

TABOO

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Introduction to the Special Issue

Breaking the Silence: Telling Our Stories as an Act of Resistance

*Dawn N. Hicks Tafari
LaWanda M. Simpkins*

Guided by autoethnography, which is rooted in ethnographic research, this special issue of *Taboo* is a space for women of color who are immersed in the academy to share critical stories. Autoethnography is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experiences (auto) in order to understand cultural experiences (ethno)” (Ellis, 2004; Jones, 2005). In fact, “stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation” (Chang, 2008, p. 43). In this approach the “self” is the I, the informant is your surroundings, and the crux of the work is your response to how you fit into all of it. Very similar to an autoethnography, a critical autobiography is a thoughtful analysis of one’s life experiences to construct meaning of self in relation to others in society. Autobiographical writing can focus on an entire life or specific actions or events to deconstruct a particular outcome. This self-reflexive process examines issues that inform us about who we are individually and collectively. However, introspection is not only critical to the person who is self-reflecting but also to the readers who may otherwise create their own narrative about the persons they are reading about.

Thus, the act of using one’s voice to tell her truth is a radical, symbiotic part-

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nership. It embodies the struggle for liberation in the communal act of telling and listening. It is the collective spirit of our communities that fosters the space for our stories to be heard. With a focus on autoethnography and critical autobiography, the WomenScholars of Color in this special issue take off their masks, stepping out from under the gaze and into vulnerable spaces, in an effort to resist oppressive metanarratives. The women featured in this issue embody a range of experience. We are Black and Brown scholars and educators; we are independent scholars, post-doc fellows, junior faculty, and seasoned, tenured professors. Furthermore, the pieces shared in this special issue highlight critical stories of resistance through deep reflection, passionate introspection, and a shared desire to transform our lived experiences by breaking the silence.

Your journey into our stories will be moving, inspirational, painful, exciting, frustrating, and empowering. This special issue includes “all the things” and will give you “all the feels” because the masks have been removed, and “the tea” is being spilled. Not only have the masks been removed, but the truth is revealed. And, at times, the truth is ugly. Why? Because sometimes, we feel like imposters in the world of academia when our intersectional realities have not been validated. Sometimes, we allow others to treat us badly, for the sake of the struggle (or so we tell ourselves), in hope that a brand new day is on the horizon. Sometimes, we get so caught up in the quagmire of introspective truth-telling that we forget (or refuse) to tell our own truths to our own selves. Other times, we feel like the resistance is too much but so necessary, so we keep pushing because we know—deep down inside, underneath all the hurt and frustration—that our Black Feminist, Womanist, Afro-Boriqua consciousness impacts how we move (and how others see or don’t see us) within educative spaces as scientists, doctoral students, faculty, and administrators at HBCUs and PWIs, alike. In this special issue, we resist the metanarrative told to society-at-large, to our children, and to our faces; and we dare to tell our stories, not for mere entertainment and not because we are self-indulgent. We break the silence because we care enough about ourselves to love ourselves when no one else will, and THAT is “an act of political warfare” (Lorde, 1988).

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Black Women's Sharing in Resistance Within the Academy

ReAnna S. Roby
Elizabeth B. Cook

Love is a term that can sometimes be used flippantly and carelessly; however no more so than when we as Black women claim to 'love one another' or call each other 'sister'. As Black critical race feminist (CRF) scholars (Wing, 1990; Berry, 2010), who are seeking a career behind the hallowed walls of the academy, we have found that love has sometimes been lost on us and lost for one another (Baszile, 2018). This article is the result of a committed effort to connect with each other despite all the other busy and unloving related parts of our lives in academia. The constant battle we engage in as Black women in academic spaces is necessary as we disrupt cultural practices and traditions which marginalize Blackness and womanness. We draw on duoethnography as a methodological approach that supports the multiple ways people "construct both unity and disunity... hence we engage in dialogue which intentionally makes room for our voices to rise and fall... (Sawyer, 2013 p. 10). However, it is through a form of Black Girl Reality/Solidarity (Ladson-Billings, Cooper, and Ore, 2016) that acknowledges differences and similarities that we empower each other in spaces such as the academy that have not been designed for us, but have been built on the backs of the generations of Black women and men who have come before us (Wilder, 2013; Anderson, 1988).

Despite tremendous efforts to change the overall way Black women are regarded in imperialist white supremacist patriarchal capitalist culture, there is no Black woman, no matter how liberated, who does not encounter on some level in daily life efforts on the part of dominator culture to restrict her freedom, to force her into an identity of submission. (bell hooks, 2013)

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Sonia Sanchez points out that while fear compels us to do what is necessary to save ourselves, it is love that compels us to think, act and engage with great regard and compassion with/for others and for a better world. Through intentional and collaborative duo-ethnographic work, we have come together to grow as Black feminist scholars; it is through these acts of love that we purposefully sought opportunities to work together and support one another in difficult and challenging anti-black spaces (Dumas, 2016). As such, this work is not merely a creation of our own reflection, but also a testimony of sorts to the Black women who have dared to stand in the academy in an effort to create opportunities for others. It is through the varying acts of love that we engage in forms of revolution (Johnson, Jackson, Stovall, and Baszile, 2017) not only within our writing, but also our experiences as instructors and researchers.

Introducing the 'Duo' of this Ethnography...

As duo-ethnographers we entered the act of this research and this writing with "...multiple and often interconnected intentions..." (Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012) and as we learned about ourselves from our sister 'Other' we used stories shared to rebuild and realize and to make meaning. Our work draws on the personal, the shared, and the external experience - we ask that you as the reader juxtapose your own resistance stories and experiences in these contexts and engage with us as we examine these stories through an emic lens.

Liz: As a Black woman doctoral student who is very cognizant of space and place as it relates to race and gender in an academic community I am always thinking about the people in the room, the space they occupy, and the role that I may or may not play in each scenario. I am a woman who has dealt with her own multiple and intersecting identities on a daily basis in an attempt to navigate a campus community (and quite frankly an entire educational system) that was not originally designed to cater to needs that may be unique to me. I am intentional and blatant about finding and addressing gaps in the research that challenge the multiple layers of power and inequity that work against female bodies of color. I have relatively liberal views of the world, and am intentional about understanding the ways in which education is managed and mismanaged for Black children in America, particularly because I am a mother of three. While I have lived in multiple cities around the world, I consider myself to be from the west coast and my lifestyle and values broadly reflect that perspective.

