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**That Tenured Feeling of “What Now?” Recalibration, Power, and Focus**

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## **That Tenured Feeling of “What Now?” Recalibration, Power, and Focus**

You did it. You persevered--and more. You defied the odds by earning the highest degree available in your discipline, again when you secured a tenure-track job, and again by performing so well in that position that you earned a higher level of job security than can be found in most fields of work. You have inspired and supported students, some of whom consider their lives better for having known you. You have contributed to the scientific literature, advancing what we know about and can do to create social justice. You developed and grew professional connections that will continue to bear fruit. You contributed your expertise, insight, and leadership to service commitments that built and strengthened structures and processes you care about. You devoted years of your life on earth to this pursuit and sacrificed in ways beyond number. If you are a member of any marginalized or underrepresented communities in academia (e.g., a woman of color, a queer person), you survived additional challenges and systemic barriers to blaze a trail your ancestors are surely proud of, and that more junior scholars will benefit from.

The way you construct your personal and professional life from here on out will be mostly measured against your own standards, not external ones. The character of your work can now take shape to fit your goals. In light of this, the suggestions and thoughts we offer on immediate post-tenure life are free for you to use as fits your career plan. In the following sections, we suggest you first and foremost take time to celebrate and relax, then use your power to speak up for more vulnerable individuals within and outside the academic system. Once you have gained stability, energy, and voice, you can recalibrate and refocus your efforts on what you are most passionate about. Finally, we suggest you return your focus to your career goals, including promotion to Professor (for details on this goal, see Settles et al., this volume).

### **Our intersectional social locations**

We would like to describe our social locations and scholarly backgrounds to frame our experience with and approach to post-tenure issues. I (Asia) am a white, heterosexual, cisgender, single mother with class privilege. I am a feminist social psychologist at an R1 Hispanic-serving public institution in Miami, Florida, where I have been since my post-doc. My lab studies how gender intersects with identities such as race, class, and sexual orientation to affect individuals' access to and experience with power. Most of my scholarly efforts these days are dedicated to the mentorship of graduate students in community-partnered social justice research.

I (Kim) am privileged as a white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender, upper-middle-class, citizen of the United States from birth, and English speaker as my first language. As a working-class (culturally and psychologically) woman from East Tennessee (Case, 2017a; Rios & Case, 2020), I also face classism, sexism, and marginalization as a religious minority. Most of my career so far was spent serving first-generation students of color at a Hispanic-serving state teaching university in Texas. In my current position as an academic administrator at an R1 state university in Virginia, I now provide faculty development full-time. My current scholarship explores effective social justice and anti-racist pedagogies, ally development and the psychology of whiteness, and faculty development programs to promote equity.

### **Celebrate and relax**

In our experience, academics rarely celebrate their accomplishments. There are myriad reasons for this, which may be compounded for feminist scholars. First, many academic pursuits are long term, requiring multiple years of dedication, revision, and resiliency. When we finally complete the task at hand, it can feel a bit anticlimactic. Achieving tenure may be the archetypal example of this, given that it represents a lifetime of work, and a year-long vetting process.

Academic culture has also become increasingly fast-paced, short-sighted, and demanding (Mountz et al., 2015; Stengers; 2018). Each accomplishment demands another, with no end in sight.

In addition, for feminist scholars, drawing attention to your accomplishments may seem to clash with social prescriptions, specifically that women, and others from marginalized backgrounds, shouldn't self-promote (e.g., Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010; Smith & Huntoon, 2013). We, as feminists, should devise creative ways to promote feminist work, including amplification of each other's work (Stephens, this volume). Feminist scholars may also engage in collaborative, community-partnered, and service-oriented work that we feel less personal ownership over (e.g., Hill et al., 2000).

We suggest that in spite of these hesitations, you make the time to officially celebrate this milestone. What this means is, of course, unique to each individual. Perhaps you have been wanting to travel, spend time with loved ones, or enjoy some time alone. Or maybe you would like to purchase a treasured item, throw a party, or complete a bucket list experience. Take some time to thoroughly consider what would give you joy and a feeling of accomplishment. Remember, too, that celebrating tenure does not have to be a one-time event. It can be a commitment to an old or new hobby you didn't previously have time for. It can be changing how you interact with family members, students, or friends. It can take the form of a year-long decision to try something new. For me (Kim), this meant finding and joining an Appalachian clogging dance team after 6 years of working far too many hours. I had been a clogger in middle-school and returning to this love of dance became my strongest stress relief, coping mechanism, and pure joy for the next 10 years.

