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Strategies for Dealing with Stress, Rejection & the Haters in Your Midst

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Kerry Ann: This is strategies for dealing with stress, rejection and the haters in your midst. It's one of my favorite workshops and I have to say this is a really tough time of year and when we were putting together the workshop, thinking, "What would be the right thing for the first week of November? Let's ask people what they want at this time." And we got a lot of feedback and it was pretty much unanimous. People said, "I don't know what I want but I do know that at this time of year I feel completely run-down, I feel beat down, I feel stressed out." So we just thought that the best way to address that pervasive feeling of both exhaustion but also kind of being through would be to go ahead and do a workshop on stress.

And not just to do a workshop that's a general type of workshop on stress but to really talk about stress in the academic context. What does it look like? What can we do about it? And I think it's particularly important for underrepresented faculty to really understand the kind of stressors that come from solo status that are part and parcel of being the only or one of few in your department. So, what we're going to do today is really do that. We're going to talk about stress, we're going to talk about it both what it is and what it does, what it looks like for academics. But most importantly, as you know for me, is actually what we can do about it. So thinking about and identifying our own stressors and how can we begin to make some new movements and new motions and new thinking and new behaviors that might help to alleviate some of the stress in our lives?

And I have to say, to be perfectly honest, even though this material isn't necessarily new for me, I had a number of pretty important insights when I was putting it together and so what I want to suggest to you is that you listen at more than one level today, so we're always listening with our brain because we're academics. We always have our internal processor on, getting the information and thinking what we're going to do with that. But even more importantly I want you to do that but I also really want you to listen, in some ways just kind of feeling what's important for you and what connects you and what you really feel in your body, because I think there's a way that part of being stressed is that we push down the information that our body is sending us. And so I just want to create this space today for you to be tuned into your bodily response, to be tuned into your intuition, sort of connecting with certain pieces of information, but not others, and really be open to that, because this is a really, really hard thing for us to talk about and I think it's not only important but I think we have to listen in multiple ways to really enable ourselves to get what we need from this particular set of information.

So, I'm going to be giving some information, I'm going to be teaching the way I usually teach but I'm going to pause at a couple of different points and I'm going to



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pause briefly for us to go ahead and do that kind of inner listening. I'm going to pause for us to reflect on our own particular relationship with stress, our own unique stressors. And really to get tuned into what we can do, maybe differently, moving forward. So, part of my saying that is because I'm going to warmly invite you right now to stop multitasking. For those of you who are simultaneously reading email and writing and doing all kinds of, you know, checking out Facebook and et cetera, just go ahead and maybe if you want to be really daring just turn your body away from the computer. You might just want to do whatever you need to do to fully focus, because part of what I'm going to be describing is how keeping ourselves not just busy but busy at multiple levels is part of what blocks us really being able to hear that inner voice and really hear our body's response to what it needs. So if it's at all possible for you to shut off the cell phone, turn away from the monitor, maybe close your eyes, just really focus in on those moments when we're reflecting, I think that'll be really helpful.

My goal, we're going to try to stick to the time today, my goal is really for each of you to get a really clear sense of not just the impact these things have on your body but to really be able to identify in an explicit way today what the stressors are in your specific life, to really differentiate between ones that are under your control and the ones that are not under your control. And to really get a sense of at least one concrete step that you can take forward today, that you can implement today to start managing some of the stress in your life. And I think what that looks like for different people is going to be really different. I'm looking at the people on this call and we have everything from very senior to just starting graduate school and that's going to look different for you. But all that matters for you today is that you get really clear about you, that you're really tuned in, that you really hear your body letting you know what you need, and I think part of the way you'll hear that is that some of the information will feel very salient to you, and others not so much.

Let's go ahead and get started. Basically the format is that I'm just going to talk a little bit about what stress is, what the typical kind of symptoms and responses are and how it really looks for academics, because sometimes we talk about stress and stress management and we talk about it in these really broad, generalized ways and I think what it looks like for us is really specific, and I just want to be really clear about that.

I'm going to talk a little bit about the three biggest stressors that I hear from people. One is this constant stream of rejection that is part of academic life. The second is really this pervasive, daily devaluation, disrespect, death by evals and cuts type of stress that many of us experience on campus and, particularly if you're underrepresented, this constant sort of stream of micro aggressions, the toll that it has on us. And, of course, no workshop on stress would be complete without the haters! And we've got to talk about those haters, because they are ubiquitous, they're all over the place in academic life and the thing is, the higher you go in your career, the more successful you are, the more haters you will have. So I think we



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just need to be really open and honest about the fact that they exist and I'm going to suggest some ways we might deal with them.

And, of course, I always want to give you some things moving forward. I think, on this topic in particular, I'll have a number of things, a number of resources I'll put in the discussion forum tonight, some extra additional reading if you want to do some other things that might be helpful for you.

And, of course, we always, at the end, if anyone wants a buddy for the month, that's our specialty. So we'll do that at the end.

So let's go ahead and start out talking about what is stress. And those of you who know me know I am not a physician. So I'm just going to put it to you real basic. What's interesting is that stress is really how your body responds to particular types of demands. And it may be the kinds of demands that are situations that you perceive a threat, you perceive high anxiety, it could be a variety of different types of demands, but the important part is that there are some kinds of things that happen in our life that our brain sends out a signal, our brain starts releasing, telling our body to release some fairly powerful neuro chemicals, some fairly powerful hormones. And what I want you to really take away from this is that we're talking about stress, we're not just talking about a feeling or an emotional feeling of stress. We're literally talking about your physical body. It's those times when something is happening that your body feels like you have to respond to. And what's happening is that things are being released in you, internally, that every once in a while it's okay.