ReAnna: As a scholar invested in the full acknowledgment and inclusion of Black women and their contributions to the field of science, I describe myself as a radical scholar. My work and teaching is very much influenced by my experiences in the field of science as a student and researcher, but also my coming of age and growing up in the rural Deep South. It is through work such as this, I pay tribute to the formal and informal women scholars, activists, homemakers, and teachers who have paved the way for Black women and girls in not only education, but

society. As such, I use my voice to highlight the ways Black women are integral to the process of teaching and learning, and as means of activism, prompting the academy to do better.

The Mattering of Multiplicativity...

Critical Race Theory (CRT) opened up a new way to challenge the law in the United States and brought together conversations of power, race, and racism to address the neoliberal notion of colorblindness. Critical race theory scholars believe that racism is sewn into the fabric of the constitution and the 'American' way of life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT scholars took those first steps that illuminated the "permanence of race" (Bell, 1987) by addressing racial realism and publicly proclaiming, "racism as an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (Bell, 1992, p. ix). He notes that no matter how much Black people fight for equality and justice it will never actually come to fruition – but acknowledged that at least during the struggle and fight – one understands the truth and in so realizing, will become empowered. Hence, racial realism became the first tenant of CRT. Delgado and Stefancic (2001) highlight the hallmark tenets of this theory:

- Racism is normal;
- Race is socially constructed;
- Interest convergence;
- Intersectionality & anti-essentialism;
- Counter-narrative (sometimes referred to as voice)

First, the normalcy of racism within American society is seen as an ingrained feature of the landscape, appearing ordinary and natural to persons within the culture, even to people of color (Bell, 1987; Bell, 1992). Second, culture constructs social reality; specifically race, in ways that allow for significant disparities in the life chances of people based on the categorical differences consciousness of race. Charles Lawrence noted, "We do not recognize the ways in which our cultural experience has influenced our beliefs about race or the occasions on which those beliefs affect our actions" (1987, p. 322). Central to this concept is differential racialization (Delgado and Stefancic, 2007) which acknowledges how society constructs and stereotypes raced people different than that of the white majority. Because all people are products of culture, the idea of self-determination, is not applicable (despite the mainstream ideal) and the dominant cultural mindset has a selective gaze and views people of color negatively (Brown & Jackson, 2013).

Third, interest-convergence is seen as a way that white elites tolerate or encourage racial advancement for Blacks (or people of color) only when also promoting white self-interests. Derrick Bell (1980) noted "The interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). Fourth, intersectionality. Originally, articulated by Kimberle'

Crenshaw in 1991, it is defined as “the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation and how their combinations play out in various settings” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 51). As human beings we are multifaceted individuals and possess multiple identities. Crenshaw (1991) noted that the work of feminist scholars and anti-racists efforts were significant, but proceed as though “they are mutually exclusive terrains” (p. 1242). Women of color are no more women than they are bodies of color. Women particularly, are especially subjected to the multiple ways in which their identities become fractured. Crenshaw (1991) goes on to say,

...a category such as race or gender is socially constructed that is not to say that the category has no significance in our world.

On the contrary, a large and continuing project for subordinated people – and indeed, one of the projects for which postmodern theories have been very helpful- is thinking about the way power has closeted around certain categories and is exercised against others. This project attempts to unveil the processes of subordination and the various ways those processes are experienced by people who are subordinated and people who are privileged by them” (pp. 1296-1297).

Without the acknowledgement of intersectionality, women of color are forced to choose from a hierarchy of oppressions despite experiencing both racism and sexism as interlocking (and sometimes conflicting) oppressions. Crenshaw's work also reminds us that the privileges that women do/ do not experience through ability, social class, and educational status also impacts the way women mediate racialized and gendered experiences. Intersectionality allows for the acknowledgement of the interplay between human, civil and constitutional rights from the perspective of a raced and gendered body. The fifth tenant speaks to the idea of giving voice or counter-narrative. Offering a story and retelling a truth – allowing for space that honors the voice of marginalized people. CRT operationalizes this counter-narrative three different ways. 1) to lift the voices of people of color so that race and racism are seen from an alternative lens; 2) pushes against ethnocentrism and one-world views to construct a new reality; and 3) works against silencing oppressed individuals and provides legitimated space for the ‘counter’ perspective/narrative to be heard (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Tate, 1994). The valuing of stories acknowledges that “...those who lack material wealth or political power still have access to thought and language, and their development of those tools...differs from that of the most privileged” (Matsuda, 1995, p. 65). This tenet of CRT speaks directly to understanding context in the social condition as well as addressing issues of power and privilege that can then be used to highlight disparities in a policy or program and push back against the so-called ‘neutrality’ of race.

Yet while this work in CRT is powerful and moving, we push again and pull from critical race feminism (CRF) as a lens to understand this space and academic world that we as women are navigating. As Black women scholars we adopt critical

race feminism as a theoretical lens and in so doing demand readers acknowledge that our experiences as Black women in the academy, in the classroom and in teaching, are different from the experiences of men of color and those of white women. The term critical race feminism was not coincidental. The intentionality allows for an emphasis on women of color while drawing from Critical Legal Studies, feminist jurisprudence and CRT. Originally used in an article related to anti-lynching and racial ideology by Amii L. Barnard (1993), CRF draws on similar notions as CRT but also critiques spaces such as critical legal studies (CLS) because they were unable to draw connections with women of color and the multi-faceted ways they exist in our world. Feminist (jurisprudence) spoke to women generally, but not specifically to women of color—forcing them to choose between race vs. gender—an impossible task.

