

**“I Didn’t Succumb to the Darkness”: Multi-Modal Reflections on Black Womxn’s
Engineering PhD Spirit-Murdering Experiences**

Fantasi Nicole¹

Brooke Coley²

^{1, 2}Engineering Education Systems and Design, Arizona State University



Author Note

Fantasi Nicole:  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-2191-3185>

Brooke Coley:  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6425-8989>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Fantasi Nicole, 262 Surrine Hall,
Clemson, SC 29634. Phone 228-800-4483. Email fantasinicolephd@gmail.com

Art

Illustration 1.

“Cut Across, Into the Wom[x]nism and Positive That Wraps Her.”

Hippolyta, 2022. Multi-dimensional Painting.



Poem: “I Didn’t Succumb to the Darkness”

Just being a Black wom[x]n, we all know what’s there without even saying it. (Kagome)

We all know that someone somewhere is trying to suck the life out of you. (Kagome)

Doubt. Anger. Questions. Angry. Mad. Sad. Am I sure? (Ashley)

The things I think. They burn in my mind. And it’s just unfortunate. (Ashley/Kagome)

I’m a grown ass wom[x]n, but this is still my formative years as far as career goes. (Kagome)

And my positionality is not up for conversation for real. It is what it is. (Kadijah)

But if you want to have that conversation, that’s a different invoice, (Kadijah)

and that’s not necessarily what I’m being paid to do, what the research project is. (Kadijah)

But it’s still just that pressure of, (Nostalgia)

“I’m about to do all this hard work and the decision is still in somebody else’s hands. (Nostalgia)

My approach to engineering research . . . how it’s taught to us anyway. (Nostalgia)

There’s only one correct answer. Only one correct way to do it. (Nostalgia)

However, I want to make it my own, to make it authentic, representative of the population I’m trying to serve. (Nostalgia)

So the time process I’ve had dealing with spirit-murdering (Nostalgia)

to rebuild who I am, the way I perceive things and how I want to be, (Nostalgia)

Our hackles rise up, our blood pressure rises up, our body temperatures rise. (Kadijah)

Figuratively, you have this thing happen to you. Your spirit dies. (Nostalgia)

Spirit-murdering is targeted. It is targeted. It’s accumulation, though. (Hippolyta)

[They’re] going after you, your scholarship, your work, what you do, how you are in this world.
(Hippolyta)

I can’t un-remember some of the things said and written. It lessens a bit over time, but 9 years out, I still experience it. (Hippolyta)

So that [fuels] me having anxiety about what does this mean for my standing in the program?
(Harper)

I couldn’t grasp what I’ve actually done with my life these past four years. It called everything into question. (Kagome)

Confusion. Angry. Super pissed. White wom[x]n’s tears. Made me feel like I was in trouble.
(Harper)

It’s a blindsided eruption. It’s just a real shock to your system. I still battle with that.
(Nostalgia/Ashley)

But they all cut across into the wom[x]nism, that cut into the person, into her face. (Hippolyta)
The wom[x]nism and the positive that wraps her up to push up against that. (Hippolyta)

It’s a constant battle . . . And always be ready to fight in my mind. (Ashley)

Not being enough. Always question myself. (Ashley)

Anxiety and depression were not really parts of my life until grad school. (Hippolyta)

Ruined my gut. Definite connections for Black wom[x]n and fibroids and anxiety and stress.
(Hippolyta)

Times over the years where my hair was coming out. (Hippolyta)

Weight gain . . . Exercise every day . . . I’m not losing any weight (Hippolyta)

Just talking about it still gives me a physical visceral reaction. (Kagome)

Figurative blood, sweat, and tears. But some of that was literal in a lot of ways. (Hippolyta)

Yes, I would love to teach, but how much is that dream going to cost me? (Ashley)

If that dream causes me to get sick and die by 40, is it worth it? (Ashley)

So in order to [let my spirit rejuvenate], I’m in autopilot. Not really stirring the pot, not really making no noise. (Nostalgia)