Some stress can actually be positive, the kinds of stress where we feel really focused, we feel really energized, we feel extra alert, that kind of stress kind of results in us rising to meet different types of challenges. I'm sure we have all had sort of isolated experiences of positive stress. But the problem is that, for many of us, we're living in a constant state of stress. We're in a constant state of our body feeling like we're in emergency mode. We're in a constant state of feeling the level of anxiety that triggers this type of physical response in us. And, of course, the problem with that is that we can't live that way and our body isn't designed for us to be constantly living in that state. And so, for me the main reason for doing this workshop is because almost all the people that I work with suffer from being in this constant state of stress and they come to work with me because they want to get out of it. They say things like, "I can't live this way anymore." And what's interesting is that our body doesn't really know the difference between, "We're in danger because we're about to fall off a cliff!" or, "We're in danger because we're walking into a class and we're teaching white students about privilege and they're not really trying to hear it." All our body knows is we're in an anxious or threatened situation, release the chemicals.

And I want to be more clear about it because I think sometimes people don't really feel and understand that chronic stress, literally, it disrupts nearly every system in your body. And I really want you to hear that. It can raise your blood pressure. It



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can suppress your immune system. It can increase your risk of heart attack. It can increase your risk of stroke. And, more than anything, it can leave you really vulnerable to anxiety and depression. So I'm not just saying, "Hey, yeah, stress is bad! We should be worried about it!" It's really, really problematic and it's problematic because, literally, your body is responding to things that are stressful in your environment in a way that it is releasing these chemicals that cause long-term illness. So I don't want to belabor that point but I just want us to really grasp the seriousness with which I think we need to take managing our stress and really caring for ourselves.

If you're following along on the slides, and this is where I had a huge insight, this next slide is really about the symptoms of stress and I put as the subtitle, "Anything sound familiar?" and I'm going to talk about these for a minute but what I really want you to do for yourself is to kind of check off the box of any that actually you are experiencing. It's interesting to me, because a lot of these symptoms we might not, necessarily connect to stress. We may not connect them to experiencing long-term stress response in our body. But they are. So there're really four types of symptoms, there're cognitive symptoms, emotional symptoms, physical symptoms and behavioral symptoms.

I think the ones that we think about most are the physical symptoms, so aches and pains, diarrhea, nausea, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, frequent colds, loss of sex drive, again, all really interesting that these are symptoms of stress.

I think the second one we think of most often is sort of these behavioral symptoms, so we're either eating much more or less than we normally would, we're sleeping significantly more or less, you might be doing some self-isolating, procrastinating, neglecting responsibilities, excessive use of various types of drugs or alcohol to kind of numb the worry or the anxiety or the feeling of stress, and certainly some nervous habits.

But there are also different kinds of symptoms, these cognitive and emotional symptoms. And I think we know the emotional ones, they at least sound familiar to us: the moodiness, the irritability, and the agitation. The one I hear about most frequently is feeling completely overwhelmed, this sense of being lonely or isolated, and depression or general unhappiness. But I really kind of want to focus on these cognitive symptoms, because, as people who think for a living, I think it's really important that we not only stay attune to the kinds of physical, behavioral, and emotional symptoms of stress but that we really start to recognize what the cognitive symptoms are. So when we're having difficulty with our memory, when we can't concentrate for very long, when our judgment feels very poor because it's just difficult for us feeling like we can't make a decision, even if we're normally very decisive people, seeing only the negative, even if there's more positive than negative, only seeing what is negative, anxious or racing thoughts and constant worrying.



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Again, I imagine that if you were checking off the boxes, probably the reason you're here is because you're experiencing a number of these symptoms. And that's fine. I think part of any change that we make is sort of bringing into awareness where we're at, kind of getting really clear where we stand in relation to our stress. But I think we also not just need to know how to really, just to be clear and identify with the symptoms, but also to get really connected to our common, our particular, stress response.

So what is the most common thing when we are experiencing stress in the moment or a stressful situation in the moment? And what's interesting is that when people study stress what they find is that people tend to have one of three standard stress responses. So of course some people fight, they lean towards the fight response and so the way they're feeling is sort of very agitated, very angry, type of response. Some of us, however, I'll just name myself here, have much more of a flee response. When there's some sort of intense stressor that we're faced with, we're more likely to sort of engage in shutting down behaviors; so we might feel depressed, we might feel withdrawn, we might disengage, we might literally flee. But the whole point is that there's a drawing in and not a pushing out.

I used to think there was only a fight or flee that were the basis of stress response, but actually the more I read the more I realized that some people freeze. They freeze because they have fight and flee at the same time and in some ways they're unable to do anything, they're just paralyzed because under the surface they're having that flight response, but on the surface they're having a disengaged response. And if that sounds familiar to you, and one of the three probably sounds familiar to you, that's the one that I think is the hardest to really recognize and the hardest to get your hands on. And maybe another way of thinking about this, the way someone explained it to me when I was preparing, is that when people experience an intense stressor, their immediate response, one way to think of it as fight, flee or freeze, but another way of thinking of it is some people put their foot on the gas, that would be the fight, some people put their foot on the brake, that would be the flee, and some people, bless their hearts, they put their feet both on the gas and the brake at the same time, and that would be the freeze. So I think it's really important for us to think about, I hadn't thought about this recently, but it is really clear to me what my pattern is and what I would really encourage for you, there's 3 big circles next to those three types of responses, is to just go ahead and put a big old "x" next to the one you recognize as your kind of default, maybe you don't do it every time but it's your unconscious default response to stress. Are you somebody who has a fight response, are you somebody who has a flee response or are you somebody who has a freeze response?