Whatever method(s) of celebration you adopt, we also suggest that you intentionally take time to relax and fall back from the front lines of work. You're safe now. Take a chunk of time off from the hopefully not-too-frantic pace at which you were working. When your high-achieving mind wanders towards anxiety about becoming Professor, remind yourself that you are relaxing, and it is your right and your job to table that concern for the time being. You can even put a note in your calendar reading "now turn to the next stage of promotion." We suggest that you aim to submit for promotion to full no more than 6-10 years post-tenure.

### **Lean into your power**

You may not feel like you have much power in your university or college. After all, you likely experienced isolation and marginalization in connection to your teaching and scholarship as a feminist. For many readers, your very presence in the academy, just being who you are in your particular social locations, caused a disruption to the white middle/upper-class patriarchal culture. At the same time, you succeeded in meeting the criteria for tenure and promotion at your institution, no matter how challenging the journey or faulty the criteria. Your university has officially accorded you a substantial level of power and status. With that new title comes job stability, financial benefit, and power you can use to advance your feminist social justice goals (e.g., establishing new departmental criteria for tenure). Your voice counts in a new way. Using your feminist intersectional perspective, we call on you to intentionally use your power and privilege to further advance social justice.

### *Your justice work as a tenured feminist scholar*

In my (Kim's) group coaching for mid-career academics, I urge social justice faculty to "embrace your inner Lizzo!" The Lizzo-focused module is all about how much we critique and diminish ourselves...just as the systems have taught us to do. What if you embraced all the

unapologetic confidence and vulnerability of Lizzo as a feminist scholar? What if you embodied your social justice values out loud? I (Kim) am here to tell you, if you do this, the right people in academia will arrive, support you, and carry you through when you need them. After years of having my confidence eroded by supposedly feminist, but patriarchy-identified bullies in women's studies, I finally reclaimed my strength, expertise, and my voice. Once I accepted that I could manage whatever the bullies threw at me, the academics who recognized my worth began showing up all around me. Yes, this requires vulnerability and feels scary. By sharing this, I hope you will remember that you are valued and reach out to your support systems.

### *Which justice? Whose justice?*

To be clear, we assume and expect that all feminist scholars do and will pursue justice for women and girls, but also well beyond the single-axis category of systemic sexism (Grzanka, 2018). As a label, “feminist” has been associated with “White feminist” (Signorella, 2020), a legitimate critique of the lack of racial justice within mainstream feminism and academic feminism (Aziz, 1992). Allow us to take a moment to clarify that feminist scholars must engage racial justice, intersectionality, and the full intricate web of oppressive systems. Your justice work as a feminist scholar must include actively disrupting systemic oppression based on sexuality, ability, gender identity, social class and income, race, ethnicity, nation of origin, language, documentation status, and religion (see *Academics for Black Wellness and Survival*; [www.drkimcase.com](http://www.drkimcase.com)). This is not an exhaustive list of co-constructed, intertwining, and intersectionally-influential systems within the matrix of domination (Collins, 1990).

### *Advocate and amplify*

What does a tenured feminist scholar do to speak up for justice? There are some concrete behaviors we suggest for harnessing your power and privilege within the academy.

- Speak up. If you felt unsafe on the road to tenure and chose to remain silent on some issues close to your heart, you can begin to reclaim your voice. You can help speak up about social justice issues affecting undergraduate and graduate students, staff, and non-tenure-track and untenured faculty. For example, the lack of diverse representation within most academic decision-making bodies remains unacceptable. How can you use your voice to bring attention to and authentically include those who typically remain invisible as well as those directly impacted by the decisions?
- Advocate. Be that person on the committee that brings up equity issues and shares ideas for how to address them. Push for inclusion, whether it be curricular transformation, policy overhauls, or urgent task forces where major institutional change can happen.
- Amplify. Are you witnessing white people repeating the ideas of faculty or students of color without getting recognition? As soon as you can get in the queue to contribute to the meeting, amplify by crediting back to the original source to make it clear who was the original idea generator. If you err, be receptive when realizing that you failed to correctly attribute an idea to its creator.
- Sponsor. Use your privilege and influence to tell people about the great work being done by less powerful or visible scholars. Sponsors elevate the work of students and more junior scholars by centering and celebrating their voices and contributions. Invite non-tenure-track or otherwise marginalized faculty onto your projects. Invite undergraduates and graduate students to present with you in spaces that can bring them positive visibility and connections.
- Organize. Noticed that your Promotion and Tenure policy does not value equity and inclusion pedagogy or scholarship? Notice that women in the department are carrying

70% of the service work? Do something about it. Organize for justice and align with more powerful people across the institution. Get organizing advice from feminist scholars outside your own university.