...I contend that Black people must come to realize that our greatest strength, our salvation secrete, if you will, is Black women... (Derrick Bell, 2003)

As CRF is a multi-disciplinary approach to theoretical development and praxis it draws from multiple fields—both legal and non-legal to seek alternative and non-traditional approaches to resolve issues for women of color (Wing, 1990). In so doing, critical race feminism is also engaged in moving the agenda forward—not just writing about theory and hypothetical situations. CRF is present in more spaces than women's law journals as it has an emphasis on generating conversation that creates change and in turn leads to progress in changing the world. Proponents of CRF call upon scholars to hold fast to the tenets of CRF beyond the academic space including addressing issues of educational policy, local government, access to adequate and preventive healthcare, prostitution, and women in prison as well as global issues to include women workers rights, sweatshop battles, food and farming inequities, sex trafficking of young girls and online predators. Regina Austin (1995) also calls to other academics and the legal community to fight unabashedly on behalf of the poor and minoritized women and to work against the disenfranchisement in these communities. Wing (1990) urges academics to write so that a push can be made to "...view the world with multiple consciousness...to make a deliberate choice to see the world from the standpoint of the oppressed" (p. 200).

While Evans-Winters and Esposito (2010) describe the ways in which Black girls survive in K-12 environments, this work seeks to push the envelope in that regard and discuss the situation of Black doctoral women teaching and learning in the academic pipeline. CRF supports us as we work to understand the way that we as Black women in graduate school may silence ourselves in order to persist in the academy, it will acknowledge and honor the ways that Black women may feel pressured to conform to a whitened model of success in order to reach academic goals. This multiple consciousness (Wing, 1997; Matsuda, 1989) cannot be accounted for in theories that do not value the intersectionality (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas, 1995) and anti-essentialist (Harris, 1990) perspectives.

ReAnna: My coming to know CRF was through my engagement in a CRT course which really turned my world upside right. During this time, I began to wonder, how epistemologically, science was indeed a white and masculine and through the teaching and learning of such, a culture of what was most worth knowing perpetuated an insubordination to other fields and people. Through my quest, I have considered what a Critical Race Science epistemology would look like. As I consider the voids within Critical Race Theory, I refocused my question into considering how a Critical Race Feminist Science fulfilled the needs of all students while decentering whiteness and centering the history of Black women and girls in spaces where their existence has not been willfully allowed, but seen as valuable due to the ability to produce.

Liz: As a Black woman in academia I have navigated moments where I didn't belong or appeared to not be a 'good fit'. I am used to being the 'only' in a room full of white academics and can navigate those spaces if need be, but it is not my preference. Critical Race Feminism informs my work as it gives fervor to my voice and provides a vehicle to drive home the argument of equity vs. equality or highlight the marginalized and silenced stories without so much as an apology. If applied correctly and used properly, CRF channels hope into spaces where there was none and peels back layers of hidden agenda so as to discover the real truth with "T" in that circumstance. A body of color is a holistic entity and cannot be separated when examining the levels of discrimination that have worked against them as individuals. Yet, despite our intersecting identities and the multiple layers of discrimination and oppression that Black women (and other women of color) endure, CRF advocates also work to empower these multi-labeled bodies. "Our essence is also characterized by a multiplicity of strength, love, joy, (with a spin leap alive, we're alive) and transcendence that flourishes despite adversity" (Wing, 1990, p. 196). As CRF is a multi-disciplinary approach to theoretical development and praxis it draws from multiple fields—both legal and non-legal—to seek alternative and nontraditional approaches to resolve issues for women of color (Wing, 1990). In so doing, critical race feminism is also engaged in moving the agenda forward—not just writing about theory and hypothetical situations. I respond to this call and have adopted the tenets of CRF for myself and my scholarship (Bowers-Cook, 2017). That being said, CRF is part of the way in which I move in the world, the way that I pursue and develop lines of scholarship, and part of the way that I mother and care for my children. Critical Race Feminism is deeply embedded within me—even before I knew her name was Critical Race Feminism.

Critical Juxtapositioning: A Methodological Approach...

We engage Critical Race Feminist praxis through the art of duoethnography. Engaging in duoethnography is most often described as a formal data collection method within the context of social science research. Given the infancy of duoethnography as a methodology (est. 2004), there are not any published studies to date that have taken this critical race feminist approach. Our lived experiences as Black doctoral women and emergent scholars is a reflection of the multiple marginality

of our experience and is often undocumented by research that seeks to record either the lives of women in academia or minority doctoral students (Turner, 2002). Wing (1990) reminds us that our multiplicative identities cannot be separated; we are each “one indivisible being...” (p. 194). Yet for us, we drew on this method because it is uniquely able to provide for our wholeness as Black women scholars while also redefining a methodological space for ourselves inside our research. While we are both part of racial groups that have been ‘researched’, in this case, we are the researchers of ourselves. Duoethnography supports the multiple ways that people “construct both unity and disunity” hence we engage in dialogue that intentionally makes room for our voices to rise and fall in dissent (Sawyer, 2013, p.10). The use of this methodology within the context of this writing revealed not only our emotions; that could be deemed as clutter in other academic spaces, but prompted a resolution and healing.

This work centers our voices as both participants and researchers, witnesses to one another in this study while juxtaposing our experiences. In so doing, we intentionally suspend judgment and remain open to “...exposure, transformation, and uncertainty...” (Sawyer, 2013, p. 11) only to revert to individual methods of grappling with our own anger and frustration in order to arrive at a more complex and layered perspective, which in turn leads to love. Together we aim to produce writing that matters not only to Black women, but also challenges issues of power, hegemonic systems, and gendered stereotypes (Berry & Mizelle, 2006). Though there are over ten ‘living’ tenets to the duoethnographic process (see Sawyer & Norris, 2013; Norris, Sawyer & Lund, 2012), we draw upon two tenets specifically for this work. They are Difference and Trustworthiness.

Difference: disruptions and interrogation of stories is possible only when differences are articulated and discussed, they don’t seek ‘resolution’. Through our narratives of difference, we seek to be “...explicit about how different people can experience the same phenomenon differently” (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012 p.17). As Black women pursuing doctorates in education while also educating others in the classroom, we find ourselves approaching this journey from multiple angles. Our methods of survival and persistence differ, as we each seek diverging paths en route to the same end goal.