And I think part of what's so important about this is that when we think about is to relieve stress, especially right in that moment when we're feeling it, each of these different responses requires a different kind of in-the-moment quick stress relief. So if your response to a stressor is fight the kind of quick stress relief is that you're going to need things that are going to quiet you down. You're going to need



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strategies and techniques that quiet you down. But if you're like me and you're a flee response person and what happens is you get disengaged, you pull in, you get withdrawn, the quick stress relief is the opposite of that. What you're going to need is something that's stimulating, something that energizes your nervous system, some kind of physical movement to try and break up that default pattern. And if you're somebody who freezes your default response to a stressor is foot on the brake and the gas simultaneously, the kinds of quick stress relief that you need are also going to be a combination. You're going to need the kind of tips, the kind of skills, the kind of strategies that provide you both with safety and with stimulation and in some ways the way that people have described it is you need to reboot your whole system. So you're locked up because you're feeling sort of intense but fighting emotions, you need something that's going to be able to help you reboot.

So just go ahead and put a big "x" next to whatever one best describes your typical stress response. There's no judgment here whatsoever. We're just trying to identify what our particular patterns are. So what I would love for us to do is just talk briefly about how this looks in academic life, in other words, what are the kinds of stressors that people experience in the academy? And if you're looking at slides what you'll see is I've kind of divided the most common ones into two buckets.

One bucket is external stressors and one bucket is internal stressors. What I want to be really clear about is: it is, in fact, the case, certainly that as academics some of the stressors that we have in our lives are due to sort of the structural context of our work. They're part and parcel of the institutions in which we are embedded. And yet, there are also stressors that come from us, they come from inside. So as I'm describing these, again, you can feel free to circle all that apply, but the point here, as I want to get across, is a) there are plenty of external stressors, those are real, but I also want you to be able to differentiate between those that are external, that are sort of part and parcel of the environment in which we work and are embedded and those which are internal. Because the internal really come from us, what that means is that we have at least the possibility and the potential to change those.

The external stressors, I think you know what these are but I'm going to name them anyway. There's all of the rank specific ones, so for example if you're on the tenure track there's a whole layer of stressors that are just part and parcel of being on the tenure track: the fact that no one will ever tell you clearly what it takes to get tenure; the fact that whatever the general guidelines are when you start, they're going to be higher when you come up and you're going to be held to that standard when you come up; the fact that you'll get very little direct feedback, not until your third year, until you come up; the stressors are things like being on probation for six years, just feeling kind of constantly surveyed, if you will; I'm just giving these as examples because they're really tied to a particular rank, so I could name a bunch for graduate students, I just named the ones for tenure track, but I think the illusion that many people are under is that once you get tenure there's no more stressors related to your status and rank and, in fact, there's a whole new layer. So the point



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here is that there always is going to be external stressors related to your specific rank, you don't rank out of them, they just keep changing, every step it's a new set of stressors.

The job market, certainly, I don't think I need to say a lot about it, but particularly it's an external constraint that the job market sucks. It's an external stressor that the job market itself is really strung out over a long period of time, you get very little feedback, it can feel entirely subjective, if you have a two body issue that you're doing all of that times two, that can creep up into your relationships, all of those things are external stressors. Certainly, financial pressures, relationship strain, a culture of never fill-in-the-blank enough: never working enough, never doing enough, never achieving enough, that's just part of academic culture, an ongoing stream of rejection and critical feedback, I think we've all experienced this, again, this is part of the context of being in the academy, it's part of our journals having very low acceptance rates, if you're someone who has to compete for grant funds, that they're very low funding rates, all of this is about competition and in the competition where very few people succeed, we're going to get a lot of rejection. And, again, it's not something that's just going to go away, it's part of academic life. It's inherently part of the system in which we work.

And two more external stressors, I'll just talk about briefly: one is, of course, a tenure system that allows problematic behavior to continue, largely unchecked. And I'm a big fan of tenure, I'm not saying there shouldn't be tenure, but I am saying that the nature of a system where you cannot fire people often ends up with a lot of bad behavior going unchecked and, quite frankly, behavior that would not be tolerated in organizations that have any meaningful human resource policies. So again, I think that's something that is unlikely to change, it's an external constraint and it certainly varies at different institutions and different departments, but it is something that is fairly consistent across. And I just want to be sure that we don't leave out racism, sexism and a variety of other -isms. I think there are very few places where we can just openly state that, in fact, that is an external stressor. And being the only person of color, woman of color, woman —period— in a male dominated department, whatever it is that you're the only, or you're one of few, there's just a reality that racism and sexism exist, what they do is create a whole wide variety of challenges above and beyond the constraints of any specific rank and they are things that are unlikely to change in the short-term.