- Center the voices and perspectives of early career faculty, non-tenure-track faculty, invisible staff members, undergraduate and graduate students, and perhaps even community members. Be careful not to take over and speak for others without being educated and aware of your own role. Work to support these less powerful groups to be “in the room” and speak for themselves.
- Keep learning. Every reader occupies an intersectional social location that includes one or more forms of privilege in the matrix of domination (Case, 2013; Collins, 1990). In your privileged social identity roles as an ally (accomplice, co-conspirator), stay in tune to continuous learning. Reflection and awareness are essential to minimize the chances of harming the efforts and well-being of the marginalized group members. Your ally actions should not burden marginalized group members with more work, or the emotional labor of helping you manage your ally journey.
- Find ways to sustain your justice work by curating your own social support network to avoid burnout.

### *Curate your service*

More than ever, you have the power to intentionally select your service efforts.

Specifically, we recommend that your service work moving forward be values-driven (Buchanan & Jones, this volume) instead of obligatory. We suggest you opt-out of voluntary service that doesn't have personal meaning, doesn't benefit your career, or doesn't benefit the field of



feminist psychology. You now have the privilege of mentoring more junior feminist scholars, of working to diversify your department, or of creating feminist service that hadn't before existed.

For me (Asia), one of my priorities after getting tenure was to challenge predominant academic priorities and reward structures. Specifically, my goal was to raise awareness and support for “Public Psychology,” – a model of psychology requires that research, teaching, and service activities engage with social problems, that academics involve the public in their work, that scholars be public-facing, and that we rethink how we define psychology and psychological expertise (Eaton et al., 2021). Part of this required that I do more national and public service, including writing OpEds, blog posts, doing expert witness work, and more. This passion project has begun to change local and national dialogue on what constitutes rigorous and legitimate psychological practice and research, and it gave me the local and national recognition that my university appreciates in the promotion process.

Of course, intentionally curating your service assignments creates the question of who will perform the tasks we don't assign as much value to- the ones that don't align with our careers and professional ideology. As feminists, it is common to consider the extent to which our behavior might negatively impact more vulnerable people. To this, we offer two thoughts. First, are these essential tasks? Perhaps some of these service efforts can be abandoned without major consequence to vulnerable others. Second, for those tasks that are essential but not values-driven, we nonetheless suggest that, at least the time being, the person responsible for them be someone other than you.

Finally, the wise Dr. NiCole Buchanan made an additional argument in favor of declining low-value and/or high-cost professional responsibilities as a woman of color (Buchanan & Jones, this volume). At AWP in 2016, she noted that if she continued to perform excessive service work

for her unit, including service related to equity and inclusion, then they would never hire anyone else like her. In essence, overworking ourselves perpetuates the system of inequities. Give the units you serve the opportunity to experience their profound need for your perspective, expertise, and labor.

*Reflective questions:*

- How does your own social identity, background, family culture, and ties to community impact how you might think about life after tenure?
- What does it mean for you to be a feminist leader with tenure and power?
- Where do you want to focus your power for justice and change? University, public policy, the broader discipline, community work, social justice teaching, and/or scholarship?
- Are you interested in public, translational, community-engaged scholarship and/or service?
- What if you chose to be your most radically authentic self, not just outside academia, but also within academia?

### **Recalibrate and refocus**

In the process of determining which responsibilities to let go of or decline, and finding your voice in speaking up for others, you will likely come up against a larger question: what exactly *do* you want to do, contribute, and be moving forward? You know your CV by now. Is this who you want to continue being, professionally speaking? Where does your passion lie? Where are you making the most traction? What are your long-term hopes and dreams? For many of us, the post-tenure process is a period of deep reflection on whether the efforts we undertook to get to this privileged place were (a) properly directed and (b) worth it. Beauboeuf-Lafontant et

al. (2019) provided a fresh perspective on the post-tenure period as a unique intersection of your own agency and your institution's reward systems and opportunities.

Review how you spent your time and effort on the path to tenure, considering both the number and nature of your commitments. What topics have you been researching? What classes have you been teaching? How much time have you spent at conferences vs. grading vs. exploring new literature vs. mentoring? Get in touch with what you want, rather than what you have been told to want. Do you want to continue working at the same pace, with the same organizations, on the same topics, with the same collaborators? What about your work gets you excited to get out of bed in the morning, and how can you nurture that?