Having this darkness, and even in the dark cloud, . . . pieces of red and orange . . . Representing hell. (Hippolyta)

Textures. Directional. Maroon, just the harshness. It’s not a flat experience, . . . demonstrate some additional depth. (Hippolyta)

The environment is different, but the context is at least partly the same. A different person projecting this, but the impact being similar. (Kagome)

The red is definitely the thing that people get caught up on, which is the trauma, or the roots, or what might make me different from whatever space I’m in. (Kadijah)

That purple angle, where it might look like trauma . . . is more royal. That’s just the background of where I come from. (Kadijah)

It’s been over 50 years. You should have been changed something right then or there. (Ashley)

And if you’re not going to change over the next 50 years, why are you lying to me? (Ashley)

Do what you need to do so your committee will let you out. (Ashley)

Even though I can survive this, do I necessarily have to go through that again in an academic career? (Ashley)

I know that I can put the work in to get whatever I need to get done. (Ashley)

But now I think it’s like, “Is it necessary? . . . Does it really require this?” (Ashley)

It’s really hard for me to even be interested in entering [academia] again. (Kadijah)

I still want to, but I think I have a lot more standards about what that would need to look like.
(Kadijah).

I’m seeing that I’m also proud that even with all these dark things or doubts, (Nostalgia)

I didn’t give up. I didn’t succumb to the darkness. (Nostalgia)

I don’t know if that’s resiliency or what, (Nostalgia)

And maybe this is something that I’m learning, too. (Nostalgia)

Rules of Engagement

Art and poetry are living modes of representation that allow the ability for different forms of access, interpretation, and reflection of the data for the researcher, the Homegirls, the readers, and the listeners (Owton, 2013). It is designed to enhance criticality and flexibility through authentic engagement with individual and collective reflections and responses to what is presented (Rapport & Sparkes, 2009). It also serves as a means of being more inclusive to those who may not speak, write, see, hear, comprehend, or retain the same way as was believed to be the traditional way of presenting academic research. Using art, storytelling, and poetry allows us to honor voices and traditions that were once excluded as forms of traditional academic scholarship and devalued as being “othered” forms of knowledge. The inclusion of all modalities

of data collection, analysis, and representation can cultivate innovative evolution of engineering as a field, practice, and education.

Serving as an evolved version of the second paper of Dr. Nicole’s dissertation (Nicole, 2023), this paper seeks to make meaning of the spirit-murdering experiences of Black womxn in engineering doctoral programs by engaging with living forms of research representation. Therefore, we encourage you to keep the following tips in mind as you critically engage with this research:

1. **Understanding Spirit-Murdering.** Spirit-murdering, conceptualized by Black womxn scholars, is “the personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries to people of color through the fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism, privilege, and power” (Love, 2014, 2017; Williams, 1987). As we consider the problem of underrepresentation to be a meta spirit-murdering experience, we used it as the critical incident for Homegirl reflections because it allowed us to 1) study race, inequities, and systems, 2) highlight trauma, reactions, accumulation, and residual impact, 3) evoke emotional resonance which is needed for multi-modal research involving artistic data (Nicole, 2023).
2. **Black Womxn as Homegirls.** The Black womxn in our study, Nostalgia, Hippolyta, Harper, Kagome, Ashley, and Kadijah, are referred to as our Homegirls, our intellectual contributors. We refuse the use of the word “participants” because for too long, Black womxn’s intellectual contributions in the form of lived experiences and trauma have been used to advance academic scholarship and practice with the womxn being undervalued and discredited (Nicole, 2023). Our Homegirls all identified as Black womxn with previous professional experience who were enrolled in, or had already graduated from, historically white institution (HWI) engineering PhD programs in the United States. We

honor our Homegirls, our womxn contributors with shared identity markers, by advocating for them and honoring their experiences and efforts. As this is an article rooted in Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 1990), we operationalize the term “womxn” here only to decenter men and sexism and to center and empower women (Ashlee et al., 2017; Nicole, 2023). This is not to be used as an alternative to be inclusive to trans women and femme-presenting nonbinary persons as it has historically been (Kunz, 2019). We do believe that they are already included in the term “women” and do not need a separate classification (Nicole, 2023).

