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## Othermothering in the Academy

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### Using Maternal Advocacy for Institutional Change

*This article explores the notion of othermothering in the academy, a form of maternal advocacy, from the perspective of teacher and students in one academic institution. Seen by many as a survival mechanism for the physical and emotional well-being of children, especially when birthmothers are not present (Collins 1991; O'Reilly 2004), this article takes the concept of othermothering to the academy, and examines its utility there. It highlights four important components of othermothering in the academy: the ethic of care, cultural advancement, institutional guardianship, and institutional change. Written from the perspectives of a teacher and students, the authors engage in dialogue about the conditions that make othermothering in the academy work, and also discuss the potential costs. It begins with a review of the literature, including a discussion of maternal advocacy and othermothering as maternal advocacy and some of the challenges involved in othermothering. The article concludes with a dialogue that uncovers some of the challenges and rewards of othermothering as maternal advocacy in the academy, and implications for institutional change.*

#### Maternal Advocacy

The notion of maternal advocacy has gained currency in the academy with the work of early feminists, and more recently, through the institutional agency of Andrea O'Reilly and her colleagues in their work on motherhood in various contexts (O'Reilly 2004, 2008; Kinser). Looking specifically at feminism and mothering, Andrea O'Reilly (1998) states that much of the scholarship in this area falls under four themes: empowerment, agency, narrative and the motherline (16). She goes on to assert that transformative mothering has the power to effect change both in the home and beyond. Feminist mothers resist patriarchy,

advocate for institutional change and teach these skills to their daughters and sons, through modeling and mentoring. Mothers who simultaneously struggle to overcome gender and other forms of oppression need to teach their children strategies to survive and succeed against the odds.

Examining maternal agency from the margins, other scholars have articulated well the specific roles that mothers and the institution of motherhood play in challenging oppression, and charting new directions for the future generations (Collins 1990; Thomas; Cooper-Wilson and McCoy; Bedard; Roy; Bernard 1996, 2000; Bernard and Bernard). The enormous responsibility of raising children of African descent to survive and thrive in race conscious societies has been largely left to mothers, who engage in various acts of resistance and advocacy to fulfill their responsibilities. As Trudelle Thomas asserts, African American motherhood challenges mainstream culture to create pathways of success for their children. Similarly, Camille Cooper-Wilson and Shuntay McCoy argue that “shadow boxing” by African-American mothers is part of a resistance tradition to build better futures. This view is shared by Wanda Thomas Bernard (1996, 2000) who posits that Black mothers, and grandmothers, who are identified as guardians of the generations, are key to the survival and success in bringing Black boys to manhood. A similar view is shared in Aboriginal cultures. For example, Renee Bedard states that Anishinaabe women are given responsibility for raising and nurturing the next generation, not just in their nuclear families, but in their communities more holistically. Bedard says some of the most important mothers are women in our families and communities who do not have biological children of their own, but take on the role of aunties, grannies, and even adoptee mothers (73). Clearly, these examples exemplify the role of maternal agency as a strategy to resist oppression and fight for change. In the Canadian context the most visible form of maternal agency might be the Raging Grannies. Carole Roy’s article, “Pesky Raging Grannies: Speaking Truth to Power with Wisdom, Humour and Spunky Actions,” is a wonderful exploration of how powerful these groups are in their maternal activism. She argues that they are a positive example of transforming rage and despair into creative activism and courage. Their works are models of maternal activism that we can all seek to emulate. Most importantly however, she declares that the Raging Grannies are mothers with “attitude,” a deep sense of caring about others and a willingness to fight for rights in their communities. It is within this context of maternal agency that we situate our discussion of othermothering in the academy.

## **Othermothering**

The concept of othermothering has its roots in the African traditional worldview.

Othermothers are “women who assist blood mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities” (Collins 1990: 119). Patricia Hill Collins asserts that, “other mothers are key not only in supporting children but also in helping bloodmothers who, for whatever reason, lack the preparation or desire for motherhood” (1990: 180). This responsibility of taking care of the children of blood mothers may be temporary or permanent and may exist in formal settings like academic institutions or informally within communities or neighbourhoods (Conaway; Collins 1991; James cited in Case 26).