Trustworthiness: found in self-reflexivity, not Validity and Truth Claims. When we first began this duoethnography - we were like young Black girls in an all-white school. We cared for and cradled our growing relationship with one another, we were careful of our words and our feelings; we edit our writing for protection of the other. As time moved on in our relationship and in our respective academic programs the duoethnography responded to the various tensions and requirements of our individual degrees. There were times when we did not seek the solace of the other simply because the other knew too much. There have been times that it has been hard to write together because despite our respect for one another as raced women we disagreed about our approach or view of classroom situations and student

engagement. Similar to Norris and Sawyer's reflections (2012) we have witnessed the change in one another over time and in the research conversation. So, out of love and respect, we step away from our shared text and write alone - pouring our thoughts and misgivings into other work so as to not hurt a sister-scholar in the field. In this way, the use of duoethnography as a critical approach adds to the body of scholarship, but is intentional and responsive to the needs of the authors who are both daring and vulnerable during their discussion of oppression and participation in academic spaces.

Excerpts of our Letters

...About Being a Revolutionary Educator

Liz: Revolutionary education.... Revolutionaries do not always have to be loud or find ways to be the center of attention. I like to think of myself as a more quiet revolutionary, a behind the scenes game changer who works with folks one on one and in the classroom to assert new ideas and introduce students to the possibilities of what it could mean to make change or challenge traditional paradigms... I however, do not know if I actually love my students in that way; Some of them have been hateful and unkind.

ReAnna: As I consider what is required of me as a evolutionary educator, I realize at the center of my work is love. As such, I'm committed to working with my students and engaging in research that disturbs mainstream ideas of knowing as a means of acknowledging and accepting ideas that have not been considered. In so doing, I'm reminded of the ways in which this type of love is very much active and as such, I must be willing to reveal and share parts of myself that I struggle to embrace or love.

Liz: Yet, at the same time I have become quite passionate about how we think about diversity in the classroom and the curriculum, the foundation and philosophy of higher education and access to those spaces. I believe that part of my job in the classroom is to help these teachers learn to ask the right questions and empower them to challenge the rules and regimens that work against students of color and other marginalized students in the spaces they spend the most time. To me that means that this kind of educating work is about loving what is just and right so much so that sometimes you will be alone and alienated in your own community because you push too hard or you have too much to say. I do a lot of things to the extreme...I love hard and teach hard and pray hard too...sometimes simultaneously...but more than anything I know without a shadow of a doubt that there are Black women who have given up space for me, limelight for me, glory for me and I want to always be sure to pay it forward. I want to always remember that love moves me to social justice even when it leaves me alone.

...Survival of the Fittest

ReAnna: Well loneliness then leads to survival, no? For me surviving in the

academy as a Black woman who engages in work centered on Black women as creators of knowledge is an act of resistance. Through this, my praxis serves as a way for me to resist dominant narratives that speak about the experiences of Black women within the context of teaching and learning as monolithic or even exotic. While I do find myself getting tired at times, I'm usually reminded by a close colleague or even local occurrences of why this work is important and what the power of narratives and stories do and I feel propelled to keep going. Even the act of reflecting on my students' voices in the classroom through their sharing is something that often times reinvigorates me and pushes me onward.

Liz: I hesitate here ReAnna, I want so much to think that surviving is a good thing, it is connected to persistence and eventually to a doctoral degree, yes, but surviving feels like it is slowly killing folks. In all the community spaces that Black women go for solace and comfort (writing groups, online support networks, retreats and women-only conferences) I hear the message that just surviving is not healthy. What happened to thriving...the definition of thriving is 'to grow and develop well or vigorously'...I cannot think of one Black woman I have met that has shared that they are developed well or are growing vigorously in the academy. That doesn't mean they are not successful, but it does mean the academy is like a tolling bell....

ReAnna: Perhaps then the thing is to become comfortable in not thinking about surviving, but knowing that you will survive. When I begin to question whether or not I will survive, issues of doubt and anxiety begin to haunt me and I lose focus of the end goal. It is easy to be swayed by distractions that are designed to destroy me and my dreams. However, when I consider what my survival looks like not only in this space as a scholar, but also through my scholarship as well as through my spirit, I am able to thrive and so are others. If we were to take the academy's definition of surviving, thriving, and even success and try to make them fit within the context of our work, I believe we might fall short. As such, while I am concerned about my survival in this space, I'm confident that my spiritual survival is eternal and I find comfort there.

Healing & Holdin' On....

Liz: For a long time, I didn't heal. For a long time, I didn't know that I was breaking inside until I was sitting in a doctor's office asking for help with what I thought might be depression.... I didn't know that the environment in the academy the one I actively and intentionally sought out was slowly wearing on my soul and killing my lust to learn, my desire to educate and that the joy I felt in sharing ideas with others and engaging in an academic community had dissipated.

ReAnna: I feel you. It wasn't until I got to this space I learned how much the role of laughter, home, and spirituality played in my healing. Simultaneously though, I've found healing in the intentional selection of courses and classes that speak to me. This was especially necessary when I took classes and had experiences with peers and even content that diminished me as a Black woman and as a scholar.

Liz: I was weary and worn and I was only a doctoral student. How does this happen?

How does one Black woman feel so much sadness and pain in an academic space that she just feels she is withering away? I relented to the sadness and seemed to disappear ...as though I was standing against a wall, and everyone just kept rushing by...No one saw me. No one saw the Black girl with the smile plastered to her face who just kept saying she was 'fine'. I was far from fine. I let go and retreated to the homespace. I went home to find the ones who have promised to love me all my life despite my flaws. I went home to find the ones that hear me and know that between the lines Black girls are usually left out or lost or considered last. I went home to find the safe space, the solace, to be reassured that I did belong and that in order to progress I would need to find a new way to breathe.

ReAnna: See, we both went home or found a home in our own way, didn't we?

Liz: Yes, I suppose that is true. I built a sister circle, I reached out to other women who had a sad look in their eyes that never reached their smile.... I found women to share my burdens with, to laugh with, to connect with in our research and in our teaching. I began saying my truth. First aloud in my bathroom alone with the door shut, then in the teaching syllabi, then aloud in class, and then committing truth in my writing. I have since taken on writing challenges and projects that are new and exciting and in so doing, I have found other women, other writing spaces, and other conference connections to meet people who are also healing. Healing is not instant or eternal. It is an everyday commitment to find the good, to embrace what is working and revise that which is not. Healing means that this academic battleground will NOT take my #BlackGirlMagic nor will it use up all my reserves. Healing means that I have enough of myself to give my daughter at the end of the day allowing me to take on her worries and fears. Healing has made me more vulnerable but healing has also made me stronger. My commitment to healing means that I will survive this space. Maybe that is how other Black women teachers and educators have done this. Maybe they too are committed to healing and in turn are able to survive and persist and grow in the academy. Maybe I want to be like you when I grow up ReAnna....

