



### *WHO AM I? Part 1*

Who am I?

In the cafeteria, I look around past the buzzing crowds and loud voices  
squinting to read the handwritten inscription,  
wondering, “what meat is pastrami?”  
when I ask the servers if I can have the mac and cheese without the pork,  
they explain it isn't possible, since everything is made in bulk.  
“Just pick out the meat”, they tell me.  
What they don't know is,  
anything touching the unclean meat is unclean.  
It's not as simple as picking out the meat.



Who am I?

I read the ingredients on the Bento sushi twice,  
once with an open tab on my phone googling “is crab  
extract real crab?”  
the rows of samon sushi rolls are empty, and the other  
snack stations closed.  
The sandwiches are another option, but they all have  
cold ham slices.  
I am not vegetarian, yet VG's is my safest option  
for a meal I don't have to wait a whole 20 minutes in line  
just to find out at the front that the food isn't kosher.

Who am I?

the dining hall closes at 7, and my class is done at 7:30  
the grill is still open.  
I'm tired of quinoa burgers

but I can't eat meat with dairy, a baby animal's meal with it's mother.  
My dietary restrictions aren't an allergy; they also aren't optional.

Who am I?

I am a Jewish student just wondering where the kosher options are.

### *MY WISH*

I wish I had a Black professor; even one will do  
in classrooms where, when counting us, I'm alone or  
one of few  
out of 22 020 students, I still find myself counting  
putting down a finger for each person with features  
like mine—  
richly melanated skin, facial structures carved with  
intention,  
eyes that either meet mine and nod in greeting  
or decide to look elsewhere.  
Rarely do I make it to my second hand  
even then, we're always less than 10.



5 000 employees  
900 full-time faculty members  
of that number, I've had  
1 Indigenous instructor, from the Ktunaxa nation  
1 professor from Pakistan  
4 East Asian lecturers, and  
0 from the African diaspora.  
The rest were white.  
Of course, I still valued their expertise. Some  
of them, I'll never forget.  
Very few would I advise other students to avoid,  
still, there's a void.  
I wish I had a Black professor,  
a mentor who knew what it took to get there.  
Where do the Black professors disappear to?  
I looked in Biology, Psychology, even Sociology,  
in stats classes and chem labs,  
in English 135 and 209,

in my first-year Fine Arts class,  
where Kanye and Beyoncé were applauded as creative geniuses.  
If their pictures were shown on the projector,  
it would have been the only time I saw a face like mine at the front of the lecture hall.  
I say “would have”, because they were referred to by name without an accompanying image.  
Here, Black people are as elusive as mist,  
mystical creatures who's names we recognize but who's faces we never see.

A predominantly white university's  
perpetual missed opportunities to make this Black student feel seen.



What classes do the Black professors teach?  
bell hooks wrote her name in lower case to  
amplify her message,  
as if she knew she had to choose between one or  
the other being remembered,  
as if she expected to be forgotten.  
I'm glad she wasn't.  
Audre Lorde exposed the pattern of  
oppression's net,  
how it entangles all of us with it's net, and  
how dismantling it requires full cooperation.  
She taught me that self-care is self-preservation,  
an act of political warfare.  
Moya Bailey gave me *mysoginoire*, a word for  
my repertoire  
of words to put to experiences too overwhelming  
to otherwise describe.  
I wish I heard their words from lips that looked  
like mine,

brown eyes and braids or headwraps at the front of the class,  
or in a field under a tree,  
passing their knowledge on to this branch,  
nurturing each inquisition, cultivating understanding beyond the surface  
so I understood not just what she said but what she didn't say.  
I heard the basement analogy on twitter before discovering Kimberlé Crenshaw looks like my mom.  
I was in my second last semester when a professor first presented the work of Charles Mills.  
I wish I knew about him in my first semester.  
Blackness visible would have made me feel safe  
rather than shivering in the classroom,  
heartbeat and thoughts racing each other,  
the winner deciding whether or not I raised my hand.  
I had to leave my program to hear voices from my own community.  
Am I the first woman of African heritage studying psychology?  
Is Black girl magic limited to feminist philosophy and art?  
Witnessing the successful and celebrated—  
better yet, the *employed*—  
would have convinced me my time and tuition wasn't futile  
and my contributions were valued in this field.  
I wish I new 10 Black professors in psychology, biology, and computer science.

Where are they hiding the Black professors?  
My white professors look at us with sincere faces,  
acknowledging their privilege and the limitations of their perspectives.  
Acknowledgements are a start, but the statement can't end there.  
Do you use your privilege to highlight the work of your Black, Indigenous, and Asian peers?  
Do you use your whiteness to open doors

for more professionals who don't look like you?  
Do you mentor students of colour,  
showing them the ropes,  
giving them the cheat codes,  
pointing them in the direction of opportunity and success?  
Do you fight for their rights even after you've clocked out?  
Do you recommend them in rooms they otherwise couldn't enter?  
While you acknowledge your privilege,  
am I meant to acknowledge my disadvantage?

I wish I had a superhero who looks like me with a PhD.  
Maybe they could shield me from  
classmates searing holes into my skin with their lazer beam eyes  
(who said Black skin doesn't burn?)  
expecting me to answer on behalf of the race  
while silently I wonder if I'm safe.  
The Black History Month poster was defaced and I wonder if the ones who did it are listening.  
And what if I don't have much to say?  
Can an academic who knows better than I swoop in and save the day  
with the proper terminology and the authority the class will respect?  
Even when they hear me,  
I feel I've said something wrong.  
I called white supremacy destructive and exploitative  
and the room went silent.  
The only sound I hear is my pulse in my ears  
and I wonder if I've done much more than put a target on my back.  
Because my white roommate still makes "Black" sound like a curse word.  
They point at me at parties when Cardi raps the n-word.  
The boys in my building pretended to be a Black boy on tinder,  
using the image of someone who could have been my brother  
while making the persona as degrading as possible.  
You know what I *just realized* rhymes with tinder?  
The word they don't apologize for using in my presence as I hold back tears.  
What consequences would they even face if I had someone to report them to?  
What version of the bat signal should I send out?  
Or did the heroes who look like me get tired of fighting alone?

Does anyone know where the professors like me are?  
Classmates only look at me from the corner of their eye.  
I know I'm not invisible, yet the hypervisibility isn't comfortable, either.  
An invisible forcefield keeps anyone from sitting too close.  
When it comes to group projects, I expect to work alone  
or else be underestimated, talked over,  
rated lower in the peer feedback not because I didn't contribute or was disruptive,  
but because they didn't like that I didn't disappear  
like the Black sidekicks and token characters they watched on Disney channel.  
This Black girl had more lines, had something to say,  
and wasn't afraid to take lead or respectfully disagree.  
I wish they appreciated my contributions,

and I hope it wouldn't take seeing a Black professor to remind them that we're capable.

Maybe you didn't hear me:

**Where are the Black professors at UVic?**

Do you hire one per year, and one per faculty?

Or do their application forms sit unread at your desk because their names aren't in languages you recognize?

I wish I spent undergrad at an HBCU. At least I know I'll find them there.