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The Responsive Diversity Worker: Emotional Labour in Academia

Amber Spence

Abstract: Often in academia, women and minorities are held to a higher standard in how they present themselves (caring, empathetic) and how they manage the emotions of colleagues and students. The emotional labour that is expected of them is well documented. In this paper, I develop a new concept to address the emotional labour of diversity workers: Responsive Diversity Work. I summarize Carla Fehr's view of the epistemic diversity worker, develop a theory of emotional labour, and explain how the responsive diversity worker, in virtue of the unfair emotional labour expected of her, is at great risk of mental health issues.

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Keywords: diversity worker, emotional labour, epistemic diversity work, 'free riding', responsive diversity work, responsive diversity worker

In this paper, I argue that Carla Fehr's concept of 'diversity worker' should be broadened to include all women and minorities in academia regardless of research interests, in order to address the disproportionate amount of emotional labour such workers are implicitly expected to carry out. In so doing, I suggest that we refer to such workers as 'responsive diversity workers.' I summarize Fehr's view of the epistemic diversity worker in Section One and develop a working theory of emotional labour in Section Two. In Section Three, I explain how the responsive diversity worker is, by virtue of the unfair emotional labour that is expected of her, at great risk of developing mental health issues.

Section One: The Epistemic Diversity Worker

In this Section, I explain Carla Fehr's 'diversity promotes excellence' theory developed in her article, "What Is in It For Me? The Benefits of Diversity in Scientific Communities," and explore the ways in which diversity work can be problematic. I argue that the concept of a diversity worker should (1) be expanded to include all women and minorities in academia regardless of

research interests, and (2) be re-worked to address emotional labour. While Fehr's theory does important work articulating the epistemic value of the diversity worker, the concept itself is not inclusive of the emotional labour done mainly by women and minorities in both formal and informal academic communities (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004).

Fehr expands on Helen Longino's social epistemology concerning the epistemic benefits of diversity within a community. The basic idea behind this view is that diversity within a community provides epistemic benefit: the assumptions, prejudices, and theoretical perspectives of the non-diverse members can be noticed and challenged (Fehr 2011, 135). When Fehr uses the phrase 'diversity', she is particularly referring to the underrepresentation of women and feminist scholars in the academy. This includes some minorities, i.e., those whose work focuses on gender through a feminist lens (Fehr 2011, 134).

For Longino, a community is a group of people who come together to critically evaluate one another's scholarship (Fehr 2011, 138). Such a community will give uptake to dissenting voices and treat each member with tempered equality of intellectual authority.

Fehr worries that Longino's view of community is not detailed enough; she prefers Helen Hankinson Nelson's view of an epistemic community as being focussed on constructing and sharing knowledge and standards of evidence among its members. Such communities are "multiple, historically contingent, and dynamic," they "evolve, dissolve, and recombine," and have many purposes and projects which may or may not include the production of knowledge. Finally, they rarely have clear and defined boundaries; typically, such communities can overlap.

While this view of a community is more detailed, there still exists a potential problem: because so many of these communities overlap, it is important to consider which communities

need to cultivate dissenting voices. Fehr argues that it is possible for a community to enjoy the epistemic benefits of diversity without cultivating such dissent (Fehr 2011, 138). The problem is that one can interact with people of different social locations and theoretical perspectives without nurturing and increasing their representation by "free riding off existing diversity" (Fehr 2011, 139). This will make it hard to use diversity-promotes-excellence theories like Longino's to argue for more representation of women and some minorities in certain communities. This is where Fehr believes such theories have room for development.

The type of community can be important for issues regarding representation of diverse workers. Fehr proposes two types of communities: formal and informal. In the context of academic and scientific communities, "a *formal community* is one that is institutionally recognized and conducts the kinds of activities acknowledged as contributions to the professional advancement of a faculty member" (Fehr 2011, 139). Formal communities can include being a student, postdoctoral researcher, faculty member in an academic department, etc.; something that one would put on one's CV.

Informal communities are simply networks of people with whom we interact and who can have an influence on our work. This can include both a professional network of scholars or friends and family members (Fehr 2011, 139).

Within either community, one can be a marginal member (someone who doesn't have much status or power in a community), a central member (someone who does hold power and/or status within a community), or hold a perspective that includes both. While marginal members can be considered diversity workers, diversity workers are not always marginal members.

