversity, especially race, and so they don't. For this reason, even though I still encounter invisibility, isolation, and stereotyping, I had to develop a different perspective about my existence

and interactions, one that would have a more positive effect on my temperament and attitude toward my colleagues and my workplace. I also had to develop new rhetorical strategies and coping skills. I continue to hope that I will connect with colleagues who recognize my ways of knowing and the culture that informs these ways, and that my pedagogy and research are no less rigorous than their own. Every institution I have worked at since the late 1980s has been a little better than the previous one and for that I am grateful. I have also developed networks, both professional and social, that have helped me along the way. Most importantly, I learned and internalized "the serenity prayer":

> Lord grant me the serenity to accept
>
> the things I cannot change,
>
> courage to change the things I can
>
> and wisdom to know the difference.

My journey has been made less problematic since embracing this prayer and accepting certain truths. I have had to accept the truth that when I speak, my ideas, concerns, questions and comments might be ignored until articulated by one of my white colleagues, but I continue to speak. I have had to accept the truth that I might only be appointed to committees because of my ethnicity (and rarely my gender, which my colleagues tend to ignore). But if I have something to say, I speak. What gets me through these truths, challenges, and frustrations is recognizing and valuing my self-worth. I had to learn the art of re-invention and establishing contingency plans. It was a strategy I learned through popular culture specifically through examples offered by Celie Harris (*The Color Purple*), Teri Joseph (*Soul Food*), Harriet DeLong (*In the Heat of the Night*), and Olivia Pope (*Scandal*).

Three dominant attributes of Celie's personality include her endurance, faith and the consistent search for truth. Celie's endurance arose out of a belief in herself and connections with others. Her resilience is miraculous and a tribute to humankind. The ability to endure under the worst of circumstances is Celie's key to survival. She manages to withstand the sexual abuse of her stepfather, the loss of her babies, the cruelty of her common law husband, the separation from her sister, and the uncertainty of her friend's love—all combined with a life filled with poverty, struggles, and prejudice. In spite of the hardships, Celie never abandons faith. She looks for ways to stand up to the unfair social system. As the older daughter, she is expected to stay at home and care for the stepfather and the house, while Nettie attends school. Fortunately, Nettie privately teaches and coaches Celie.

Shug also offers life lessons. It is Shug who teaches Celie about her own self-worth, making her believe in herself. As a result, she finally leaves her abusive husband, and goes off with Shug to make a life of her own. By the end of the novel/movie, we learn that Celie has built a successful business, largely because she never gave in to the reality of her life but searched for the truth beyond it. Equally important, we discover in the novel that Celie also comes to terms with her oppressor. She forgives Albert and they become friends. Celie learns how to be self-sufficient which brings her story to a triumphant conclusion. Although Celie's story is not my story, her particular pains and life's circumstances are foreign to me, I benefitted from her life, her self-sufficiency, the power of her faith and her ability to reinvent herself. And, in understanding her story, she mentors me.

It was my first day in my new office on my new campus. As I approached the door, I smiled as I saw that my nameplate had been attached to it. I had moved to this new environment a month before the beginning of the fall semester so I would have sufficient time to get settled in on campus as well as in my new apartment. Today I needed to unpack.

As I stood in my office unpacking and shelving books, my African American male colleague heard my footsteps and walked over to my door to talk. This was the first time I had actually been in a department that had more than one African American at one time. Usually departments hire "one" to replace the "one" that got away. I was looking forward to having an African American colleague. It was one of the reasons I had accepted the position. But that feeling didn't last long.

As we talked, a white woman, a secretary in another department in our building, approached my doorway and, ignoring my presence and our conversation, immediately started a conversation with my African American male colleague. Suddenly, he, too, ignored my presence, turning away from me to engage in a conversation with the secretary. They talked for about five minutes. Realizing that I had faded into "invisibility" I proceeded to continue my chore of unpacking and shelving books.