3. **Engage With The Emotion.** Research is meant to be engaged with in an iterative and reflective way. The art, poem, and discussion will ebb and flow in ways that require you to engage with all pieces as you progress through this research. Engage with your emotions and thoughts as you read. This work is very evocative emotionally and provoking thoughtfully. That is normal and we must normalize it as an appropriate process for research engagement. We must normalize pushing through discomfort in order to disrupt systemic harm. Now, let us engage with this work.

Multi-Modal Representations

Explanation of Artistic Painting

“Cut Across, Into the Wom[x]nism and Positive That Wraps Her” is a multi-dimensional painting created by Hippolyta in 2022 as a research artifact in Nicole’s dissertation study. Each Homegirl was asked to create a visual artistic expression of their conceptualization of spirit-murdering, and Hippolyta created hers based on her engineering journey from her undergraduate experience through her doctoral program experiences. Hippolyta’s art piece was chosen because it artistically called out the main tenets that came across in the Homegirls’ reflections. One of the

main tenets was that of self-defined values and identity, and the way they described themselves as whole human beings prior to their engagement in an engineering doctoral program. All Homegirls referenced their identity and values with things representing beauty, strength, intelligence, resilience, pride, and community. For instance, most womxn drew themselves as different shades of Black bodies, and had colors like white, gold, and purple to represent their womxnism, intellect, and royalty. The second main tenet was the harshness of their engineering doctoral program experiences, each referring to some form of correction and surveillance (Foucault, 1990) and institutional betrayal and trauma (Smith & Freyd, 2014) that they experienced because of their marginalized identities and values. All Homegirls referenced this harshness with warm colors, like orange and red, which traditionally represent intensity when used to describe degree or depth. The third main tenet was the longitudinal impact it had on them, most expressing psychological harm manifesting in physical ways. This was represented by something coming towards their face (which corresponds with their identity), towards the top of their head (which corresponds with their intellect and epistemology), and towards their body (which corresponds with their strength and stability).

Explanation of Poem Creation

This poetic inquiry (Kromidas, 2019; McClaurin, 2001; Prendergast et al., 2009) was created in a composite narrative expression that highlighted the collective and individual Black womxn’s ways of accounting the impact of spirit-murdering experiences throughout their engineering doctoral programs. Homegirls contributed to the overall dissertation study (Nicole, 2023) by 1) engaging in an initial homegirl conversation, which served as an initial consultation to make sure we operationalized “spirit-murdering” the same way; 2) creating a 2D art piece describing what spirit-murdering means to them; 3) recording a narrative explaining the

conception of their art piece and what each component means; 4) a “spirit-murdering” homegirl conversation, where we had conversations that ebbed and flowed around their experiences within their engineering doctoral programs. The creation of the poem was based on the data collection and analysis of the art narrative and “spirit-murdering” homegirl conversation transcripts. A codebook was developed using the first pass analysis data and the following themes were established during the second pass analysis of the transcripts: 1) the conceptualization of spirit-murdering, 2) the spirit-murdering experience, 3) the homegirl’s positionality, 4) and the homegirl’s perspectives on their experiences. An interpretive lens was used to determine the poem content and the flow of the themes. Piecing together lines of the Homegirls’ excerpts, the poem opens with their positionality, which feeds into their spirit-murdering experiences, followed by their conceptualization of spirit-murdering, and finishes with their perspectives on those experiences. Names were included at the end of quotes to highlight individual experiences that also represented the collective of the Homegirls in this study. This analysis and representation work led to the resulting poem, “I Didn’t Succumb to the Darkness.”

Discussion

Explanation of Poem Content

Stanza 1: Kagome/Ashley speak about a common, understood epistemology (or way of knowing) for Black womxn because of their shared experiences of being Black and womxn in their current social location, which in this case is multi-layered (see restatement of Stanza 1 below).