So I just want to really name those as kind of being the bucket of external stressors, they are things that people often just label, that bucket: "It is what it is." And I want to differentiate from the internal stressors, those are things outside of us that we cope with; but the internal stressors, the things that sort of come from us are things like perfectionism, things like negative self-talk, things like pessimism, things like the inability to accept uncertainty, which is a particularly challenging given that most of the things I've just described as being external stressors involve uncertainty, procrastination, internalizing the rejection, I'm going to talk about that in a minute, and things like cognitive distortions, and by cognitive distortion I only



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mean the ways, the tricks that we play in our mind that sort of distort the actual reality of a situation. So, for example, over-generalizing, we take one single negative experience and we expect it to hold true forever. So I got a bad teaching evaluation that means I'm a bad teacher and I'm always going to be a bad teacher. Or things like diminishing positive experiences, something positive finally happens and instead of celebrating it we come up with reason why it doesn't really count. "Oh, I got accepted in a journal, my paper got accepted, what was wrong with those reviewers? They must have just been being nice to me." I hear people say these things all the time.

I'm giving you these examples of these academic stressors because if you, hopefully, I imagine, you probably circled all the external ones because those are just the circumstances in which we work. What I really want you to get aware of is what are the internal stressors, the things that we actually do and at least have some potential or possibility to change?

I'm pointing out all of this because what I don't want to happen is for us to devolve into what I see all the time, which is people unconsciously engaging in unhealthy coping behaviors. And these are, I think, in many ways, the dirty little secrets of academics. So, I see a lot of people with drinking problems. There, I said it! And I think drinking excessively is very much a coping mechanism for many academics. Over eating or under eating, zoning out in front of the TV or in front of the computer for long periods of time, just kind of glazing over, really withdrawing from our friends, our family, our activities, our relationship, the kind of things that could actually support us. And, maybe one, I think, really unhealthy coping mechanism that I see frequently is really filling up every single minute of the day and multitasking through the entire day, as a way of really avoiding having to face the deeper problems or the deeper challenges that go on. And maybe the last sort of unhealthy coping mechanism I'll just mention is really taking our stress out on other people. It doesn't really have to do with the, but we see some convenient targets and we take it out on them.

What I want us to do is just pause for five, actually we can probably do it in 3 minutes. And I just want you to go ahead and list all of the things, given that context of what stress is and what it looks like for academics, but I really want you to use that next slide to list what is stressful for you, what's causing you stress right now. And I'm going to set the timer just for three minutes and I just want you to go ahead, get it all out there. Go!

[guitar music]

Great, so as you're finishing up, I don't know if you're like me, I had to go on the back of the page because I was experiencing a lot of stressors. But hopefully you have, probably you have a mixed bag, some external and some internal. We're really going to focus on the internal ones, of course, because those are the ones that we have some possibility of change, some potential, some control over. And what I'm going to do briefly for the remainder of our time is really to walk through



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the three most common ones that I hear from people, and when I ask people to make a list, these sort of pop up on their lists. And I'm just going to talk about them in three categories, so the first category being rejection, the second being daily devaluation, and the third being what to do with those haters in our lives.

Let me start with rejection, because I think we're all in the same situation, right? We're all in the situation that usually the greatest stress for people is that we have the pressure to publish. That's part and parcel of the academic life, which doesn't matter how brilliant you are, at some point you have to produce and at some point for your ideas to become part of the process of the production of knowledge and part of the discourse and conversation and argument in your field, they have to appear in writing. And even though we're all operating in this context where publication of our ideas is the currency, it's also the case that acceptance rates are low, funding rates are even lower, and that is the reality. We have to do it and it's really hard to do.

Because of that, because we are in this world where publishing is so important but that acceptance and funding rates are so low, rejection is going to be part of our lives. And the more you produce, the more rejection that you experience. It's just a persistent and painful reality that is academic life. Even though it's normal, even though it's common, even though it's guaranteed to happen, that doesn't mean that it feels good. Especially if you're early in your career, it can feel devastating, if you're later in your career it can just be still very painful. But the point of it, and the point of us talking about it is the sooner that you can develop some healthy coping mechanisms the better off you're going to be. I don't think it'll be a surprise for most of you that, for me, my orientation is that most negative things fester in isolation. So when we receive a rejection and we just keep it to ourselves, what I see happen to people is they don't deal with it, they just sit on it, they don't move, they get frozen, they get locked out and they have whatever stress response they're going to have. But it really debilitates them actually doing their work.

So, I want to just sort of suggest three specific things but they're all in the vein of creating a support network. So what I'm talking about is really creating groups of people and relationships throughout the process. From the conception of an idea to celebrating it's publication and all the points in between. So I've talked about this in a number of workshops, really having a pre-submission feedback loop. So it should not be the case that you're submitting things that no one has read, no one has reviewed; no one's given you feedback. So you're building in multiple feedback loops as you're in the production process.

I also want to suggest that you begin to create, if you haven't already, what I'm calling post rejection filters. And what I mean by that is people in your life who can help you interpret the external feedback. I often call this a translation service. So they're people who can, you can give your reviews, they can read them and they can strip away the pettiness, the judgments, the ugly parts of the reviews that are unnecessary and really help you to understand what the person is trying to communicate, they can help you strategize how to do your revisions, they can help



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you to think about where it might go next, but it's often very difficult for us to do this on our own. Because it feels so devastating and so stinging to us as individuals that it skews our perception, it brings up all our stuff, and when we're in that stressed moment we're really not seeing things clearly and this is a wonderful time to have other people in our lives.