At the end of their conversation, the white woman looked into my office and asked my African American male colleague, "Who's that? You got a new maid?" It took every fiber of my being to remain silent, but I did so because I was new and didn't want to start off the new school year in an awkward way. If I had openly reacted I could imagine the hallway quickly buzzing with echoes from other faculty and staff of how the new African American professor is one of those angry black women who went off on the innocent white women for no reason. So, I willingly fell prey to becoming a victim of stereotype threat, avoiding the risk of confirming to a negative stereotype about my ethnic/gender group (Steel and Aronson). I remained silent and earnestly tried to control my gaze. He said, "Oh, that's Dr. Hamlet. She's a new professor in our department." The white woman turned up her nose and responded in a condescending tone of voice, "Ohhhhhhhh." She then turned to my African American male colleague and said, "Well, I'll see you." She walked away.

My African American male colleague then turned to me and attempted to continue the conversation we had been engaged in before the white

woman approached him without any thought to what had occurred. As he talked, I stared at him in disgust. I made no effort to disguise it. He innocently asked what was wrong. I couldn't respond. I didn't want to respond. I just stared at him for several seconds then returned to my task. After a moment, he walked away. The possibility of any real collegiality between us was destroyed on that day. My experiences only became worse.

In coming to this university I also became the second woman in the department. My female colleague exemplified a type of feminism I did not understand nor embrace. Although we had mutual feelings of uneasiness with one another, she expected me to be supportive and loyal to her based on our shared gender while my African American male colleague demanded loyalty and support to him based on our shared ethnicity. But neither of them offered such support to me based on these commonalities. I would quickly discover that the two of them were supportive and loyal to one another based on their shared sexuality. As the school year continued, I became increasingly aware of my ability to fade in and out of "invisibility." During faculty meetings, whenever any discussion of women was brought up, my white female colleague was considered the expert and whenever any discussion of African Americans was raised, my African American male colleague was considered the expert.

Neither of them ever included me in the discussions and whenever I attempted to contribute, I felt silenced. Yet, I experienced this "invisibility" and disrespect from my colleagues on a daily basis, especially from my two minority colleagues, even to the point of the two plotting how to get rid of me. Why? I would later discover that it was because I had invaded their space, their distinctiveness. They were no longer the *only* female and *only* African American faculty member in the department. They weren't special anymore. However, as difficult as it was, I tried to persevere. I worked hard to increase my record of conference presentations and publications. I won three national

fellowships. I established myself in the community as a lecturer in African American Studies and Women Studies, especially in the area of womanist theory and methodology and soon was regarded on the campus as an expert in Women Studies, African American communication, and multiculturalism, being invited to give lectures in other faculty's member classes, conducting workshops for students, and giving presentations to women's groups in the community.

I was later appointed founding director of the university's ethnic studies program. Despite obstacles and roadblocks, some initiated by my two minority colleagues, the launch of the program was a major success. The next year I was invited to kick off the Women's Studies Annual Colloquia Series with a lecture highlighting my research on intersectionality and womanist theory. In doing these things I reinvented myself from the position for which I had been hired and the role others stereotypically expected me to fulfill. My new identity as a leader had been created. Celie taught me how to transform my situation and myself.

In reflecting on this experience, it was made more significant when I became a devoted fan of the television series *Soul Food* (Henderson). *Soul Food*, adapted from the critically acclaimed movie of the same title, looks at family traditions and life through the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of the Josephs, an African American family living in Chicago, Illinois. The oldest sibling, Teri, a labor attorney, is a junior associate at a prestigious law firm, Greene Norris, located in Chicago. She is the only woman and rblind discourses on television viewing audiences of the primetime junior associate at the firm, winning the most cases and bringing in the most clients. She has worked hard and has followed the rules. A two-time divorcee, Teri is a highly driven and ambitious career woman, full of ideas and strategies from which the firm has greatly benefitted. However, her self-confidence, aggressiveness, and ambition were contributing factors in her being passed over for partner, as communicated to her by her mentor. But in one particular episode (2001) Terri is taught an important lesson

from one of her clients, Rick Grant, an African American male and CEO for Lamont Airlines. Rick comes to Teri's office to complete their work and notices a change in her demeanor. She's still professional and courteous but not as cheerful.

Rick: "Are you okay?"