University departments are important formal communities, as this is the place where academics are paid for their epistemic labour. Herein lies the difficulty for Fehr: it is possible for

one to reap the epistemic benefits of diversity from an informal community without ever having to increase the representation of diversity within one's formal community (Fehr 2011, 139). When this happens, often the diversity worker who provided the dissenting view in the informal community is not credited with having provided such a contribution; this means that this person has done epistemic labour without compensation or professional advancement (Fehr 2011, 141). Fehr calls this diversity 'free riding'. In some cases, the diversity worker may gain recognition or advancement through offering a voice of dissent; but even still, the person gaining from the diversity worker is free riding (Fehr 2011, 141).

Fehr writes that "the person being used as a source of diversity is doing what I call *epistemic diversity work*" (Fehr 2011, 141). This definition covers a lot of ground, encompassing the sort of activities that are typically considered part of the everyday work, research, and service that is required of academics. The difference here is that epistemic diversity work is often done in addition to the regular activities in which academics engage (Fehr 2011, 141).

The impact of free riding on a diversity worker depends both on the social location and the kind of diversity that the worker adds to the community. A diversity worker who is a central member of a formal community will probably not sustain much damage by being the object of free riding or by turning down opportunities to do epistemic diversity work as opposed to someone who is a marginal member of an informal community. Free riding off such a member can have serious consequences for one's professional development because it is time-consuming labour that uses up energy that could be used to further one's own career (Fehr 2011, 142).

If free riding is common and continues to happen, it will end up decreasing the amount of diversity workers available to do this work, since it can impact their career trajectories in a negative way (Fehr 2011, 142). While it is true that epistemic diversity workers can decide not to engage

in such work and withdraw from both formal and informal communities, the choices available to the diversity worker to either provide or withhold service is constrained depending on her status and the kind of diversity being provided (Fehr 2011, 142).

Fehr's concept of an epistemic diversity worker does a few important things: First, it calls attention to the epistemic work that is being done without recognition by women and feminist scholars. Second, it highlights the inequity of epistemic diversity work and the unlikelihood of professional advancement. Third, it calls for more representation of diversity within our communities, especially our formal communities. Crucially, free riding off diversity workers in a marginal position means that diversity workers spend time and energy labouring on something that often will not receive recognition or professional advancement; this could be why we see so many women leaving academia.¹

Nevertheless, there are two crucial things Fehr's concept leaves out. While 'epistemic diversity worker' includes women and/or feminist scholars, it leaves out people who are minorities and those who do not work on issues relating to gender. This is important because such scholars often face a disproportionate workload, in comparison to their cis white male counterparts, which is overlooked. This workload can be epistemic in nature but need not be, such as the work an indigenous scholar does in uncovering biases in research relating to indigenous cultures. While there is certainly an epistemic element to this work, to say that it is entirely epistemic is to miss an important and often exhausting component: emotional labour.

¹ The leaky pipeline refers to the higher percentage of women faculty who leave academia in comparison to their male colleagues. A short discussion of this as related to diversity workers can be found in Carla Fehr's paper, "What Is In It For Me', 143-144.

Fehr's paper is an important contribution to discussions about the leaky pipeline and the unique challenges that women and feminist scholars face in academia. Nevertheless, I propose that her term 'epistemic diversity worker' should be expanded to include the people and the labour it leaves out.

Section Two: Emotional Labour

There seems to be an intuitive sense of emotional labour as being acts of caring that put strain on the agent carrying out such an act. In her book, *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Hochschild proposes that emotional labour is the management of emotions with the purpose of either inducing or suppressing one's feelings in order to "sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild 1983, 7). What makes emotional labour so challenging and straining is that in order to be successful at it, one often has to reach deep into the part of the self that is prized as the source of individuality and personhood in order to manage emotions in this way.

Generally, the payoff of engaging in emotional labour in our personal lives is at least close to being equal to the strain. We can also stop when we need to. Other than what Hochschild calls 'feeling rules', there is nothing forcing us to continue. When this kind of work is forced through pressures related to employment and career progression, however, emotion work becomes problematic and often unequally distributed.