ReAnna: No! No! No..don't say that! I don't want to be superwoman, I don't want to have a complex about strength and survival, what I want is for us to work together at finding ways to help other women in the academy connect with each other so that the journey is not so lonely and painful. To have a conversation with new scholars prior to their receipt of class evaluations so that we are able to deal with the barrage of emotions that they bring, understanding that hate mail may have be written to us individually, but it is always about the larger collective. This is about making a space where we can be super women together...not trying to be one all-encompassing Superwoman.

Shared Resistance in (and) Healing

In the ways Richardson (2007) and Brown (2007), engage in work regarding Black women and girls in society at either ends of the academic pipeline, it is important to center our collective experiences through our work, while also acknowledging their personhood, struggles, and triumphs (Baszile, 2006; Richardson, 2013; Baker-Bell,

2017). Utilizing duoethnography within the context of healing and research that is intentional on focusing on the wellbeing of Black Women in multiple spaces—at home, in the academy, and more—is a form of Black feminist praxis that is essential to the liberation of the mind, body, and soul. For us, this liberation allows us to engage in a love not only for writing that speaks and hears our testimony, but also a trusting that is grounded in selfless love. When we first discussed and toyed with this idea of writing together we were concerned our influences and connection to formalized curriculum would be a challenge, both academically and spatially—but we have discovered despite our diverse upbringing and our differing HERstories, we can be more than just sister-friends moving through the academy. We are sister scholars and while our positionalities and perspectives may differ, we are able to write and support one another’s writing through fellowship, care, and love. This duo-ethnography is the result of our convergent and divergent stories around race, learning, and teaching as Black girls in the academy. As such, Black women loving each other and then in return learning to live and write and teach in a space and place that does not always love them back, i.e., the academy, is in fact our act of resistance, and therefore revolutionary (Taliaferro Baszile, 2017). Thus, centering love within the context of revolution is not only essential, but required for all as we consider liberatory possibilities that acknowledge the past—sung and unsung—and the future.

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Overcoming Imposter Syndrome and Stereotype Threat

Reconceptualizing the Definition of a Scholar

Callie Womble Edwards

If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.

—Audre Lorde

In this critical autoethnography I will explore the theoretical underpinnings of the imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, and intersectionality to give voice to my lived experiences as a young, Black woman in the predominately middle-aged, White, male academy. While retelling the stories of both my childhood and young adulthood, I will speak my truth while connecting theory to praxis. I will also explain how I overcame imposter syndrome and stereotype threat by reconceptualizing the definition of a scholar. In the spirit of the opening quote from Audre Lorde, I had to define myself for myself to both survive and thrive. Finally, I will offer several recommendations for women of color to consider as they navigate their own space and place in the elusive ivory tower.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The imposter syndrome is a phenomenon that was first coined in the 1970s by psychologists Dr. Pauline Rose Clance and Dr. Suzanne Imes to describe feeling like an academic or professional fraud. In their seminal work, Clance and Imes (1978)

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examined women specifically and asserted that “[d]espite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments, women who experience the imposter phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise” (p. 1). Simply put, women who suffer from the imposter syndrome do not feel worthy of the praise they receive on the basis of their academic or professional accomplishments. Instead of acknowledging their accomplishments as achievements that they deserved and earned, women with the imposter syndrome perceive these achievements as overestimations of their gifts and talents. Context plays a vital role in the imposter syndrome as women are looking to others to determine what characteristics make one an authentic academic or professional. In comparing themselves to whom they deem as authentic academics or professionals, women notice differences and begin to feel like counterfeits. This feeling activates the dangerous cycle of women attempting to forecast others’ perception of them and then performing behaviors based on those assumed perceptions. In particular, the psychologists observed four different types of behaviors performed by women with imposter syndrome that perpetuate the phenomenon (Clance & Imes, 1978). The first behavior is engaging in diligence, which refers to women working hard to prevent others from discovering their status as an imposter. The second behavior is engaging in intellectual inauthenticity, which refers to women choosing to conceal their true ideas and opinions, and only voicing ideas and opinions they believe will be well received by their audience. The third behavior is engaging in charm, which refers to women seeking to gain the approval of their superiors by being well liked and perceived as intellectually special. The fourth and final behavior is avoiding displays of confidence, which refers to women being cognizant of society’s rejection of successful women and consciously exhibiting themselves as timid.

Twenty years later, in 1995, psychologists Dr. Claude M. Steele and Dr. Joshua Aronson coined a separate psychological phenomenon, stereotype threat, to describe feeling at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one’s social group. In other words, individuals who suffer from stereotype threat are mindful of the negative stereotypes associated with their social group and actively seek to contradict those negative stereotypes. In their pivotal piece, the psychologists examined the role of stereotype threat on Blacks in four different experiments (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Together, these experiments demonstrated that awareness of negative stereotypes associated with their racial group’s intellectual ability decreased Blacks’ standardized test performance relative to Whites. At the same time, efforts to alleviate that awareness improved performance.

While distinct concepts, both the imposter syndrome and stereotype threat underscore the anxiety that some marginalized groups, such as women and people of color, experience based on how they interpret and internalize the perceptions of others. Rooted in the ideologies of privilege and oppression, both phenomena ignite a sense of otherness and propagate the dominant metanarrative. Whether they feel as though they do not belong (i.e., imposter syndrome) or they feel as though

they must prove they belong (i.e., stereotype threat), some marginalized groups are hyperaware of how they are othered, and this awareness influences how they navigate spaces. Instead of being their full selves, they mask, camouflage, or alter their being to be accepted by the majoritarian group. In addition, for individuals who identify with two or more marginalized groups, a third theoretical framework is necessary for this discussion as well: intersectionality. Intersectionality contends that social identities are not additive but multiplicative. Put differently, socially constructed identities can intersect and overlap creating multilayered experiences with identity-based oppression (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Kimberle Crenshaw, a leading critical race theorist and legal scholar, coined intersectionality as she investigated the experiences of Black women. Crenshaw (1991) expounded on her work as follows:

My objective there was to illustrate that many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately. (p.1244)

For me, the imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, and intersectionality are not just theoretical frameworks for understanding emotion and behavior; they also provide a practical lens into my daily reality as a young, Black woman in the predominately middle-aged, White, male academy. Like many women, I have various intersecting social identities. I am young, Black, a daughter, a friend, a wife, an entrepreneur, a researcher, and a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) to name a few. However, I have always struggled with labeling myself with one particular identity: a scholar. This struggle is the focus of my critical autoethnography.