Teri: "Actually no, but I'll work through it. Besides my problems aren't Lamont Airlines' problems."

Rick: "Lamont Airlines isn't sitting here asking you how you are. Rick Grant is."

Teri: [sigh] "I found out today, unofficially, that I didn't make partner."

Rick: "I see. How many African Americans partners are employed here at Greene Norris?"

Teri: "None."

Rick: "How many women?"

Teri: "None."

Rick: "So what happens now?"

Teri: "I really don't know."

Rick: "You're so sure of yourself that you don't have a contingency plan? You are a young black woman working in a minefield called corporate America. You should always have a Plan B no matter how good you think you are."

In this scene, Rick introduces Teri to the art of reinvention, a skill that will serve her well in the future. Teri leaves Greene Norris to work at a predominately African American law firm where she makes partner quickly. Later, a large New York based law firm recruits her—a firm that has also acquired the Chicago-based Greene Norris. In illustrating the notion of "turnaround is fair play," Teri is made the managing partner of the Chicago office, effectively positioning her as the superior of the same attorneys who refused to make her a partner a year earlier.

Even though my first reinvention had occurred almost seven years earlier, this episode reinforced for me that I had made the right decision. The art of reinvention occurred again in 2006 at a different institution when I felt like I had been maliciously pushed out of a multisectional course that I had been so successful in teaching. I was momentarily upset about it but felt I couldn't openly complain because I would become the stereotypical angry black woman. This time I consciously thought about Rick Grant's advice to Terry. *You're a black woman; you have to always have a backup plan.* As a result, I took one of the not so popular rhetoric courses, recreated it, and made it my own. The course now works well for me. I also took advantage of work opportunities outside of my department.

The experiences for many faculty of color, especially women, at PWIs have been described as negotiating "personal and psychological minefields" (Ruffins 18-26). Contributing factors to the existence of such minefields include a display of cognitive dissonance because the faculty member can feel overworked, over-committed, and burned out; placed unwillingly and continually in the role of multicultural expert and unable to move beyond that role because of other colleagues' expectations and assumptions; appointed to committees solely because of race/ethnicity and gender; lack of supportive networks; the need to continually prove oneself to colleagues; feelings of isolation and alienation because of different perspectives; research interests and classroom experiences that differ from

colleagues; being penalized in the tenure and promotion process for engaging in diversity-related activities and research.

Additional factors include having your authority challenged in the classroom; expectations of being an "easy" grader and compensating for the "tough" grades students will get from their white professors; your otherness status is always exposed and made available to be the sacrificial lamb or thrown under the bus, if needed.

The experiences of faculty of color as they are subjected to these situations have come to be categorized as racial microagressions. Racial microaggressions are brief and common verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, which, whether intentional or intentional, communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Sue, Capodilupo, Turino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, and Esquilin). Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such acts when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities, although I contend that some perpetrators are quite aware of their actions and their potential impact. I have experienced racial microaggressions and have learned that it is healthy and necessary for colleagues of color to discover the power of bouncing back by creating contingency plans when insults, disappointments, and failures occur. It was a lesson I had to learn quickly if I expected to survive. Celie Harris and Teri Joseph offered good examples.

Another mediated mentor for me has been Harriet DeLong, from the critically acclaimed series, *In the Heat of the Night,* created in 1988 (Barrett), and based on the novel by John Ball and the 1967 movie (Jewison) of the same title. Situated in the fictitious town of Sparta, Mississippi, the show centered on the relationship of Virgil Tibbs, a Philadelphia detective who has returned home for his mother's funeral. Based on his relationship with Police Chief Bill Gillespie from a past murder investigation, Tibbs is persuaded by Gillespie to remain in Sparta to become Chief of Detectives in an effort to help overcome the city's

reputation of being a racist town. Although the relationship between Tibbs and the police officers was tumultuous at the beginning, Tibbs's expertise motivated the officers to warm up to him and they began to come together in improving law enforcement in Sparta. The weekly storylines provided a variety of real world issues including racism, sexual abuse, police brutality, drug abuse, homophobia, Anti-Semitism, government corruption, drunk driving, and burglary.