For me (Asia), my professional purpose and joy is found in mentoring graduate students in the scientific process, centering their passions and strengths in service of social justice research. Pre-tenure, I was heavily involved in mentoring Ph.D. students in my lab. I continued this work post-tenure, at one point having 10 Ph.D. students across two programs (an overcommitment). As a feminist social psychologist in a department without a social psychology program, I had survived tenure by becoming a core member of our Industrial-Organizational program and our Developmental Science program. While I was able to conduct meaningful research in these areas that aligned with my training, I never felt fully at-home, and was constantly having to learn literatures outside my areas of expertise and interest.

After earning tenure, with the help of Dr. Dionne Stephens (a colleague at FIU), I sought to create a new Ph.D. program at my university in Applied Social and Cultural Psychology. Creating, and ultimately directing, a new graduate program was a dream project for me, where I could both live my values and fully use my skills and knowledge. To make more room in my life for this endeavor, I left a number of editorial positions, as well as some university and national

committees. Tenure also provided me the time, perspective, and energy I needed to reevaluate my marriage, and the confidence and financial stability to move on.

For me (Kim), my recalibration meant asking powerful questions about my justice-oriented career goals. The professional goals that get me excited about my work are tied to advancing inclusive, equity-minded, anti-racist, social justice teaching practices across the curriculum, across the disciplines, across the full landscape of higher education. I love my students and the joy of serving their learning journeys, expanding empowerment, and growing confidence. And yet, I wanted more. My drive to make the broadest impact possible drew me to faculty development and institutional change as my life's purpose. I took an extremely scary leap and edited my first book on privilege pedagogy and how privilege shows up in our teaching and learning (Case, 2013). I did not embark on the torture of book editing as a strategic career move. I did this because *Deconstructing Privilege* is the book I wish someone had given to me when I started teaching. In fact, this book you are reading is another book I wish someone had given me when I earned my Ph.D.

Although my goal was clearly to earn Professor as soon as possible, I did not make my career plan based on that goal. The desire for that next promotion was mostly fueled by my low academic salary and need for a substantial increase that would accompany promotion. Honestly, I focused on what gave me the most meaning and purpose. Professor was icing on the fulfillment cake. More on that later. At the same time, I was not naive enough to ignore my university's standards for promotion to Professor. As freshly minted associate professors, Dr. Jeannetta Williams and I built a mid-career peer mentoring process to make our individual action plans for promotion (Williams & Case, 2019). One of our top priority actions was to gather as much

information, data, and feedback about our institution's previous patterns of approval and rejection of promotion so that we could build a solid case for how we met those standards.

In the process of realigning your professional efforts to better reflect who you want to be and what you want to accomplish, be mindful of the direction these efforts will take your career. If continuing your career in academia, you will need to integrate your efforts with university standards and expectations for achieving Professor status. If you plan to leave academia, this may be the time to turn away from the academic track and develop a side hustle or exit strategy. Post-tenure, I (Kim) also developed my soul's work business focused on coaching and consultation with social justice academics. Working with faculty and universities on anti-racist and intersectional pedagogies and supporting mid-career feminist scholars has my "passion project cup" overflowing with joy! How will your efforts moving forward get you closer to these goals?

*Reflective questions:*

- What supports do you have that will enable you to refocus and recalibrate successfully?
- What learned and/or false beliefs are you carrying with you that you may need to reframe or shed to live your best post-tenure life?
- What updates and changes do you need to make to your career support systems (e.g., mentors, sponsors, social support). You are at a new stage and need to reconsider who will be part of your team. Now is the time to identify and develop relationships with feminist scholars who have what you want or can help you navigate the path.
- What about your hobbies and passions outside work? Are there things you lost that you want to reclaim?
- What does work/life integration or balance look like for you after tenure?

## **Our wishes for you**

We hope this chapter has given you permission to celebrate and relax, and encouragement to use your power to speak up and carefully curate your scholarly endeavors moving forward. There are countless ways to live with joy, meaning, and safety post-tenure, and our thoughts and experiences represent a tiny window into what is possible or ideal. Further, there is no “wrong” way to approach your post-tenure experience. Perhaps you are reading this because you don’t feel you’ve made the most of your time post-tenure. Maybe you lingered a little “too long” in celebration or relaxation. Or maybe you refocused your efforts on projects that did not bear the intended fruit (or not yet!). Do not despair. You can restart, reinvent, and even rewind as you move to the next stage of promotion (Shields, this volume). We thank you in advance for lifting other feminist scholars as you climb and providing them a successful model of what it is to be an authentic, values-driven, power-sharing academic.

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