And we can certainly trade this favor back and forth. I have people read my reviews, I still do, they tell me what I need to do, they can discuss them with me, but I'm willing to do the same in return. And the wonderful thing about having post rejection filters is that it not only helps you not internalize the negative feedback, it helps you to look at it objectively, look at it as data, look at it as data that's going to help you plan your next step. But it also works for all kinds of different evaluations. So I know lots of people that do this with teaching evaluations, because sometimes students can just be nasty. And for many of us even having a handful of really nasty responses that make up less than five percent of the responses, all we hear are the negative ones. All we hear are those few students who just can't stand us. And we can't even hear the larger body of people who say, "This is the best class I've ever taken." So people sue this for teaching evaluations, they use it for annual reviews, any time that you're going to be getting feedback that might include things that are critical, that are rejecting, that are maybe going to push your buttons or make it hard for you see it objectively, this is a great time to have some people around you who can also read the same reviews, the same evaluations and give you their perspective.

And finally, I think it's really important, because we get so much rejection and there are so few acceptances, that we really celebrate those acceptances. What I see happen all the time is people, boy, they're just dying for years trying to get something published and then when they get published they say, "Oh, that's great, but what I'm really focused on now is the next thing," they won't even stop and celebrate the fact that something got accepted! So what I want to really encourage you to do is when you have these points of completion along the process, that you celebrate them, that you have people who you can genuinely share good news with, who aren't going to try to diminish it, who aren't going to try to twist and turn it into something that isn't an accomplishment, you want to be able to have people who you can really, really enjoy the acceptance with. And internally you want to be able to really pause and really be able to savor that goodness, because if we're constantly running for the next thing, that's our body in that emergency mode.

Second, and you know, maybe I've already said this, but I do think it bears repeating, I think the point of all of this is that the pain that we experience with rejection is normal, but what we don't want to do is just keep that pain and isolation because anything in isolation tends to grow into epic proportions. And so we constantly want to be keeping us in community so that we get the support we need, we get the translation services we need, we get the celebration we need, we get all that fullness and not just for ourselves but that we're able to share that in a collective.



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So let me talk briefly about these daily devaluations, oh! The disrespect! The micro aggressions! Again, if you're underrepresented in any way, shape or form, these are just a normal part of what goes on in campus life. I sometimes call this, "Death by a thousand cuts," none of them are so egregious as to rise to the level of over hostility, but they're these sorts of covert hostilities. People constantly interrupting you, the students how refer to your colleagues as Doctor and Professor and call you by your first name, it's the mistaken identifies, constantly having to tell people who you are and what you do there, it's all these kind of little things that none of which, in and of themselves, are that big of a deal, but they can build up and the cumulative impact of them can really feel like you're taking a bunch of punches on a daily basis. So how do we manage the stress of that?

Well, first of all I think we have to get real about: it happens. To really be able to be clear what's going on when it happens, because a lot of times we just try to blow it off or stuff it down and there isn't any stuffing it down. If you stuff things down long enough, you're going to explode. I think we need to be really honest and aware about it. But I think we also, this is when that healthy conflict, this is our monthly training last month that these same skills really come into play. So constantly asking ourselves, "Does this matter?" This specific instance right now, do I want to push back, or do I want to pull back? Secondly, really asking ourselves, "What am I going to gain or what am I going to lose based on my choice?" So if I decide to push back, if I decide to engage in conflict, what am I going to gain and lose? And if I decide I'm not going to say anything, sometimes we can lose a piece of our integrity by doing that. What we gain is sort of not having to have a conflict in the moment. So really asking ourselves, "What do we gain and lose by doing these things?" And if we do decide to push back, and a lot of times that's a perfectly reasonable decision, the question is always, "What is the most effective way for me to manage that choice?" So if I'm going to push back, what is the appropriate level of push back? What is the appropriate type of push-back that's going to get across the message but that's not going to put me in danger of retaliation?

So I just want to be really clear, I think we don't say it often enough, it is perfectly normal to be pissed off and angry when you experience the daily micro aggressions of racism, sexism, or any -ism. But guess what? There's very few ways in the academy and our social world that women of color can express anger without becoming, "the angry black woman," "that bitch" that this, that that, without being labeled as that being part of who we are. So part of that is that we want to constantly be managing the way that we negotiate conflict with people, but we also want to be really clear, it's very few times that we're going to be able to have a conflict that we get to express the full intensity of how we feel, because most of the time that's going to create a whole spiral of other consequences. And even as I'm saying that, here's the deal, that anger is energy, it's not just, you can't keep stuffing it down, you can't keep pushing it down, because what ends up happening is if you don't get it out of your body, it's going to build, it's going to take root, it's going to grow into bitterness, it's going to really take all over your body.



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So, again, the idea here in terms of the stress management piece is that, and I can't say this strongly enough, you have to be healthy just to withstand the daily kinds of micro aggressions that you will experience if you are underrepresented. And what that means is it is imperative for you to take care of your body. It means eating well, it means exercising regularly, it means sleeping eight hours every night, and it means having a safe space. And I don't know what that safe space is for you, but every single one of us needs a safe space. A space where you can vent, where you can laugh, where you can be heard, where you don't have to explain whether something really happened or not, or whether it was really related to race and gender; a space where you can just let loose. And if you don't have one, we should brainstorm how to get you one because I cannot tell you how important it is to now walk around with the stuff all bottled up inside of you. And if your partner is the only safe space, that's tough because that then creates a whole other dynamic to the relationship itself, so I just really want to encourage you and tell you, literally, as a coping mechanism, one of the things we really need is to have the kind of safe space where we can really let loose, we can blow off the steam that is that angry energy, where we can laugh about the sort of crazy aspects of it, where we can really just let go of all those things that build up inside of us.