Season Three (1991) introduces Harriet DeLong, an uncompromising city councilwoman. DeLong is intelligent, beautiful, aggressive, the consummate professional who can stand up for herself in any conversation with anyone. She never thinks of herself as less than anyone. She's tough but feminine and polite in her toughness. Harriet DeLong often butts heads with Chief Gillespie (who she would later marry) and the other members of the city council, but she is unabashed in standing up for what she believes is just. For these reasons I am inspired by the character of Harriet DeLong.

Perhaps my greatest modern-day mediated mentor is Olivia Pope from the series, *Scandal* (Rhimes). *Scandal* is a political thriller television series that takes place in Washington, D.C. and focuses on Olivia Pope. Pope is the head of Olivia Pope and Associates, a crisis management firm. She and her staff are known as "gladiators" who have dedicated their careers to protecting the public image of the nation's elite, including the president and White House staff. Prior to forming her own crisis management firm, Olivia Pope was the White House Communications Director. She's also the president's mistress.

I devote every Thursday night to *Scandal*. During this hour I do not make nor receive phone calls. I do not send nor receive emails, texts, tweets, nor answer the door. Thirty minutes before *Scandal*, I walk my dog and upon our return give him a toy or treat that will keep him occupied for at least 45 minutes. I dress for bed, go to my kitchen cupboard and take out my Olivia Pope wine glass. Sometimes it has wine

in it; oftentimes milk. But it really doesn't matter what's in the glass. It's the large wine glass that's important because Olivia has one. It's for ambiance. I'm a gladiator in pajamas. So I take refuge every Thursday evening on the living room sofa to become an eyewitness to secrets and lies, mayhem and corruption, blood and guts, trials and triumphs, viciousness and sycophancy, seduction and romance.

Each action-packed hour also offers insight about real world issues and personal dilemmas. There are lessons to be learned. Nearly every line that Olivia Pope speaks is empowering and I, in kind, feel empowered. Every female *Scandal* fan likely comes to this conclusion via their commitment to the drama. We aspire to be more like Olivia Pope. She is beautiful, intelligent, feisty, skilled in the rhetoric of argumentation, and can communicate powerfully with anyone. Olivia has a swagger that demands respect. Her public persona is a model of proficiency, efficiency and grace. She is always impeccably dressed. Her personal life is in disarray unfortunately because she has not devoted much time to developing one. But in many ways Olivia Pope represents many professional women. The more time spent developing a professional public persona, the less time we have to devote to the personal one. In this sense Olivia is merely a mirror reflecting our own dilemmas. Many women can identify with Olivia Pope and are drawn to her because of her public persona. The following are some of Olivia Pope's sage wisdom which I use as daily affirmations:

1. Whatever happens, I do not give up. It is my name on the office door and I do not give up.

I think about Olivia's affirmation to her gladiators in moments of frustration after leaving a class where someone was disruptive or a committee meeting where an hour or two of my day has been wasted over nonsense. I will then assess that as long as my name is on my office door, I continue to fight and do the work I believe in and have been called to do.

2. It's handled.

I love this affirmation. It communicates loudly and clearly confidence in the work you can do and have done. When I leave my classroom every Tuesday and Thursday and have done what I set out to do, when I have expressed what I needed to say in a meeting, giving breath to my physical presence, weakening my objectification, I quietly affirm to myself, "It's handled."

3. My gut tells me everything I need to know.

Instincts are powerful. This affirmation relates to the importance of following one's instincts. I have learned that trouble or hurt happens when I don't follow my own instincts, my gut feelings. When I ignore the siren going off in my head that tells me not to trust a colleague on a particular issue or don't go along with a colleague on a plan of action, I pay the price for ignoring the warning. I have learned to trust my gut. Olivia continues to mentor me to do so.

4. You don't get to run. You're a gladiator. Gladiators don't run. They fight. They slay dragons. They wipe blood. They stitch their wounds and live to fight another day. You don't get to run.

Olivia's mantra to her gladiators has relevance to me as well. In view of all of the challenges I have faced, why do I continue? It's a question I often contemplate. I always return to the same answers: I enjoy what I do, I feel compelled to do what I do, and I persist in the manner in which I do it. I have tried to walk away from the academy but I can't. I have concluded that it is what I was called or destined to do. Like Olivia Pope, I don't get to run.

Feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins reinforces for women of color that we cannot afford to be fools of any type, for our objectification as the

Other denies us the protection that white skin, maleness, and wealth confer. This distinction between knowledge and wisdom, and the use of experience as what divides these issues, has been key to (our) survival. In the context of race, gender, and class oppression, the distinction is essential. Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate (208).

Of all of the *Scandal* episodes, the most memorable scene is one in which Collins' argument is reinforced. In this episode (2013), the media and the country discovers that Olivia is the president's mistress. She departs from her condo building unaware that others know. The media has gathered outside of her building and when she steps outside, she is ambushed and overwhelmed. However, bodyguards are waiting to whisk her away to a limo. When she gets in the limo, she says in amazement, "Dad?" Olivia's father, Rowan Eli Pope, makes his debut to *Scandal*. He takes her to a hangar at the airport and has prepared for her to leave the country with a new identity. Rowan scolds Olivia for believing that the president loves her and wants to marry her. He is disappointed that she would settle for being the president's lady instead of secretary of state or chief of staff. Olivia argues with him and the following exchange occurs:

> Rowan: "What did I tell you? What did I tell you? How many times have I told you, you have to be what? You have to be what?"
>
> Olivia: "Twice …"
>
> Rowan: "What?"
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> Olivia: "Twice as good as them to get half of what they have. "
>
> Rowan: "Twice as good as them to get half of what they have."

Although race is never mentioned, the exchange was, indeed, a "racial moment," espousing a lesson I continually heard from my parents, my pastor, my teachers as a student in segregated public schools, and my professors at my historically black university. The "you" in Rowan Pope's furious baritone voice referred to African Americans and the "they" referred to White Americans. For African American viewers, especially "baby boomers" and their off-spring, Rowan Pope's advice about the need to work harder and outperform white peers just to be considered "good enough" was an all too familiar sage wisdom. It has been a valuable life lesson for African Americans in the workplace for decades.

For example, in the movie, *Something New* (Hamri), the African American characters refer to this mantra as paying the "black tax." What was interesting about this *Scandal* episode was that because it was considered a "racial moment" by so many African American viewers, it immediately went viral. This event reinforced for me that the advice was not outdated. It would become the most epic of Rowan Pope's passionate monologues endorsing the advice of a race-conscious parent. Even in his wickedness, Rowan Pope can sometimes offer important "equipment for living" (Burke) for Scandal viewers. Olivia gets on the plane anyway but quickly changes her mind and exits the plane. Being known as the Washington fixer, she handles the media and turns the situation around. But she is frequently haunted by her father's words.

I return to Celie in *the Color Purple:* On an Easter Sunday, Celie prepares to leave her common-law husband and goes with Shug Avery, Shug's new husband, and Tweet, a young woman who has also discovered herself. Out of anger, Mister flings insults at Celie. Mister says: "Look at you. You're black, you're poor, you're ugly, and you're a woman. You're nothing at all."

But, as Celie gets in the car with her friends, she finds her voice, her inner strength, her dignity, and God within herself. Celie proclaims:

"I may be poor,

Black,

I may even be ugly.

But Dear God,

I'm here!

I'm here!"

When I think about all I have experienced and survived in this multi-faceted minefield known as academia, painful memories no longer torment me and I am grateful for the friendships I have made, the networks I have developed, the skills and strategies I have constructed, and the blessings. But when I am rendered invisible, when colleagues forget how to pronounce my name, and when my worth is devalued because of my otherness, I think of Celie Harris and that extraordinary Easter morning when she found her voice. Her words emancipate me.

Although I will continue to seek the advice, collegiality, and support of live mentors, mediated mentors will also continue to have a place in my journey in the academy. I see mentoring reflected in whoever helps me to reveal and perhaps demonstrate a truth, suggest a course of action, or to consider a different point of view. Stories can reinforce harsh truths, teach us to endure, celebrate, or apply ourselves in ways we might not have imagined possible.

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