Just being a Black wom[x]n, we all know what’s there without even saying it. (Kagome)

We all know that someone somewhere is trying to suck the life out of you. (Kagome)

Doubt. Anger. Questions. Angry. Mad. Sad. Am I sure? (Ashley)

The things I think . . . They burn in my mind. And it’s just unfortunate. (Ashley/Kagome)

The multi-layered social location that these womxn exist in includes: 1) the United States—which happens to be majority white, 2) their respective doctoral institutions—which are all historically white institutions, and 3) their respective engineering doctoral programs—with roughly 0.56% of engineering doctorates being awarded to Black womxn in the year 2021 (American Society for Engineering Education, 2022). Because of their social location within these environments that they live and operate in, they experience things that only people with those marginalized identities can, and will, experience as a result of their marginalized identities (Charleston et al., 2014; Grollman & Hagiwara, 2019; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2022). Black womxn experience things that other social groups would not, and do not understand because they exist within a different social location within society (Armour-Burton & Etland, 2020). Therefore, when Black womxn try to explain their experiences and ways of knowing, it is often looked at as subjugated knowledge (Michel Foucault, 1990, p.82), resulting in them questioning their intellectual aptitude/ability. This coincides with several tenets of a theory that Patricia Hill Collins developed called Black Feminist Thought (Hill Collins, 1990). Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is a theory that represents a collective of words, ideas, expressions, and experiences of Black feminist intellectuals both within and outside of academia (Hill Collins, 1990). It is vital to examining how the complexities of Black womxn’s intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and more shape our experiences and how these experiences shape consciousness as Black womxn (Hill Collins, 1990). Even more, it explains how these experiences are cultivated through the matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 1990), which is an interlocking system of oppression with multiple levels that causes oppression for those with multiple marginalized identities. This matrix of domination presents multi-layered oppressive

experiences that work to kill the mind and spirit, which often manifests in physical ways. I will refer to these experiences and the implications of these experiences as spirit-murdering. I first heard the term spirit-murdering in accordance with scholars Patricia Williams (1987) and Bettina Love (2014, 2017), as “the personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries to people of color through the fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism, privilege, and power.” Because of our interest in exploring Black womxn, I felt marrying the spirit-murdering definition with the tenets of BFT would be complimentary in exploring Black womxn’s reflections of spirit-murdering experiences in their engineering doctoral programs through multi-modal representations.

Stanza 2: Kagome/Kadijah speak about their positionality (Secules et al., 2020) as it relates to their Black, womxn, adult, professional, and researcher identities (see restatement of Stanza 2 below).

I’m a grown ass wom[x]n, but this is still my formative years as far as career goes. (Kagome)

And my positionality is not up for conversation for real. It is what it is. (Kadijah)

But if you want to have that conversation, that’s a different invoice, (Kadijah)

and that’s not necessarily what I’m being paid to do, what the research project is. (Kadijah)

Operating in these engineering PhD spaces, these Homegirls describe how their intellectual contributions, their values and identities, are often under surveillance and not valued or respected within their scholarly environments. They even acknowledge the tension that occurs between their identities as adult Black womxn with professional work experience and their roles as doctoral students and engineering researchers on their advisor’s or other faculty’s grant projects. They speak on how people question what they know in a way that questions their identity and their intellect. However, they also own their professional identities as well by

sharing their identities as “grown ass wom[x]n” and needing people to pay them for that additional labor of also having to explain who they are, which is a burden that students existing in privileged groups do not have to do. This is referred to as the minority tax (Rodriguez, 2015), which is the “burden of time and resources placed on minority persons to represent and advocate for their communities” (p.1).

Stanza 3: Nostalgia speaks on being in an environment like her engineering doctoral program, where there is a preconceived notion of being objective and there being a right way to engineer (see restatement of Stanza 3 below).

But it’s still just that pressure of, (Nostalgia)

“I’m about to do all this hard work and the decision is still in somebody else’s hands.