Final piece I want to talk about is dealing with the haters. I get a lot of email about haters. They just torture people. Let me be clear, I think somebody is a hater when they just can't be happy for your success. So, instead of ever being able to celebrate that you did something well, they have to undermine what you do in some way, shape or form and the purpose of undermining you is to just knock you down a notch. So, that's what haters are, they are all over the academic world. And again, the more successful you become the more you flourish the brighter your light is, the more those haters will be out in droves. I was just visiting a campus two weeks ago, and it happened that I was visiting at the same time as a very famous African American female professor, and I went to dinner as part of my visit and guess what? Half the dinner was spent, people sniping and being petty about this person and their shortcomings and how they're not really all that and blah blah blah. And what was interesting was at the end of the conversation, it ended with, "And I wonder if we could potentially hire this person?" Because she was looking to make a move.

So I say all of this because this was someone who, their work changed my life, I was literally posturing to try to, they were staying in the same hotel and I was kind like, stalk them but not stalk them. I was hoping to run into them at breakfast. This was someone who, really, I think is just amazing. And to sit in a conversation and hear people really just downing this person with one stab after another, it's just petty. But pettiness is sort of a way that academics relate to each other, it's a way that they bond. And the greater that someone is, the easier it is for that pettiness to come flowing out. So, I just want to say that's not going away. It's not unlike experiencing the daily devaluation, it's not unlike rejection, it's not going away. And, in fact, the further you go in your career, the more it's going to happen.



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I think, in terms of stress, it is incredibly important to distinguish between two types of haters, one type of hater is someone who is a hater and has power over you in some way. And another type of hater is somebody who is a peer or who has less power than you, and peers could be your colleagues who are in the same cohort or the same rank or status, and you can have haters of people who have less power than you, even your students can be haters.

The point here is that the reason it's so important to differentiate is because I often hear a lot of people who are very caught up in competition with other tenure track faculty and they're really embedded in that they have a hater who is at the same level as them. You need to let those people go. They have no power over you and they're just hating on you to hate on you, you need to stop letting them have so much power over you. And people do this in a variety of different ways, certainly some people visualize putting on an invisible coat of armor, some people just work at doing their internal meditation work to forgive that person, I don't care what you do, but for the people who are at your same level or have less power than you, I think it's really critical to be compassionate towards those people because here's the deal: if you are in an emotional state where you cannot stand for someone else to be good at something or successful at something and you can't stand it so much that you feel comfortable publically pulling them down and trying to take them down a notch, you know what? You're already in your own private hell. There's nothing that you can do to that person that's going to be any worse than them having to live in their own skin. So when I think about the haters who are my colleagues, the people who have less power than me in the organization, I actually really imagine what it's like to be them, which often pulls up, in me, an incredible compassionate response and I actually have to do my own inner forgiveness work about what ever it is they've done to me.

And what's interesting is that people like this always reap their own karma. You don't have to be the person to deliver a punishment, that's not helping you and in many cases you're walking around stewing about things that they have never even thought of after it passed their lips. They said something nasty to you or about you or did something and then they moved on with their day and you're sitting around worrying about it, waking you up in the middle of the night, none of that is good for you and especially if they don't even have any power or control over your situation. So for those people who are peers and who are one down from you in a work chart, let those people go.

But the ones who have more power than you, it's a little stickier. And what I want to suggest is that you, you know one of the examples someone emailed me was a department chair who, no matter what this person does, it's never good enough. And the person just pushes and pushes and sticks the knife in on a daily basis, and really does so around issues that are absolutely petty, things like what gets printed on a flyer and what room something is in and blah blah blah. This idea that even if they do an extraordinary job they can't acknowledge the extraordinary nature of it and all they can do is point out the minutia of detail that is a mistake. And of course



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this is enough to drive a person crazy, especially if it's someone's department chair or a senior faculty member.

So what I want to suggest in this case is that, luckily for us no tenure decision is a decision of one. We all exist in community, we vote in community, we make decisions in community, and certainly power is an influence, or distributed within any group but what you really want to be doing in any of these situations is when you have a difficult person like this who has power over you, that you're really getting and staying clear internally about what matters. So you're doing the things that you need to do, you're aligning your time with your priorities and you're building a network of mentors and sponsors beyond this person's reach so that if, for any reason, they act out when you're not around and people are talking about you, that you've already strengthened the relationships around you so that other people will step in, not only see what's going on but use their power to change the conversation.

I think more than anything I think we all have to be really clear that we're really not allowing this kind of pettiness to penetrate our inner being. We're not allowing this really low-level shit to sort of come inside and start shaping how we feel about ourselves. And what's going on with that is, if you really require external validation, if you need other people to tell you what you're doing is good or worthwhile or excellent, what ends up happening is that you're likely to be very miserable as an academic. Because, regrettably, the culture is not one of external validation. The culture is one of, when you're doing great no one says anything. And when you make even a small mistake, everyone is there to discuss it and amplify it. So I think the implication of this is that we have to get really clear about our own measure of value, our own measure of worth so that these types of little jabs, these little cuts, they don't really wound us in this deep and profound way.