For Hochschild, feelings are a sense alongside our other five. This sense is a bodily sensation called up by the situation we find ourselves in and communicates information to us about our viewpoint on the world or situation we are in (Hochschild 1983, 17). Feeling is not something stored inside of us, nor is it independent of management. Rather, "the act of 'getting in touch with'

feeling and the act of 'trying to' feel may become part of the process that makes the thing we get in touch with, or the thing we manage, *into* a feeling or emotion. In managing feeling, we contribute to the creation of it" (Hochschild 1983, 17-18).

What is that 'thing we get in touch with', however? I suggest that we are missing what Herta Nobauer refers to as 'affect'. She writes that affect "is a non-conscious experience of intensity that traces its power from the fact that it is unformed and unstructured and cannot be fully realised in language" (Nobauer 2012, 134). We experience it in our body before we are able to find a name for it. The name is based on the language our society has given us to express our sensation. Once named, it is then "reexperienced through social relations and culture," and because of this, has "an inherently reflexive, transitive, and inter-subjective quality" (Nobauer 2012, 134). I propose that affect is that from which feeling arises, and is likely the sense of deep self that is considered the source of individuality and personhood which Hochschild believes is used in emotional labour.

I suggest Hochschild's 'feeling rules' have a considerable part to play in the (implicit) biases we hold regarding who should be doing emotional labour. Hochschild proposes that emotion management is guided by feeling rules, which are the standards "used in emotional conversation to determine what is rightly owed and owing in the currency of feeling" (Hochschild 1983, 18).

Emotion management, guided by feeling rules, is often considered the domain of women in private life. As Hochschild notes, it is up to women to create "the emotional tone of social encounters" (Hochschild 1983, 20). These feeling rules are what women used to trade for economic support. So, when women became a fixture of working society, the expectation was that they would continue to abide by the feeling rules expected in regular private life and pick up the emotional workload in the workplace. Women are expected to be caring, empathetic, warm, and approachable

(Hua 2018; Koster 2011; Hochschild 1983; Ogbonna & Harris 2004). That is not to say that men are never expected to abide by feeling rules; they have their own set that guide their emotion management. I suggest that the feeling rules applied to cis white men's management of emotion are less demanding in virtue of their 'manliness'; men are not commonly expected to show emotional engagement and warmth in their working lives.

Feeling rules are often what is cited as why women are more naturally fit for an occupation like teaching, and this bias is what leads to women and minorities having to engage in far more emotional labour than that of cis white men in their capacities as teachers (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004).

Hochschild suggests that we participate in emotional labour through what she calls 'surface acting' and 'deep acting'. When we are surface acting, we use our facial expressions and body language to portray an emotion we do not actually feel. This kind of acting does not engage one's affect or one's feelings (Hochschild 1983, 35-38). Audrey Williams June writes that scholars who are of a visual minority, such as black and Hispanic academics, are often asked to serve on committees in order to provide everyone with their 'unique perspective' (June 2015). In such a case, we can imagine an Hispanic scholar quickly rearranging her facial expressions to cover up her true feelings of exasperation and annoyance, instead showing a cheery and enthusiastic acceptance of the task. Inwardly, she has not attempted the deep emotion management of her feelings; she still feels annoyed and exasperated at being asked to do this. She just does not *look* it.

In deep acting, the agent is actively trying to either induce or supress a feeling in order to experience the emotion for which she believes the situation calls. This involves reaching into the affect of one's sense of self to try and bring up a feeling suitable for the occasion or the situation,

and then acting out that emotion in a convincingly spontaneous way. Let us consider for a moment what Linh U. Hua writes about her experience lecturing as a woman of colour. According to Hua, both white students as well as students of colour are susceptible to the "cultural socialization that devalues the authority and contributions of women of color" (Hua 2018, 81). This often means that "at best…student resistance is operationalized as apathy, and in the extreme, as open hostility" (Hua 2018, 81). Nevertheless, Hua must engage in the performance that is teaching. When she lectures these students, she must push down any 'negative' feelings she may be experiencing in the face of the lack of enthusiasm or outright hostility, and instead create a genuine feeling of passion, enthusiasm, and care. These emotions are "obligatory as a measure of [her] competence, professionalism, and collegiality" (Hua 2018, 82). This sense of vibrancy is a perfect example of the ways in which women and minority scholars engage in deep acting as a part of their job requirements. The "student gaze", as Koster calls it, does a thorough job of ensuring that women and minority faculty are working hard to produce the appropriate emotions the students feel entitled to receive (Koster 2011, 70).