(Nostalgia)

My approach to engineering research . . . how it’s taught to us anyway . . . (Nostalgia)

There’s only one correct answer. Only one correct way to do it. (Nostalgia)

However, I want to make it my own, to make it authentic, representative of the population I’m trying to serve. (Nostalgia)

However, what do you do when certain ways of being and doing in engineering do not align with your values, your way of knowing, and your way of doing? This is what happens for Black womxn in engineering when they are taught to be objective. From an outsider-within (Hill Collins, 1990) perspective, you don’t always have the same perspective as those who claim to be “objective.” I argue that there is no such thing as objectivity in engineering because everything from inception, to design, to production, to deployment, to maintenance is done by human beings like you and me. The only difference from the Black womxn and the people who claim objectivity, is that Black womxn live in the margins of engineering. This means that the makeup

of engineering norms, culture, rules, etc. are based on people who belong to the majority group, which is why they feel that these things are “fair;” because they align with the majority. However, time has proven the majority may always rule, but the majority is not always right. This majority rule through notions of “objectivity” works to exclude any other way of establishing engineering practices, or innovations that are authentic to the engineer themselves, or representations of the populations they wish to serve. This adds an undue amount of pressure to Black womxn engineers to try to uphold their desires in a system that does not value what they value.

Stanzas 4-8: Nostalgia/Kadijah/Hippolyta/Harper/Kagome/Ashley speak to the vicious way that spirit-murdering compounds upon them as Black womxn, as scholars, as human beings (see restatement of Stanzas 4-8).

So the time process I’ve had dealing with spirit-murdering (Nostalgia)

to rebuild who I am, the way I perceive things and how I want to be, (Nostalgia)

Our heckles rise up, our blood pressure rises up, our body temperatures rise. (Kadijah)

Figuratively, you have this thing happen to you. Your spirit dies. (Nostalgia)

Spirit-murdering is targeted. It is targeted. It’s accumulation, though. (Hippolyta)

[They’re] going after you, your scholarship, your work, what you do, how you are in this world.

(Hippolyta)

*I can’t un-remember some of the things said and written. . . . It lessens a bit over time, but 9
years out, I still experience it. (Hippolyta)*

So that (fuels) me having anxiety about what does this mean for my standing in the program?

(Harper)

*I couldn’t grasp what I’ve actually done with my life these past four years. It called everything
into question. (Kagome)*

*Confusion. Angry. Super pissed. White wom[x]n’s tears. Made me feel like I was in trouble.
(Harper)*

*It’s a blindsided eruption. It’s just a real shock to your system. I still battle with that.
(Nostalgia/Ashley)*

*But they all cut across into the wom[x]nism, that cut into the person, into her face. (Hippolyta)
The wom[x]nism and the positive that wraps her up to push up against that. (Hippolyta)*

It’s a constant battle. . . . And always be ready to fight in my mind. (Ashley)

Not being enough. Always question myself. (Ashley)

Anxiety and depression were not really parts of my life until grad school. (Hippolyta)

*Ruined my gut. Definite connections for Black wom[x]n and fibroids and anxiety and stress.
(Hippolyta)*

Times over the years where my hair was coming out. (Hippolyta)

Weight gain . . . Exercise every day . . . I’m not losing any weight (Hippolyta)

Just talking about it still gives me a physical visceral reaction. (Kagome)

Figurative blood, sweat, and tears. But some of that was literal in a lot of ways. (Hippolyta)

They speak to the immediate impact being the physical response their body has to such a targeted offense (Bailey et al., 2017; Nicole, 2023; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2022). However, they also