The Traditional Definition of a Scholar

To begin my storytelling, I believe it is essential to first define the term “scholar”. There are two preeminent sources from which I glean definitions. The first is commonplace, the dictionary. *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary* (2017) defines a scholar as follows:

- (1) a person who attends a school or studies under a teacher (i.e., a pupil), (2a) a person who has done advanced study in a special field, (2b) a learned person, and (3) a holder of a scholarship.

As I refer to this textbook definition, my resumé undoubtedly meets the criteria. I have attended school for the majority of life, completing primary, secondary, and postsecondary school, including my graduate degrees, consecutively (i.e., without breaks). Additionally, I have engaged in advanced study as a research assistant in my master's and doctoral programs. Moreover, one of the hallmarks of

the doctoral degree process is narrow and in-depth study on a particular topic via the dissertation. On February 22, 2018, I successfully defended my dissertation study, which focused on the experiences of high-achieving Black male undergraduates in engineering majors. Later, in April 2018, my program faculty selected my dissertation study for the 2018 Higher Education Dissertation of the Year Award. Thirdly, I am a learned, or well-educated, person who has obtained knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout my educational journey. In addition to my high academic grades, degrees, and honors attained, I also profoundly resonate with the concept of “lifelong learning”. In my free time, I enjoy studying cultures, visiting museums, reading, and overall expanding what I know and understand about the world. Finally, I have earned a variety of scholarships that have funded my college and graduate degrees. Most notably, I earned the Gates Millennium Scholarship, which is a highly competitive merit and need-based scholarship funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This scholarship is a good-through-graduation award for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral studies to use at any accredited college or university.

In addition to the dictionary, I also gather definitions from a more specialized source, my industry, which consists of thought-leaders, mentors, and colleagues. In the higher education industry, we often use the word “scholar” to describe a distinguished academic, someone who has a high intellectual capacity and can advance their field of study. For example, in the American Educational Research Association (AERA), a professional organization for educational researchers, some of the most sought-after awards, fellowships, and application-only opportunities contain the term “scholar” in their titles. Scholars are held in high regard and often praised by others for their brilliance. Even with all the evidence supporting the idea that I am a scholar according to *Merriam Webster’s Dictionary*, I have still struggled with the more colloquial definition that we use in academe. Thinking of myself as a distinguished academic, or someone who can advance their field of study, does not come naturally to me. As I reflect, I realize that my struggle with seeing myself in this way began in my childhood.

Childhood Memories

I was raised in Durham, North Carolina, a city known for its extraordinary juxtaposition of high crime rates as well as its close proximity to highly acclaimed institutions of higher learning and one of the largest research parks in the world, Research Triangle Park. Affectionately known as “The Bull City”, my hometown is both celebrated and antagonized by the media for its stark contradictions. I have experienced life on both sides of the proverbial tracks. In my early years, my lifestyle in a two-parent home was very comfortable. We lived in a nice neighborhood, and I never remember money being a big issue. However, once my parents split up and their marriage dissolved, my financial status quickly changed, and the shift felt like an epic fall from grace. My mother and I moved to the poorer side of

town, and she had to work multiple jobs to make ends meet. The schools I attended went from well-resourced to less financially stable. I became eligible for federal programs such as free and reduced lunch. Our family vacations ceased as my mother worked more and more hours. Years later, my father also became disabled. So, my childhood, like my hometown, contains stark contractions.

Thinking back on childhood memories fills me with an immense appreciation for my humble beginnings. Overall, I would say I come from a family that is rich in love, but modest in earthly possessions. I am the only child of my mother and father, who divorced when I was ten. Both of my parents graduated high school, and neither graduated from a four-year college or university. Thus, I consider myself a first-generation college student. My mother, a Queens, New York native, became a teaching assistant, and later earned her certification as a certified nursing assistant (CNA). My father, a small town guy from Goldston, North Carolina, graduated from community college with two associates degrees in computer and electrical engineering. My father was, and still is, an avid fan of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, his dream school. Although he never attended the University, he would visit their library often to read and use their computers. In fact, in my early years, while my parents were still together, it became a Sunday tradition for my mother, my father, and I to spend the afternoon in the Stacks. This weekly ritual was my first introduction to college life.

Growing up, my extended family was also very involved in my life. For example, I did not attend daycare as a child. Instead, my mother would drop me off at my maternal grandmother's house every morning before she went to work. At my grandmother's house, I would spend time watching educational television shows such as Bill Nye the Science Guy and Reading Rainbow, reading books, and creating with crafts from our local craft center. Each week my grandmother, grandaunt, and uncle would also take me to our public library, where we would read and check out books. At the end of the workday when my mother returned to pick me up, she would ask me what I learned. The high level of engagement of my family fostered my love for education. They made learning a fun, daily activity. They celebrated my accomplishments, no matter how big or small. They always showered me with praise and spoke positively about my future. From a very early age, it was evident to me that my family—both nuclear and extended—had unshakable faith in my academic abilities. They were confident I would be the first in our family to earn a college scholarship and graduate from a four-year university. In fact, I remember hearing them talk about how I would earn scholarships and attend college before I even knew what scholarships and college were. I, on the other hand, wrestled with an inability to see myself through their eyes. The imposter syndrome reared its head in my childhood in the form of self-doubt. When I would receive praise from my family members for earning good grades I would think to myself, *“That’s so sweet of them to say, but I’m not really that smart, I’m just a hard worker”*.