Andrea O’Reilly (2004) views othermothering as a survival mechanism which ensures that all children receive the mothering that would bring about both psychological and physical well-being and makes empowerment possible regardless of whether the biological mother is present or not (12). This survival strategy can be traced back to the era of slavery and slave trade when mothers were often separated from their children and children were often orphaned by the sale or death of their mothers (Hill cited in Conaway 6; Guiffrida 2005: 715). With the exclusion of “slave children” from any form of formal educational system, othermothering became a primary vehicle for education and fostered cultural identity (Dubey cited in Case 26).

Although blood mothers are expected to nurture and care for their children, Collins states that “African and African-American communities have also realized that vesting in one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible” (1990: 47). Rather than view children as the possessions of their parents, Collins emphasizes that they should be seen as valued and valuable members of the community who are in need of a broad network of support and for whom adults should assume responsibility. Othermothering involves all practices of effective or empowering mothering including social activism. As activists, othermothers and many Black educators contribute to the collective physical, emotional and intellectual welfare of the community (Conaway 4).

### **Othermothering in the Education System**

Although some aspects of the traditional practice of othermothering may have been eroded today, it is still present in Black communities. Moreover, othermothering is not limited only to communities but extends to educational institutions and influences the role of teachers in schools and their relationship with students. Candace Bernard and colleagues refer to the relationship that develops between African-American teachers and their Black students as “othermothering in the academy.” They view it as work that extends beyond traditional definitions of mentorship. Othermothering in the academy is a sharing of self, an interactive and collective process, a spiritual connectedness

that exemplifies the Africentric value of sharing, caring and accountability (Bernard et al. 68). “Academic mothering takes the form of informal advisement that may be academic or personal in nature” (Edwards 144). Arlene Edwards adds that academic mothering as practiced by Black female faculty, staff and sometimes upper level students also take the form of support groups or other types of groups with the aim of providing assistance and to pass on what is known to others in order to ensure success (144). In an exploration of aspects of segregated schools, Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant found that good teachers in Black schools often went above and beyond to assist students in formal education (as cited in Guiffrida 2005: 716).

The relationships between students and teachers impact the academic success of students (DeFour and Hirsch; Terenzini and Wright) their satisfaction with the educational institution (Astin) and the ability of the institution to retain students (DeFour and Hirsch Stoecker, Pascarella and Wolfe; Tinto cited in Guiffrida 2005: 70). While developing teacher/student relationship is important, some students face challenges in doing so, which may impact their level of achievement. Black students in predominantly White schools experience difficulties in developing relationships with White faculty (Fleming; Arnold). Michael Nettles states that students who attend predominantly White institutions have less contact with faculty outside of the classroom and are less likely to be academically integrated into campus life than White students (cited in Guiffrida 2005: 55). Moreover, a dialogue among African Canadians and African Caribbean students and faculty revealed that African Canadian students experience difficulties when looking for academic advisors for research projects that are African centered (Bernard et al.). Research also indicates that students of color rarely seek help from White faculty and prefer to turn to family, friends or academic counsellors from minority groups for academic help (Guiffrida 2003, 2004, 2005; Burrell and Tromley; Sanchez, Marder, Berry and Ross).

The development of a quality relationship between faculty and students may be influenced by different expectations that teachers and students have. While students have expectations for teachers to help them achieve success, teachers also hold beliefs about their efficiency, experiences in the classroom and “associated expectations” for students. The intersection of students’ and teachers’ expectations intertwines to influence the behaviour of teachers and students towards one another (Weiner et al. 208). If these expectations are not met, students may find it challenging to develop relationships with their teachers to help them become more comfortable and feel supported by their teachers in the academic environment. For students of African descent [and other racialized groups], the challenges they face in connecting with White teachers is because the students do not perceive them as realistic role models

(Guiffrida 2005: 702). This relationship is also affected by the perceptions of students who view the predominantly White institutions as culturally insensitive due to the failure of academic institutions to incorporate a culturally diverse curriculum (Fleming; Fries-Britt and Turner; Feagin et al. cited in Guiffrida 2005: 702).