I often say, "Pity the haters." And, really, forgive them and move on. If they have more power than you, let me be clear, you need to start building that network of other people who can offset them, you need to be taking care of your business, but you also need to take back your power and take back how much they're able to hurt you.

Final slide, I just want to say, very simply, is that really the best stress management of all is to start focusing not on how horrible everything is and unchangeable, but to start stepping out, to start leaning towards the things you actually want. So if you're looking at this diagram I put in the middle, "What really matters to you?" and I put a bunch of empty boxes around it, and I'm not going to ask you to fill it out now but I just want to plant that in your head. Because, ultimately, the more we focus on how awful things are, what we don't want, this is so miserable, I'm in this toxic situation, guess what? We just get more of that and the more attention stays on that, the more our energy just stays stuck in that. And so what I want to encourage you to do, in terms of your stress is, in part, to start letting go of the things that are outside of your control, that are largely unchangeable, you can manage how you respond to them, but not them in and of



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themselves. Not to do so from a place of just throwing up your hands and giving up, but doing so from a place of conscious decision that, in fact, I'm going to focus my energy on the things that matter, the things that I can change, the ways that I can adjust my perceptions, my time, how I understand my relationships to my own power and how I move in that direction really, to make what I want happen.

So when I filled this out, what really matters to me, in my life, is helping people really live their full potential. So I work with a bunch of people that are just withering on the vine, and what really matters to me is helping people be full and live a really full life. So, what that means for those spokes around it, if that's happening in my life all is well and when I start to think about the kinds of things that I respond to, react to, am anxious about, worry about, obsess about, if they don't fit in that box I want to start pulling some energy away from that. And what I want to point it towards is all the things surrounding that that I want. And when I filled that out it was things like, "More laughter in my life," I want vibrant health, I want loving relationships, I want inner peace that comes from me and not from what others think about me, I want real community, I want daily connection to my purpose, I want more fun and play in my life, and when I move in the world, when I start each day from that place, not from what everyone else is doing to me and what I can't change and, "Oh, isn't it awful!" but from this place of this is what matters and this is what I want to create, I start seeing opportunities for those things to happen, they start flourishing more because I'm putting more into them.

I'm going to stop here and I'm going to stop here, I'll take a couple questions if anyone has them. Just go ahead and hit one on your telephone keypad if you do and I'll call on you. But, I really hope that before you head out today, and you might do this while we have some discussion, is to really commit to at least one thing. What is one thing that you could commit to moving forward from today, if you can commit to three things, great! But at least choose one, whether it's something that you are going to do differently in terms of responding to rejection, if it's something that you're going to do differently in terms of handling micro aggressions, if it's something that you're going to do differently about those haters in your life, or if you really want to step back and think about, "What really matters to me? And what are those things that aren't currently present that I want to grow and flourish and I want to put my energy, not more and more energy into the things that are stressing me out, but more energy into the actual life I want to live?"

So feel free to raise a hand, we have a lot of people here so I'm kind of surprised that nobody has a question. But maybe this was a lot for an hour. Any questions? Just hit one on your keypad. I'll know you want to ask. Well, it looks like we must be completely full or we'll filling out what our thing is going to be, either way is just fine, so what I'm going to do is —oh, we have one, great. Hold on. Monique, hi Monique!

Monique: Hi, how you Kerry Ann?

Kerry Ann: I'm well, how are you?



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Monique: Good! I noticed that most of my stressors were internal. And I also noticed that I, myself, am a bit of a hater.

Kerry Ann: Oooh!

Monique: Which makes me be even more inner, inner-ly negative towards myself.

Kerry Ann: Mmmm!

Monique: I recognize that this is awful and it stems from the competition that I'm in for limited resources and all that. And I really shouldn't even make excuses, because it's unacceptable and it's awful.

Kerry Ann: Well, you don't have to beat yourself up about it either. Part of why I'm talking about haters is because it is normal for us to engage in this, because the environment and the context that we're in often creates the haters. It's part of being in the context, as you just said, of competition.

Monique: Yeah. So, anyway, one of my things is to replace those negative comments and thoughts about others that really, they don't help me feel better about myself either.

Kerry Ann: Right.

Monique: And I think that, "Oh, well, she got that because she knew this person." Or, "Of course he's published because he's not asked to do so much service," you know what I mean? It just doesn't help me move forward. And it serves to create distance when there shouldn't be between me and those particular colleagues. So I need to shape up.

Kerry Ann: Well, I love this comment, and let me just appreciate the fact that you're willing to say, "Oh my goodness, sometimes I'm a hater!" and I'm only giggling because, of course, I'm a recovering hater. So I totally get it. And I love what you just said about it, which is, "Here's the deal, when I'm engaged in hating, especially either if it's to myself or if it's a collective hate, what it does is it pulls my energy in a certain way, it creates a certain energy and that energy, it is what it is, but guess what? It's not helping me! It's useless to my getting what I want. It is not moving me forward, in fact, it's a leaking of my power." And this is what one of my mentors always says, "When you engage in that behavior, you are leaking your most precious resource: your power. And you're giving it out to something that has no impact on you."

Monique: Yeah, that's good.

Kerry Ann: Well, I love that you shared that. So what exactly are you going to do, concretely? How are you going to disrupt that?