So, where did that self-doubt come from? It is important to provide a caveat

here. My self-doubt was not an internal issue. In other words, there was nothing inherently wrong with me that caused me to doubt myself. Rather, my self-doubt was illustrative of systematic issues within the broader social context; and imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, and intersectionality are three lenses that offer language to examine the theoretical constructs that were at play. At the intersections of my marginalized identities (i.e., low-income, first-generation, Black, and female), I constantly encountered academic environments and messages that contradicted the foundation that my family established. People who were low-income, first-generation, Black, and female were rarely in positions of leadership or power in the educational spaces I frequented. Additionally, the news and popular media would typically portray individuals from communities like mine in negative ways, highlighting their “lack of” and neglecting their unique gifts, talents, and contributions. The combination of limited positive representation and overwhelming negative stereotypes caused me to question my ability. Thus, while my family encouraged me that “I could do it”; I struggled with that idea because I rarely saw people like me “doing it”. My lived experiences also corroborate research findings. There is no shortage of literature confirming how students from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle with finding their place in privileged academic environments. For example, in exploring the experiences of low socioeconomic status (SES) students in university contexts Jury et al. (2016) found that low SES students face considerable psychological barriers in comparison with their high SES peers, such as emotional distress, identity management issues, and negative self-perception. Similarly, in her review of the imposter syndrome in higher education, Parkman (2016) noted that imposter syndrome scores are higher for minority student populations than majority student populations. Further, the work of Peteet, Montgomery, and Weeks (2015), Martinez et al. (2009), and Terenzini et al. (1996) suggest that first-generation students experience imposter phenomenon more often and at higher levels than their non-first-generation peers.

In elementary school, my self-doubt was compounded by my embarrassing stuttering problem. My childhood physician wrote off my stuttering as a phase. In one appointment he said, “*Whenever she is excited about a topic, her mind moves faster than her mouth. She’s very bright. She just needs to slow down.*” Although I was in the appointment with my mother and my physician and heard those words, the positive affirmation did not affect me. Instead, I focused on the constructive criticism: *I need to slow down.* Alas, the phase continued. In school, I would stutter so bad that I started to loathe reading aloud. In particular, I remember my third and fifth-grade classes. Ironically, I had the same teacher for third and fifth-grade. My teacher in those classes would have our desks organized in a circle, and as a class, we would collectively read books. Each student would read a paragraph aloud, one after another, until everyone had read for the day. I remember how fast my heart would beat as my turn approached. My mouth would go dry, and my palms would get sweaty. I would look ahead to determine if I had a short or long paragraph.

Taking a deep breath, I would try to read as slow as possible to prevent my stuttering, and still, sometimes that did not work. “Readers are leaders” was a prominent expression in my elementary school. But I didn’t like to read out loud, so I often wondered what that made me?

The self-doubt that emerged in my elementary years persisted throughout my middle and high school years and was most noticeable during my senior year in high school. My high school was an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma granting school, which means in addition to earning a high school diploma; seniors had the opportunity to also earn the IB diploma. The IB diploma is a highly competitive, globally recognized honor awarded to high school students who complete an academically rigorous and socially conscious international course of study. I completed an IB curriculum during my junior year of high school, but I was convinced that the IB Diploma was not for me. To start, in my school students who completed the IB diploma usually had also completed the precursor program, IB Middle Years Program (MYP), in middle school. My middle school did not have MYP, so I did not have the opportunity to participate. Additionally, IB students were looked at as some of the brightest students in our school and district. I felt like an academic fraud. “*I am not the brightest,*” I thought to myself. “*I simply work hard. Surely, if I complete this program senior year, I will be found out.*” The summer between my junior and senior years, the IB program coordinator at my high school scheduled individual meetings with each student and parent dyad to register them for IB courses. Before our meeting, I had informed my mother that I did not want to participate in IB my senior year. Confident in my inability to earn the IB diploma, my plan was for us to respectfully decline the opportunity and instead register for honors courses. In the meeting, the IB program coordinator praised me for my academic potential. “*Callie would make a great candidate for the IB Diploma program this year. I am confident she can earn the diploma.*” Again, I thought this was a kind gesture, but I honestly did not believe this statement. However, during the meeting, my mother and the program coordinator agreed it was best for me to continue with the program. So there I was, an IB candidate. Throughout the year I frequently reminded myself that the likelihood of me earning an IB Diploma was slim. Nonetheless, I completed the required coursework and examinations. After I graduated, I learned that I was one of the handful of students to earn the IB Diploma from my high school that year. It was a historic victory for my high school, which had gone several years without an IB graduate, and it prompted a shift in mindset for me. “*Maybe I am a scholar,*” I thought.

During my senior year, my self-doubt was also omnipresent when I was applying for scholarships and colleges. As stated previously, my family had an academic vision for my life since I was a little girl. However, I always saw their vision as too far-fetched for my abilities. As a high school senior, I applied to all safe schools, or schools in which I was confident I would be accepted. I did not apply to any reach schools, or competitive schools in which I was unsure if I would be accepted. I

vividly remember a conversation with my older cousin during this time about my college decisions. My cousin, who graduated high school and never attended college, asked me which colleges I was considering. When I read my list of schools, he looked puzzled. *“Why aren’t you applying to the top universities in our area? We have Duke, Carolina, and NC State. You belong at one of those kinds of schools.”* As per usual, the affirmation did not affect me. Although he saw me at “those kinds of schools,” I did not see myself there. Similarly, around the same time, the Gates Millennium Scholarship application became live. One of my friends, a recent alumna of my high school, earned the scholarship the year before me and encouraged me to apply. *“You would be perfect for this, Callie!”* she asserted. *“That’s so kind of her, but I would never earn a scholarship like that,”* I thought to myself. Luckily for me, my mother had also heard about the Gates Millennium Scholarship. Unlike me, my mother believed in my ability to earn a scholarship of this magnitude and told me to apply. As a respectful daughter, I did as I was instructed. Over the next few months, I carefully completed the application which consisted of writing eight essays, providing records of my academic, leadership, and community service activities, and enlisting both a nominator and a recommender. Once submitted, the waiting process began and continued for several months. Countless times I reiterated to myself, *“This scholarship is out of my grasp.”* Yet, that script changed when I came home to a large envelope from the Gate Millennium Scholars Program. Bursting with excitement, I ripped open the envelope, and one word stood out to me, “Congratulations”. Instantly, my heart sank. *“I did it,”* I thought. When I received notification that I had won the award, I was genuinely shocked. Out of the 13,000 applicants that applied that year, I was one of the 1,000 to receive this ten-year funding opportunity. This moment was transformative for me because it was the first time I truly saw myself through my family’s eyes.