Developing early teacher-student relationships is instrumental in helping students deal with such challenges and bring about academic success. Karen Case suggests that othermothering is a way in which teachers' early relationships with students may be important to their own classroom philosophy (cited in Weiner et al. 2008). Patricia Hill Collins stipulates that "unlike the traditional mentoring so widely reported in the educational literature, this relationship goes far beyond that of providing students with either technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts" (cited in Guiffrida 2005: 715).

As othermothers, Black teachers learned that they have the spiritual and moral obligation to uplift the Black community by catering to the academic, social and psychological needs of students (Guiffrida 2005: 716). A case study on othermothering in an African American elementary school revealed that successful educators attend to the psycho-educational and emotional development of students, develop strong relationships with the families of students and empower them by setting firm expectations for them (Case). In addition to this, reflections of African American women principals revealed that these principals consider it their mission to bring love, mothering and nurturing to their students as well as provide guidance to young parents (Loder 316). Academic mothering therefore includes the "creation of support systems and organizations which provide venues for students to 'exhale' and reach out to others who are similarly oppressed but who might otherwise not feel empowered enough to transform the setting into that which is positive and supporting" (Edwards 144). Othermothering signifies the continuity of shared responsibilities that are vital in empowering students and bringing about social transformation not only in communities but in educational institutions as well.

### **Othermothering in the Academy**

Edwards asserts that academic mothering involves meeting the needs of students, providing support in a reciprocal manner between students and between students and faculty, as well as a sense of urgency to ensure the retention of students, graduation or timely completion of student's assignments or responsibilities (149). In order to ensure the success and "academic survival" of students especially minority students, it is important for faculty

and staff members who practice othermothering to be devoted in mothering students from the “beginning of the process until its conclusion.” In stating the importance of incorporating othermothering in institutions of higher learning, Marybeth Gasman highlights three important components of othermothering: *ethic of care, cultural advancement and institutional guardianship* [emphasis ours]. These components have important rewards when infused into academic institutions.

Ethic of care centers on the interdependence of all individuals and takes into account the vulnerability of certain individuals. Carol B. Stack asserts that ethic of care is “a collective social conscience manifested through cultural strategies related to concern for reciprocity, commitment to community, and belief in the morality of responsibility” (cited in Case 36). Ethics of care therefore emphasizes the importance of having extra consideration to vulnerable communities and individuals while maintaining a relationship of mutual benefits. This component is very important in that educational institutions need to emphasize the psychoeducational needs of the students who may be experiencing various challenges in order to ensure academic achievement (Case). With the ethics of care in mind, educators as othermothers go beyond their responsibility of mentorship and role models for students, to ensure that they holistically serve the best interest of every student. Essentially, through working holistically, they are concerned with helping students fulfill their psychological and educational needs.

The second component of othermothering is cultural advancement that calls on educational institutions and the society as a whole to celebrate and promote the culture of various racialized and ethnic groups in institutions. Considering the fact that the Eurocentric worldview is dominant in academic institutions, incorporating the practice of othermothering through cultural enhancement will instill cultural pride among students from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. As a result, these students will enhance their cultural pride, positive self-pride and self-esteem. This will help ensure success not only for students but will also increase retention of students in academic institutions as well as degree attainment (Gasman).

Gasman states that institutional guardianship, the third component of othermothering, is when a college or university acknowledges that it has an important role in producing the next generation of graduates for the African-American community. Therefore, institutions need to acknowledge that it is their responsibility to ensure success of all students irrespective of culture race, gender, class, age, ability, sexual orientation or religion.

To conclude, othermothering in the academy represents the preservation of the practice of collective responsibilities that empowers students and brings about social transformation in educational institutions and communities. It is

guided by Africentric theory, most specifically the principles of a holistic conception of people, a collective consciousness, empowerment (Este and Bernard), and racial uplift (hooks). It signifies the rejection of individualism in favour of a value system wherein the ethic of care is paramount. As bell hooks says:

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (207)

This is the foundation of othermothering in the academy.