highlight what it does to their psyche, noting that the impact is longitudinal and multi-layered as well, causing them to have anxiety and question themselves. Mind you, these Black womxn were more than qualified to pursue their doctoral degrees based on the academic standard. All six Homegirls included throughout the entire poem had previous full-time and/or internship professional experience prior to starting their PhD programs. Therefore, their intellect, according to the standards of whiteness, had been tried and true. Why is it that being in their engineering doctoral programs makes them question everything? I believe this is because of the hegemonic domain of power that exists in the matrix of domination (Hill Collins, 1990). The hegemonic domain of power is where people justify old systems of ideas by refashioning them as new “common sense” ideas. But recall, if Black womxn are outsiders-within when it comes to their engineering programs, they are typically not privy to the same notions of “common sense” as someone else who is demographically similar. This hegemonic way of operating causes spirit-murdering experiences to seem nonexistent to the majority group, causing one to uphold stereotypes of Black womxn speaking out on it as “sensitive,” “angry,” etc. (Doharty, 2020; Hill Collins, 2009; J. Celeste Walley-Jean, 2009; McGee & Martin, 2011). This aloof nature of the ivory tower then begins to impose ideals like imposter syndrome (Nicole & DeBoer, 2020; Stitt & Happel-Parkins, 2019) into the minds of Black womxn engineering doctoral students. This pattern causes an ongoing cycle of accumulated murders of this social group’s spirits, which manifests in emotional, mental, spiritual, and physical ways.

Stanzas 9-13: Ashley/Hippolyta/Kagome/Kadijah/Nostalgia speak to this dialectical relationship between oppression and activism (Hill Collins, 1990) and how that manifests itself through their understanding of the engineering academic environments they are in, or plan to be (see restatement of Stanzas 9-13).

Yes, I would love to teach, but how much is that dream going to cost me? (Ashley)

If that dream causes me to get sick and die by 40, is it worth it?” (Ashley)

So in order to [let my spirit rejuvenate], I’m in autopilot. Not really stirring the pot, not really making no noise. (Nostalgia)

Having this darkness, and even in the dark cloud, . . . pieces of red and orange. . . . Representing hell. (Hippolyta)

Textures. Directional. Maroon, just the harshness. It’s not a flat experience, . . . demonstrate some additional depth. (Hippolyta)

The environment is different, but the context is at least partly the same. A different person projecting this, but the impact being similar. (Kagome)

The red is definitely the thing that people get caught up on, which is the trauma, or the roots, or what might make me different from whatever space I’m in. (Kadijah)

That purple angle, where it might look like trauma . . . is more royal. That’s just the background of where I come from. (Kadijah)

It’s been over 50 years. You should have been changed something right then or there. (Ashley)

And if you’re not going to change over the next 50 years, why are you lying to me? (Ashley)

Do what you need to do so your committee will let you out. (Ashley)

Even though I can survive this, do I necessarily have to go through that again in an academic career? (Ashley)

I know that I can put the work in to get whatever I need to get done. (Ashley)

But now I think it’s like, “Is it necessary? . . . Does it really require this?” (Ashley)

It’s really hard for me to even be interested in entering [academia] again. (Kadijah)

I still want to, but I think I have a lot more standards about what that would need to look like.

(Kadijah).

I’m seeing that I’m also proud that even with all these dark things or doubts, (Nostalgia)

I didn’t give up. I didn’t succumb to the darkness. (Nostalgia)

I don’t know if that’s resiliency or what, (Nostalgia)

And maybe this is something that I’m learning too. (Nostalgia)

The five Homegirls in Stanzas 9-13 started their initial homegirl conversations with desires to become engineering professors; yet all but one have decided not to pursue academic endeavors post-graduation. Although they enjoyed what they did, they critically assessed if engineering academia was the environment that would allow them to be authentically themselves, doing work that serves a purpose, aligns with their values, and is equally valued. They recognized how they could evolve so much within their time in their programs; yet, questioned how institutions could stay the same over decades even though they all had diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. They discuss their strength to endure and how it kept them going through the dark times; however, they questioned if they wanted to endure that type of murder experience again just because they could “survive” it. Therefore, four of the six Homegirls presented in this poem have changed their professorial intentions (Burt, 2019; Coley

& Thomas, 2023) as impacted by their experiences. They expressed pride in not “succumb[ing] to the darkness,” but boy, what a loss to the engineering academic community.