Students often penalize women and minority professors if their expectation of care is not met. Because cis white male professors do not have such high expectations placed upon them, based on these feeling rules, they do not have to engage in this surface or deep acting as much or to the same extent as women and minority scholars do (Hua 2018; Nobauer 2012; Koster 2011; Ogbonna & Harris 2004).

Koster suggests two ways we can think of emotional labour as unfolding. The first is 'Everyday Emotional Labour', which is managing one's own emotions by surface acting and/or deep acting. The second she calls 'Extraordinary Emotional Labour', which is managing one's

own emotions through either surface and/or deep acting, as well as managing the emotions of others through spontaneous emotion and care (Koster 2011, 69).

Women and minority scholars are called on to engage in and provide both Everyday Emotional Labour and Extraordinary Emotional Labour on a fairly regular basis in order to complete the work they are paid to do--the same work, I might add, that cis white male academics do with far less emotional labour (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004).

Note that men of colour must also engage in a disproportionate amount of emotional labour by virtue of their ethnicity. According to institutional research data from the Southern Illinois University, when there were about 3000 black undergraduates enrolled, there were only 31 black tenured or tenure-track professors. This is a ratio of 100-1 (June 2015). This means that there are woefully few faculty members to whom these students can look as representing them and their social location by virtue of their minority. June writes as follows:

[T]he hands-on attention that many minority professors willingly provide is an unheralded linchpin in institutional efforts to create an inclusive learning environment and to keep students enrolled. That [emotional] labor reflects what has been described as cultural taxation: the pressure faculty members of color feel to serve as role models, mentors, even surrogate parents to minority students, and to meet every institutional need for ethnic representation (June 2015).

Section Three: The 'Responsive Diversity Worker'

In Section One, I discussed what Fehr calls 'formal' and 'informal communities'; recall that a formal community is of a kind that participation within one would find its way on a CV. Since the exploitation of the emotional labour of diversity workers in formal and 'mid-formal' communities is what concerns me, I will leave out the discussion of informal communities for the purposes of this paper.

In explaining what I take emotional labour to mean in Section Two, I have shown how diversity workers are called on to engage in far more emotional labour than their academic peers. Often, this emotional labour includes supporting, mentoring, and teaching students. Beyond this, emotional labour can include surface acting when confronted with the request to engage in more service activities, something which is taken on predominantly by women in academic departments (Guarino & Borden 2017), as well as supporting colleagues when they feel overwhelmed or lost in their research. It can also include dealing with micro-aggressions due to their sex/gender/ethnicity/etc., using both surface and deep acting while trying to deal with inequities and microinequities such as being talked over or not having one's ideas granted serious uptake, and being implicitly responsible for combating instances of micro-inequities through microaffirmations, i.e., small acts of encouragement to help others succeed, such as "opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening" (Brennan 2013, 27). I suggest that micro-affirmations probably fall to the emotional workload of women and minorities due to the feeling rules associated with this group which hold them responsible for providing care, warmth, and friendliness.

Such emotional labour is extensive, exhausting, and largely unrecognized. Even diversity workers who hold central positions in formal communities must contend with the mental and physical drain of emotional labour. For women and minorities in precarious working conditions, such as short-term contract work, this emotional labour is far more troubling. While it is true that, under Fehr's definition, diversity workers who are employed in short-term contracts are technically members of a formal community, I suggest that they are not *full* members thereof. They do not have the space to engage in the emotional labour they are implicitly required to do, as they are not paid in the same way or the same amount as full faculty members of a department. Because of this,

they do not have the freedom to pursue areas of research and publish from that research in the same way that full faculty members do; they are paid to teach, and that is all they have the time to do. Further, the pay is usually not enough to cover all expenses. Often, contract professors must supplement their income, exerting more pressures on their time. In Ontario, contract professors are not part of the same unions and collective bargaining units as full faculty members. For instance, they do not get the option to vote whether or not to strike alongside their full colleagues (MacDonald 2013).