### **Context and Method**

When Wanda Thomas Bernard was invited to do a keynote talk on Othermothering in the Academy for Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement (MIRCI), she knew that this had to be an inclusive journey, as othermothering is not a solitary act, but happens in a context. Building on the process developed by Joyce Castle and Vera Woloshyn, she decided to engage in collaborative conversations, and invited some of the students she directly mentored to join her. In this work, we used personal narratives as a way to make meaning of our individual and collective experiences.

We reviewed the literature on othermothering in the academy, and then came together as a group to talk about our experiences. We further analyzed our experiences in relation to the literature, and identified themes in our collaborative conversations. Whilst we recognize that this method of inquiry is very subjective, it does not dismiss the authenticity of our lived experiences. We concur with Castle and Woloshyn that our "...collaborative dialogic analyses of our stories allow us to link our own worlds and troubles to more public issues" (44). Little is written about othermothering in the academy, or the significance of maternal advocacy, and our stories help to fill that gap.

### **Turning Rage into Empowerment: How I Became an Othermother in the Academy**

When Wanda traces her journey to the academy, she realizes that she was never meant to be there. As one of the first Black women to attend university, the first African Nova Scotian to be hired in a tenure track faculty position, and

the first to be promoted to Full professor and to a mainstream administrative position within the academy, she is widely referred to as a trailblazer. If she were to chronicle her life story, she would identify numerous examples of race, gender and class oppression that she has had to navigate to survive and succeed in the world. Many of these experiences have left her feeling absolute rage, but like the Raging Grannies, she learned to turn that rage into power and empowerment. Furthermore, because of her success in overcoming experiences with oppression and empowerment, she has made it her life's work to be an othermother in the academy and the community, and regards it as both a privilege and a responsibility.

Wanda says, "I entered the academy, survived and achieved incredible success against the odds. Being born poor, in the racialized 1950s Nova Scotia, the middle of twelve children, and raised by a single parent mother after my father died when I was twelve years old, I was not expected to go on to postsecondary education. Given this social location, my life was scripted for an existence of poverty and oppression based on race, class and gender. However, because my mother was a widow, my family was considered among the deserving poor, and as a result, people reached out to help us. One form of help was to give my older sister and I an opportunity to go on to higher education after high school, when most of our peers did not have such access or encouragement. Captain Don Denison, a non-assuming white man from Winnipeg and stationed in the army in Halifax, and a member of the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was quietly opening some doors in universities. He was the one who made it possible for Connie Glasgow White, my sister Valerie Thomas Hodges and I to go to university, and we were the first from our small segregated Black community. Denison speculated that if we received an education, we would make a difference in our families and our communities. He expected that we would 'lift as we climbed' and he knew that we would become socially conscious citizens of the world. He knew we would want to give back, because someone had opened doors for us, we would open doors for others. What he did not predict was that I would do as Glaze suggested, and make a difference, leave an imprint and create a legacy. Part of that legacy is othermothering in the academy and using this maternal advocacy as acts of resistance.

"I have been able to make a difference because of the positions I held in the university, first as a professor, and for the past ten years as Director. Although I have not worked directly with many students during my term as Director, there have been some opportunities to mentor a few undergraduate and graduate students. This article is the result of our collaborative conversations."

Gasman's work on othermothering in the academy stresses three important components: *ethic of care, cultural advancement and institutional guardianship*

[emphasis ours]. Through our collaborative conversations and analysis, we discuss each of these, sharing points of difference and convergence.

### The Ethic of Care

Considering what it means to have an ethic of care, educators as othermothers are more than role models and mentors, but are seen to take a holistic perspective to each of their students. Wanda asks, “Have you experienced that ethic of care” through our relationship as teacher and student?

Princewill: If a professor can relate to a student both inside and outside the classroom, it is seen as unique and empowering. My classmates and I saw that between our professor and her graduate assistant.

Sasan: As a racialized person who moved to a new Province which is different historically and socially, I would not have been able to sustain myself through my graduate thesis if I did not have a mentor who was like an othermother. It was important to have someone go above and beyond for me. Academia can be isolating and the othermother plays a role emotionally, intellectually, and socially. It was so important to have access to a mentor and to feel cared for in a non-judgmental way.