Monique: Well... yeah... that's a good question!



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Kerry Ann: [laughs]

Monique: What would you suggest?

Kerry Ann: Well, I think..

Monique: Some of it is aiding and abetting, so there's a particular person that I don't really care about but my colleague really hates and had a horrible graduate student experience with her, but she got tenure, so maybe I could just redirect the conversation when it goes sour about that person.

Kerry Ann: Yeah.

Monique: Because it's just not worth it, and maybe I can just affirm my colleague, who is hurt by this person, and just let her know it's okay, but I'm not going to talk about that anymore.

Kerry Ann: Well, I know that person really hurt you, but what's going to help you to move forward?

Monique: Right, that's good, yeah.

Kerry Ann: Because oftentimes they think when we're doing that hating it's because we're hurt, right? We want something somebody else got, it's that ugly sort of, either, "I've been hurt," or, "I'm envious," or something. So sometimes just speaking what it is and asking what someone needs to move forward is helpful. Sometimes not, sometimes just change the subject. Use your best judgment. But I'm also curious what you could do when it's not with someone else, but it's just in your own mind. So, you hear yourself saying it in your head?

Monique: This is going to sound lame, but maybe I could pray for them, do something to bring some positive energy into my own being.

Kerry Ann: Well, that certainly—

Monique: Wishing well for them, or something, I don't know.

Kerry Ann: Yeah, you could do that, that's certainly a good idea. I think probably you could come up with five or six ideas, whatever it is that's going to, I think you're going to be more aware of it because we're talking about it.

Monique: Yeah.

Kerry Ann: But when it comes up, we just want to have some redirect. If it's a prayer for you, great, if it's, "I wish them well and I release them," if it's, "I wonder how I could get what they have? I wonder how I could move in that direction? How could I be funded in that way, recognized in that way, published in that way?" Sort of redirect it back around to what you actually want. Whatever it is, it's really always that combination of awareness plus redirect.



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Monique: Yes.

Kerry Ann: That's awesome. Oh, I can't wait to hear how it goes.

Monique: Thank you, Kerry Ann.

Kerry Ann: Celebration for recovering haters! Let's see, Courtney!

Courtney: Hi Kerry Ann, how are you?

Kerry Ann: Good, how are you?

Courtney: I'm good, good. This is a great topic, thank you so much.

Kerry Ann: Oh, I hope it's helpful.

Courtney: It's definitely. I think you might have answered part of my question with Monique. I have a question about what are some ways to putting myself out there as being willing to be part of someone's post acceptance celebration team. Everyone is walking around really stressed out and really down, and I feel like I want to be that cheerleader and help, I like the build morale and be that cheerleader for the department. How do I let other academics know, given the way that, as you said, all these external and internal stressors happen, that I would be willing to be a part of that celebration team?

Kerry Ann: Well, you know you can certainly tell people. You can post on our forum and tell people to call you and you celebrate them! You can sort of advertise. I think a really good way to do it is just do it, right? So when people tell you something, when you hear something good about someone, that you just respond, because you don't want to make a job of it, you just want to sort of call up in yourself that genuine response. And look, I have to be honest, people so rarely get a genuine enthusiastic response, that they don't even know what to do with it. I am a natural edifier. I will celebrate anybody, any time. I've grown into that, because it feels good to me, there's something about celebrating other people that creates good energy in me. I get all excited! The point is that I think if you just start with the natural occurrences in your environment, just looking someone in the eye, I mean literally saying, "I'm proud of you!" or "Congratulations!", or "Oh my gosh, that was so wonderful!" And not following up with a little smack on the back, which is what most people do, just giving it genuinely and freely, that's what you do. And the good thing is that pretty soon people start knowing that you naturally congratulate. And when people want it, they'll come find it! You become like living Prozac!
[laughs]

Courtney: [laughs]

Kerry Ann: And I don't suggest this to anyone that it's fake, it only works if it's really genuine. But honestly, I really, for me, this is a like a muscle. I constantly want to be celebrating and regularly celebrating other people because it makes me feel good.



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It releases endorphins in my brain! It makes me feel like suddenly I did something, that's a good feeling. And as I said, I'm trying to bring more pleasure in my life, that's something that's important to me. So I think there's probably everybody on this call is now going to be looking for you, "Courtney who?" you're going to be the most popular request as a buddy. But honestly, sort of doing that in a way that's... just get started, just be real, be genuine about it, and people get it so rarely they're going to love it.

Courtney: Thank you!

Kerry Ann: Great! Well, speaking of which I always like to do a quick buddy match at the end. So if anyone is interested in a buddy, just go ahead and hit one on your keyboard, all a buddy means is you get matched up with somebody, it's only for thirty days, it's not like you're married to them, it's not a lifelong commitment. You get connected with one other person and you can use it for whatever you want. You can use it for accountability, you can use it for writing support, you can use it to celebrate each other's successes this month, and you can do whatever you want. So I'm going to go ahead right now, we have quite a few, people love their buddies. So let me just take a quick screenshot. Okay.

So I just want to thank you all for coming. I will go ahead and post the audio in the discussion forum, but I'm also going to post a couple more resources for you around stress, around coping, around tips and tricks, so that you'll have a place to go when you need something to start mitigating your stress. So I hope everyone has a relaxing evening and I will look forward to working with you again soon. Okay, goodnight!