



Traumatic Accumulation and Enumeration: A Poetic Voice for Experiences of Prejudice and Discrimination in the Academic Workplace

Ellen D.B. Riggle, University of Kentucky

Abstract: Two poems give voice to individuals with marginalized and stigmatized identities in the academy. The first poem is a breathless recitation of experiences of prejudice and discrimination, with ellipses providing a pause for the reader to engage and add their own experiences, expanding the voice. The second poem lists the cliché responses many with marginalized and stigmatized identities have experienced when reporting experiences of prejudice and discrimination. The clichés are a crescendo of attempts to deny voice and shift accountability to and ultimately silence marginalized people. Through an accessible and interactive form, the poems engage individuals and invite institutions to recognize and reflect on practices of reporting and responding to acts of prejudice and discrimination.

Preface

Two poems give voice to events of prejudice and discrimination in the academy experienced by individuals with marginalized and stigmatized identities, the impact compounded by paternalistic responses to informal or formal reporting of these experiences.

The first poem is a breathless recitation of a sample of instances of prejudice and discrimination experienced by me over 35 years as a professor in an academic institution. All events listed can be linked directly to my positionality as a person who does not conform to and actively disrupts the gender(ed) expectations—in appearance and demeanor—for a White (assumed-)woman, and intersecting with my lesbian identity and queer being.

Ellipses provide a pause for the reader to engage, adding their own experiences and expanding the poetic voice. I, as author, speak my own experience and do not appropriate the experiences and traumas of others while holding space open for those voices to be added—filling the gaps and voids epitomizing actively created silences of marginalized and stigmatized voices within institutions.

The second poem lists cliché responses to reports of acts of prejudice and discrimination that I and others have experienced from colleagues and institutional officers. This crescendo of statements, which often sound like commands, attempts to deny our voice and shift accountability to the marginalized, ultimately silencing us. The litany is recognizable as a source of trauma—direct and vicarious—creating acute and chronic harms to the bodies and well-being of individuals, and where even tenure or long-term contracts may not alleviate precarity and vulnerability.

In an accessible and interactive form, these poems engage with and encourage individuals to break silence; they invite institutions to reflect on their practices of receiving reports of and responding to acts of prejudice and discrimination.

Experiences of Prejudice or Discrimination in the Academic Workplace: Traumatic Accumulation

Survey question: *“Have you ever experienced prejudice or discrimination in the workplace?”*

Promotion denied (twice). Interrupted when I speak. Ignored (is it my assumed sex? my gray hair?). Credit to the next man who repeats the same thing I just said. ... Assuming I have no family to go home to because I’m queer. The phone call never received with the offer untendered. Action uncredited. Deed unrecognized. ... The preface, “you must be too busy for this” or “you don’t like to do these types of things” (from a cis-straight man who knows the next in line for the award is a cis-straight man he calls brother). ... Denigrated. Belittled. Unbelievable. Unread. Research devalued and dismissed. ... My walk mocked, tone ridiculed. The set-up and bait. Graphic (phallic) graffiti on my desk—it was not a masterpiece. Envelope with no return address for me to respond to the indictment within. ... The below average raise for the above average evaluation. ... Cut off. Shut down. ...

Survey response: “☒ YES”

Paternalistic Responses to Those Who Report Experiencing Prejudice or Discrimination in the Academic Workplace: Traumatic Enumeration

Things are much better now than they used to be.

It's not as bad as it used to be.

It'll get better.

It could be worse.

We've seen worse.

Keep your head down.

Don't burn bridges.

Don't worry so much.

It's not a big deal.

Hang in there.

If you would just...

Do your work.

Get over it.

Nobody got hurt.

You should...

Stop looking for trouble.

Stop imagining things.

They didn't mean it that way.

You're overreacting, calm down.

No one else complains.

Everyone else has moved on.

What's done is done.

It is what it is.

You're making things worse.

We don't want to hear anymore.

We are finished here.

Author Biography

*Ellen D.B. Riggle is an award-winning author and professor of political science and gender and women's studies at the University of Kentucky. Their research focuses on minority stress and health disparities, the impact of laws and political phenomena, and supports for positive identity and well-being for LGBTQ and gender-expansive people. For more information about the author's research, go to PrismResearch.org. In addition to academic journal articles, they are co-author of *A Positive View of LGBTQ* (2012); executive producer of [Becoming Myself: Positive Trans & Nonbinary Identities](#); and their poetry is published in *Rise Up Review*, *Pegasus*, and *Earth's Daughters*.*