Princewill: Having a Black teacher was so important to me. I developed confidence in my writing and felt freedom to send her my work and not feel judged.

Marok: As an immigrant who has been away from family members for a long time, having a mentor and a role model of African descent has been very inspiring and has played a great role in my educational achievements. It is always comforting and encouraging knowing that I have an “othermother” who cares not only about my welfare in the classroom but out of the school environment as well.

The ethic of care is evident in each of these examples, and are illustrative of Gasman’s argument that othermothers in the academy go beyond mentorship and role modeling for their students and address both the educational and the psychological needs of their students. These stories are all laden with an underlying, unnamed experience of isolation, fear, perhaps a history of being misunderstood, misinterpreted and undervalued as a racialized student in a Canadian university classroom. The students identify the significance of othermothering as key to their success in the academy. For the professor, there is also an unspoken expectation that the othermothering they experience will not only help and empower them, but also inspire them to help others. The notion of “paying it forward” to help the next generation is another form of maternal advocacy. As Bedard asserts, the maternal teachings are practical knowledge for survival and the well-being of future generations. In the academy context,

much of the maternal advocacy and teaching is transmitted through cultural advancement.

## **Cultural Advancement**

Gasman asserts that cultural advancement is another aspect of othermothering in the academy. It helps to enhance cultural pride, promotes self-esteem, and contributes to the retention and success of students. Our collaborative conversations highlight a number of areas where cultural enhancement was experienced.

Sasan: This is the first place where I felt understood, and not isolated. My thesis supervisor modeled the collective voice, and I always felt that my voice was heard and integrated in the class. This is not always our experience as racialized students. Having a professor appreciate my cultural experience enhanced my pride, built my confidence and self-esteem.

Jemell: I do not know if I would have reached this stage [graduate thesis] had it not been for such a supportive, caring environment and supervisor. Feeling respected and understood, and having my work validated was so instrumental to my success.

Sasan and Jemel, both graduate students, highlight the importance of having a thesis advisor who understood them, and provided a supportive, caring environment for them. They were able to thrive in their environments because their cultural differences were affirmed and they felt connected.

Althea: My situation is different, as I recently returned to get my BSW after many years of thinking about it. The aura of the School is different now and the values made it a mutual learning journey.

Althea's story suggests that the institutional changes in the academic setting helped to make her educational experience a more positive one as she returned to learning.

Jemel: I learned and benefited from a professor who could say difficult things without being tough on you. Getting feedback that was encouraging, even though you still had a lot of work to do. Having someone understand you really encourages you.

Marok: My learning environment has promoted cultural diversity and I have been able to share my opinion and cultural experiences without fear of being judged. This has inspired me to base my graduate thesis on members of my ethnic group in order to make unique contributions to the body of research on people of African descent.

The above noted stories all speak to the students' ability to be themselves and to bring their culture into the classroom and into their research. The unspoken storyline suggests that this was a new experience for these students,

and that they were not accustomed to having their experiences acknowledged or appreciated. In fact, many stories of pain and cultural oppression they have experienced in the academy underpin these positive experiences. Undoubtedly, having one's voice heard and one's experiences validated and affirmed are important to students who are so accustomed to being silenced. Having a supportive professor, an othermother, who can be tough without being demeaning, can be empowering and facilitates success. In addition, a culturally engaging, positive and welcoming environment that promotes and facilitates cultural advancement, not only for students, but also for the communities they represent, can and does lead to personal and collective transformation. This is an excellent example of what bell hooks calls education as the practice of freedom, and maternal advocacy at its best in the academy. Such maternal advocacy that has the power to transform pain into action, can lead to institutional change.

### **Institutional Guardianship**

Gasman's third and final component of othermothering in the academy, institutional guardianship, is helping the next generation of marginalized students and graduates.

Jemel: I recall that on my graduation from my BSW, the School's Director asked when I was returning to do my MSW. I had no plans to do a MSW until that seed was planted. She stretches you by gently nudging, and nudging.

Sasan: Having the seed planted about doing a Ph.D. has helped me to believe in myself and helped me determine my career path. I am encouraged to go on with my research because of the mentors that have helped me along the way.