Due to this, I argue that precarious workers exist in a half-way point between an informal and a formal community; they are in a 'mid-formal' community. Taking into consideration the time and financial constraints on the regular precarious worker and the ways in which such constraints lend to the challenge of publishing enough to secure career advancement, it is clear that the extra-emotional labour expected from a diversity worker can be seriously detrimental. Not only is the diversity worker in precarious employment implicitly expected to take on both Everyday Emotional Labour and Extraordinary Emotional Labour, but she is expected to do so alongside the research work she must do (without pay) in order to try and gain full employment within a formal community. The diversity worker is expected to take on this extra labour without any compensation, formal recognition (it cannot be added to a CV, for instance), and any chance of professional advancement. Like Fehr's epistemic diversity work, what I call 'responsive diversity work' is done in addition to the regular professional activities of a scholar.

While engaging in emotional labour cannot be used for professional advancement, opting out can be detrimental to obtaining further employment. The diversity worker in precarious employment must rely in part on her teaching evaluations to ensure future employment, whether that is through renewing an existing contract with the same university, seeking further contract

work at other universities, or applying for a coveted tenure-track position in a university department. It is easy to see how responsive diversity workers are in a double bind; they are damned if they do the emotional work, and they are damned if they do not.²

The formal community of a department is important, as Fehr points out, because that is the place where the diversity worker gets paid for the epistemic labour, and as I argue, the emotional labour they do. Recall Fehr's description of a diversity free rider: "either an individual or community who makes use of existing diversity without increasing the diversity of any formal community or without increasing the total representation of diverse voices" (Fehr 2011, 141). In the case of the responsive diversity workers who exist in a mid-formal community, I suggest that the formal community that surrounds them free rides off their diversity by virtue of benefiting from the emotional labour they do on behalf of their departments.

One possible solution to this is to bring more responsive diversity workers into the formal community, which would entail hiring diversity workers to fill tenure-track positions in academic departments. While responsive diversity workers would still face a disproportionate amount of emotional labour, and thereby face the mental and physical exhaustion from doing that labour, they would at least be getting paid enough to allow them to pursue other avenues to improve their academic careers. It would also mean that, should they 'slip up' or choose not to engage in the level of emotional labour that their students, for instance, are calling for, the possibility of a

² I think it is important to note here that I am calling attention to the *expectation* placed on women and minority scholars in the academy to perform everyday and extraordinary emotional labour. Not all diversity workers do engage in this work. The problem is, though, that if they choose to opt out of this work, they are likely to be penalized for it; the woman who does not preform responsive diversity work will likely be regarded as a 'horrible woman'. If such a diversity worker is a central member of a formal community, she is not likely to suffer any further consequences than a reputation of being unapproachable and cold. However, if the diversity worker is a marginal member of either a formal or mid-formal community, opting out of this work can have serious negative consequences on one's professional advancement.

negative teaching evaluation would not translate into the possibility of being turned down for a contract renewal.³

I have used the term 'responsive diversity work' to refer to the disproportionate emotional labour diversity workers, that is, women and minorities within academia, are expected to do. I have shown that much of what Fehr argues concerning the epistemic diversity worker can be applied to the emotional labour diversity workers are called on to do. As such, I argue that (1) we should consider the term 'diversity worker' to include all women and minority academics and (2) that my concept of a responsive diversity worker supplements Fehr's account of the epistemic diversity worker.

An important difference between Fehr's concept and my own, however, relates to her remarks about free riding off diversity workers who are central members of a formal community. Recall that, for Fehr, this can be considered permissible because the worker can refuse the labour without the likelihood of negative consequences; it probably will not hinder her professional advancement. I argue that this is not entirely the case with a responsive diversity worker in the same position within a formal community.

While it *is* true that a responsive diversity worker in such a position (for instance, a full professor) is not harmed in her career trajectory through the extra emotional labour she is called on to do, it does not mean that such a disproportionate amount of emotional labour should be considered permissible. Part of the problem with such emotional labour is its likelihood of leading

³ Some forms of emotional labour can be lucrative; for instance, if a female scholar preforms emotional labour that helps to uphold patriarchal standards, she is likely going to be recognized and generally praised for doing so. It may also help further her career trajectory. However, when women and minority scholars engage in the emotional labour that is implicitly expected of them in their everyday work as academics and teachers, they are far less likely to be either recognized or praised for doing so. As such this extra emotional work will not further their career trajectories in ways that are proportionate to the extra labour in which they must engage.

the diversity worker to a feeling of estrangement which can result in emotional exhaustion, burnout, and other negative effects to mental health.