Key Takeaways

Multi-modal representations of spirit-murdering presented in this article allowed us to explore Black womxn’s reflections on their engineering doctoral programs in ways that were critical, yet liberatory (Hill Collins, 2009). Arts-based research methods (ABR) have been used in other STEM fields, primarily science, as a way to connect deeper with the needs and interests of students (Allina, 2018; Emdin et al., 2016). In engineering, arts-based methods have primarily been used to inform STEM K-12 educational policies and practices (Aguilera & Ortiz-Revilla, 2021; Bequette & Bequette, 2012; Clapp & Jimenez, 2016; Graham, 2020; Guyotte et al., 2014). The use of ABR has proven to be influential in the development of students at the K-12 level learning science concepts and being connected to their educational experience (Kijima et al., 2021; Quigley et al., 2017). It has even been included in engineering ethics research (Hitt & Lennerfors, 2022). However, ABR has not been used as a lens for conducting and presenting research at the doctoral level in engineering. Creating and interpreting art and art narratives as meaning-making tools provided me with different vantages for assessing the knowledge in the data. Through these multi-modal representations of spirit-murdering, this study shows that Black womxn: 1) share common epistemologies with differing positionalities that are subject to the same spirit-murdering, 2) experience targeted acts of spirit-murdering that result in longitudinal impacts on professional endeavors, personal health, and intellectual efficacy, 3) often operate within the dialectical relationship between oppression and activism within their programs. As ABR promotes reflexivity, time investment, innovative thinking, and meaningful interpretation,

it can be used to explore critical occurrences in engineering while creating liberation through expression for marginalized groups.

There are several implications for faculty accountability and institutional transformation that we will mention here. One of the implications is around progressive grading/review rubrics. Homegirls expressed having experiences that made them question themselves and their value, despite having a proven track record of success in professional environments. One of the things that could help improve inequitable lived experiences is having progressive grading/review policies with transparent rubrics and frequent policy reviews. Creating space for students to co-create assignment expectations and rubrics, be flexible in assignment forms (i.e. written vs. video, etc.), and engaging in policy reviews will foster culturally relevant pedagogy practices (Buffington & Day, 2018) and an equitable and inclusive learning environment. Another thing that would help would be to hire external equity consultants. Have specialists come in and do sessions with your program’s faculty, staff, and students to make effective change. Many times, we are too close to the situation to see it from multiple perspectives or we just don’t have that expertise. Allow someone trained to do it, initiate the work of making yourself equitable. We pay for speakers, conferences, writing coaches, and everything else. Hire someone who will directly help create a system of equity within your respective spheres of influence. The last implication we will provide is creating a safe professional culture within your labs. Create an environment where your students are acknowledged as the professionals that they are, awarded for their successes, and supported on their journeys in the academy. There is no reason why a place of learning should cause malaise, harm, discomfort, or trauma to *anybody*. It should be a place where people are accepted and valued for their differences. Treat it as such.

We shared a few implications for faculty accountability and institutional transformation with you; however, we hope that you will engage with this work and identify ways that you know will help your particular situation. Whether you are a student, staff, faculty, or stakeholder, you all have a sphere of influence that you have some form of control over. Control it for the advancement of your entire sphere. Do what you can to mitigate spirit-murdering and foster equity for all.

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To Dr. Katreena Thomas, thank you for not allowing me to succumb to the darkness.

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Dr. Fantasi Nicole, also known as The Scholarly Vixen, integrates identity, intellect, and innovation to bring scholarship to the streets and culture to engineering. She focuses on liberatory methods to promote anti-racism and anti-sexism in engineering education, research, practice, and media. Dr. Nicole has participated in 13 grant-funded research projects, served in 4 DEI engineering offices, and consulted with 3 Fortune 500 engineering companies. Rising from a first-year engineering student with a 1.92 GPA to a four-time engineering graduate, she is currently a PROMISE Postdoctoral Fellow in the Engineering and Science Education Department at Clemson University.

Dr. Brooke Coley is the Founding Executive Director of the Center for Research Advancing Racial Equity, Justice, and Sociotechnical Innovation Centered in Engineering (RARE JUSTICE) and Assistant Professor of Engineering in the Fulton Schools of Engineering at Arizona State University.