Althea: Returning to school at my age could have been intimidating but my supervisor was always encouraging and presented me with options. I always felt that I had a say in what I was doing and that made a difference to me. I completed the research because the work I was doing was valued and at the end of the day I got what I came for.

These examples of institutional guardianship all focus on the support that the students received not only for the pursuit of their current studies, but also in getting them to look to their futures and the possibilities of further post-secondary education. The idea of "planting seeds" to get students thinking about their potential is similar to what a maternal advocate would do as she engages with her family or community to build a better future (Cooper-Wilson and McCoy; Thomas; Bernard et al.). Moreover, as our collaborative conversations continued, we uncovered another step along the journey in *doing* maternal advocacy in the academy.

Wanda: It seems to me that what we are talking about is more than insti-

tutional guardianship, but also *institutional change*. I see othermothering as part of my responsibility to help bring about institutional change and to help produce the next generation of university graduates and scholars.

Sasan: I recall the student in the Africentric Social Work class who said “I never had a Black teacher before” and she went on through the term to talk about how empowering the class was for her and how it stretched her learning.

Wanda: I believe she was reflecting on the opportunity through the class to engage with the community and to see collective action and social justice in real life situations. I also recall that student, and have had many others over the years comment on the fact that I was their first Black teacher. The following story is illustrative of how some students respond to having their first Black teacher. A white male student at the end of a twelve-week class about diversity and inclusion, said,

*I thoroughly enjoyed this class more than I expected to. In fact, when I entered the class the first day, I said to myself, “Wow, a Black woman teacher, she must have done alright for herself.” It was only going through this learning experience that I realized how racist my thoughts were on that first day. I have had many Caucasian teachers, male and female and have never had similar thoughts about any of them. I have learned a lot about my own racism and how I need to address it.*

So as I think about this student, and others like him, it makes me realize that my position in the academy is a site of *racial consciousness-raising* for my students, most of whom are experiencing a racialized teacher for the first time. Critically reflecting on these types of teaching experiences also makes me think about my role in making institutional change happen from that site of resistance as a maternal advocate.

Sasan: Yes, and it is not just about race. The aspects of othermothering we are talking about transcend race. It is more about the values, having your voice heard, respected and validated, and is not like traditional mentoring.

Wanda: As the first Black Director of the School of Social Work, I engaged with my colleagues to help make the School a more welcoming place for all students. We began with a collaborative development of our vision statement, which states “The School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, is committed to building a socially just society, defined as one that upholds and validates the values of equality, diversity, inclusiveness, democracy, and concern for human welfare. We manifest and advance curricula, scholarship, and school culture that are congruent with these values.” It was certainly my goal that the School would be a socially just institution, and as Director, I tried to embed those values in all aspects of our work.

Althea: Having a Black Director at the School has made a difference for students and the community.

Jemel: I have seen so many students of color pass through the School during the past ten years. Having a Black Director must have made a difference because she brought people along.

Sasan: Yes, the aura is more inviting, beginning with the website. Seeing the diversity in the School is inviting for students.

Jemel: And the diversity extends to the community. For example we have more members in the Association of Black Social Workers (ABSW) now because there are more Black social workers, most of whom have graduated from Dalhousie.

These are all excellent examples of the institutional changes that you have witnessed as students. Certainly, the diversity you are seeing in the community is a reflection of the diversity we have seen in the School. The increase in diversity of the student body, the staff, full time and part time faculty make the Dalhousie School of Social Work one of the most diverse units on campus and one of the most diverse social work programs in Canada. What students are saying here is that part of that change was facilitated by having a Director who was also an advocate, a support person, and an “othermother.”

As noted above, othermothering in the academy represents the preservation of the practice of collective responsibilities that empowers students and brings about social transformation in educational institutions and communities. Our collaborative conversations began with a discussion of the components of othermothering in the academy, and now we shift to reflecting on the challenges and rewards.