This can lead to a feeling of estrangement from emotion for the responsive diversity worker. To manage one's emotions regarding the range of feeling in one's private life is to "participate in an intricate private emotional system" (Hochschild 1983, 13). When aspects of this system are used in the workplace, and "sold as human labor, they become stretched into standardized social forms" where a person's feelings are "thinner, less freighted with consequence; but at the same time it is seen as coming less *from* the self and being less directed *to* the other. For that reason it is more susceptible to estrangement" (Hochschild 1983, 13). I think what is of particular importance in this passage is the reference to what we have been calling 'affect;' that is, the bodily sensation that is indescribable in language which, through the managing of it, gives rise to feeling. I have argued that affect is that part of feeling which comes from our innermost self.

The link that connects our emotion management in our private lives to the way we are encouraged to manage emotion for the purposes of work is what Hochschild calls the 'transmutation of an emotional system' (Hochschild 1983, 21). When we use our feelings for the "organizational engineers of worker-customer relations" (or worker-student/colleague relations), then we risk "losing signal function of feeling" (Hochschild 1983, 21). Recall that feeling is often what informs us on what we should think in any given situation; this leads to confusion in using our emotions and deciding whether we should trust them. According to Hochschild, "when the transmutation works, the worker risks losing signal function of feeling. When it does not work, the risk is losing the signal function of display" (Hochschild 1983, 21).

Hence, the consequence of the emotional labour that responsive diversity workers must engage in is the risk of becoming estranged from their emotions, and as such, from themselves; their emotions end up being experienced as something shallower. Their emotions in this experience seem to come, not from their affect, where they usually originate, but rather from their feelings.⁴ Hochschild writes that "in order to survive in their jobs, these workers must mentally detach themselves: the factory worker from that one's "own body and physical labor" and the responsive diversity worker from "her own feelings and emotional labor" (Hochschild 1983, 17).

I propose that this detachment or alienation is at least in part to blame for the links between emotional labour and burnout (Koster 2011, 73). Burnout is "a unique type of stress reaction that can lead to job turnover, absenteeism and low morale, and is linked to insomnia, increased use of drugs and alcohol, and physical exhaustion" (Koster 2011, 73). To try and safeguard herself from all of the emotional labour she is called on to do with students, Koster enrolled herself in a counselling course to better handle these emotionally charged situations (Koster 2011, 74). Hua addresses the situation she has experienced as a woman of colour:

women faculty of color are pushed out by a state of unwell that manifests as fatigue, but that reflects a matrix of constant negotiation of competing emotions and pressure. Unacknowledged by professional reward, promotion, or remuneration, women of color are rarely compensated for their work in a way that makes material difference, adding to their physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion (Hua 2018, 83).

The remarks Hua makes concerning the states of unwell experienced by women of colour in academia can also be applied, to varying degrees, to responsive diversity workers as a whole. While I acknowledge that subgroups under the umbrella term 'diversity workers' will have their

⁴ Recall in Section Two where I discussed 'feeling' as being the result of the managing of our affects.

own unique experience of suffering, I contend that their suffering is a result of a shared unacknowledged labouring, and as such, is similar in nature.

I believe that part of the problem concerning academia's inability to retain its diversity workers is due to this experience of estrangement as a result of the extra emotional labour they are implicitly expected to carry out alongside their other academic duties.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I have argued that responsive diversity workers are implicitly expected to engage with a disproportionate amount of emotional labour in comparison to their cis white male colleagues. I have suggested that this extra labour is both harmful to their professional advancement as well as to their emotional and physical well-being.

An interesting consequence of this argument is who the diversity free riders are. I have suggested that some of them may be the formal members of a community when the diversity worker is in precarious employment and existing in a mid-formal community. Finally, what of the students? In their implicit demand for the emotional labour of their diverse professors, it seems very much like they are free riding. It would be interesting to explore further the complexities that arise from this.

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