## Challenges of Othermothering in the Academy

Wanda: I have written elsewhere that, “We must collectively work at challenging those chilly climates if we want to retain and promote women of color and First Nations women in the academy” (Bernard 2001: 68). The challenges and barriers we face help to make for a chilly climate. We identified the following *Challenges For Othermothers in the Academy*:

Are we setting unrealistic expectations for future relationships with managers or supervisors? Many of us worry that with such a positive othermothering experience, we may be unprepared to deal with a less supportive supervisor in the future. Secondly, the potential for burn-out is huge. If there are only a few othermothers, how much can they realistically take on? The needs are greater than the resources we have. What happens when the othermother needs support?

Finally, we note that those writing about othermothering in the academy are women of African descent. If they are primarily writing about it, we suggest

this means they are primarily the academics who are doing it. Most women in the academy are overworked and undervalued in their institutions (Castle and Woloshyn) and the situation is worse for First Nations women and Women of Color (Whitmore, Luther and Moreau). We see othermothering as service work and service work is not considered significant in tenure and promotion considerations. The tenure and promotion expectation to publish or perish is especially challenging for women of African descent who simultaneously feel the pull to do othermothering in the academy in order to break barriers for the next generation of students under their charge. How much more can they realistically take on? What do the burdens of othermothering cost them personally and professionally? These are questions that we argue need to be explored in the academy as they are institutional issues. However, despite these challenges, there are many rewards, which we explore next.

### **The Rewards of Othermothering**

Interestingly, we were able to identify more rewards than challenges. Seeing others experience success, and then giving back to the next generation and to the community, is the best reward. Being a part of a collective movement for change, and seeing social justice in action are rewards experienced when successful othermothering occurs in the academy.

Seeing the transformation of the academy is especially gratifying. Having a more diverse student body, faculty and staff will help us to recruit and retain even more students from marginalized communities. For the othermothering relationship to work in the academy there needs to be authenticity. Othermothers are more likely to give to those who share the *ethic of care* and the commitment to *lift as they climb*. The greatest reward is seeing the institutional change that is facilitated through successful othermothering relationships. In addition, witnessing the significance of theory and research in the lived experiences of the teacher and students is empowering and transforming.

### **Conclusion**

William Arthur Ward once said, “The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.”

Wanda: Dalhousie University strives to be an institution that inspires. What has inspired you most during your studies at Dalhousie?

Princewill: I was most inspired by being taught critical thinking. I cannot even read the newspaper now without thinking critically about what I am reading. Critical thinking gives me the opportunity to reflect upon my working relationship with people from diverse backgrounds.

Sasan: I was most inspired by being taught that change is possible, that the academy and research have the power to change, and seeing social justice in action. Also, witnessing people's struggles and their resiliency.

Althea: I am inspired by seeing the number of Black women now teaching at Dalhousie. They have made their mark and it is so important to see Black women in the struggle. Also, the sense of seeing the School more family and community-oriented, and having a BSW linked to the School, have made it more inviting.

Jemell: I have been inspired by having a supportive supervisor and mentor, and doing academic work that I am able to give back to the community.

Marok: Through the words and actions of my mentor, colleagues and professors, I have gained new perspectives for looking at social issues. I have been inspired to be very active in the change process, to lead the change and always uphold values that encourage development, empowerment and the realization of social, economic and social equality.

As we reflect on othermothering in the academy, we concur with Gasman that the ethic of care, cultural advancement and institutional guardianship are essential components. However, we would add a fourth component—institutional change, because we feel strongly that as the face of the academy changes, other aspects of the institution will also need to change. The culture of the institution needs to be more inviting if it is to recruit and retain marginalized students and faculty. It is a reciprocal process. If communities feel welcomed they will engage with and support the institution's goals. Clearly, the role of othermothering in the academy is a form of maternal advocacy when the relationship works. Othermothering makes specific and unique contributions to the success of students who enter the academy from the margins and helps bring them to the centre. This work needs to be made visible and should be counted as part of service work in the academy. Othermothering in the academy is transformative education in action and it should not be left to those few marginalized faculty to carry the torch in silence and isolation. Is it not time to make othermothering a recognized and valued institutionalized practice, since it is obviously so meaningful to the lives of the students that are directly impacted by it?

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