Early Adulthood Memories

Being a Gates Millennium Scholar allowed me the privilege of pursuing higher education without fear of the price tag. In the fall of 2008, I enrolled in one of my safe schools as a freshman undergraduate student. Initially, I could not envision myself at any other type of college outside of safe schools. Selecting the safe school that I attended was a nonhazardous choice because it did not threaten my concerns of imposter syndrome or stereotype threat. No one would be able to determine that I was an academic imposter at a safe school, and I was not likely to confirm negative stereotypes about my affiliated social groups. I reasoned that a safe school was the ideal setting for me because it would satisfy both psychological phenomena I had battled in my childhood. However, astonishingly, my perspective on safe and reach schools changed during my first semester of college. While taking 18 credit hours with a bulk of science and mathematics classes and earning a high GPA, I realized I was not being academically challenged. I was accustomed to performing at a high

level because of my training with the IB program, and I desired a more intellectually stimulating environment. I was amazed that the institution I chose because it felt non-threatening to my feelings of imposter syndrome or stereotype threat now felt restricting to what was possible for my future. I wondered how much more I could learn and grow in a setting that challenged me more. In short, my academic life at my safe school left me yearning for a reach school experience. Recognizing that my needs were not being met at my current institution, I took a leap of faith and decided to apply to a reach school to enhance my experience. The decision to transfer was one of the best decisions I made in my early adulthood. It represents the first moment in which I choose to see myself as a scholar, or distinguished academic, instead of someone choosing that perception for me. I assumed ownership of my destiny and began to create an academic vision for myself. At my new institution, a predominantly White institution (PWI), I was mentally stretched and gained a host of fond educational experiences.

I went on earn both my undergraduate and master's degrees from my reach school. It was there I was introduced to research and began conversations with faculty and staff about earning a Ph.D. To my surprise, conversations with majoritarian faculty and staff at this institution also extended the imposter syndrome and stereotype threat I felt during my childhood. Two distinct conversations from the first year of my master's program are etched in my memory. These conversations were with my then academic advisor and my program's student support staff member, respectively. My academic advisor was an old White man, and the student support staff member was a middle-aged White female. Initially, I saw both of these individuals as allies because they were a part of my academic community and they were knowledgeable about the Ph.D. process. My academic advisor earned his Ph.D., and the student support staff member was a Ph.D. candidate at the time. As a first-generation college student, I felt unsure about what steps I would need to take to successfully transition into a doctoral program following my master's program. Thus, I requested individual meetings with each of them to discuss my future goals of earning a Ph.D. In our conversations, I was jarred to find that both individuals highlighted my flaws and used these flaws to convince me that I should pursue other post-graduation options instead of a Ph.D. program. For example, after disclosing how I did not perform as well as I anticipated on my first biostatistics exam, my advisor harshly reminded me that I was "*going to have to do well in statistics in a Ph.D. program.*" Similarly, after disclosing how I did not have full-time work experience yet, because I enrolled in my master's program immediately after my undergraduate studies, the student support staff member suggested I "get some work experience first," and when I do apply, look at other programs because my top program was "*too difficult.*" I include these interactions in this manuscript not to villainize my former advisor or student support staff member, but rather to draw attention to the difference between intent and impact. In actuality, I do not know what the true intent of their statements was, but their impact was damaging.

While I recognize the importance of candid feedback, tone and context are equally significant. When I unveiled my Ph.D. aspirations to both these individuals, I was vulnerable and seeking a safe space to explore the possibilities of a path no one in my family had traveled before. Though they may have been well-intentioned, the statements from my former advisor and student support staff member reiterated negative cultural stereotypes I had heard in the media about individuals from marginalized backgrounds like mine. The takeaway message was simple: *People like me do not belong in Ph.D. programs*. Their feedback was incredibly hurtful, particularly because of their positioning. These were two higher education professionals tasked with facilitating student growth. I admired and confided in them, and their insensitivity pierced me. At the same time, their criticism was also remarkably motivating as I embarked on a journey to prove them wrong, a phenomenon that researchers have found when studying how Black males persist in engineering majors (Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003). Aligned with the findings of Moore & colleagues (2003), I vowed to demonstrate that people like me do belong in Ph.D. programs, and I persevered without the guidance of my then advisor or student support staff member. I share this part of my journey as a cautionary tale to higher education faculty and staff members. As university gatekeepers, faculty and staff members have a responsibility to create inclusive environments. A solid grounding in imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, and intersectionality can provide a theoretical understanding of the complex social realities facing many historically marginalized students and insight on ways to support them. I encourage well-intentioned faculty and staff members to become familiar with these constructs and allow their awareness to inform their engagement with, and ultimate impact on, students. Thankfully, I persisted in spite of the discouragement I felt, but not all students experience the same outcome.

Two years later, on August 16, 2014, I officially began my doctoral coursework at a large Southern PWI, my top choice program, as a newly minted 24-year-old. My birthday was nine days before the start of classes. Pursuing a doctoral degree was a goal I set for myself when I earned the Gates Millennium Scholarship and learned that the scholarship would pay for education up to the doctoral degree. As a stipulation of the award, any time between degrees had to be approved by the scholarship administrators to remain eligible for additional funding. As such, I decided to pursue my undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degrees consecutively without any time breaks. So, there I was on August 16, 2014: sitting around a large table with my cohort members as we each introduced ourselves to our program faculty. As I sat there listening to the lived experiences of my fellow co-learners, descriptors of my own identity rang loudly in my ears. Young. Black. Female. Low-income. First-generation. Unmarried. Without children. Without full-time work experience. I was so different from everyone sitting around me. "*I'm the minority of the group in every way,*" I thought. As each person shared their story, negative stereotypes of my own group membership echoed in my mind. I thought about the undesirable

perceptions of my hometown, low-income students, and the first-generation students. I wondered if they would think I was naïve and unsophisticated because of my background. Would I stand out? Would I fit in? I was suddenly brought back to my early memories as a child who stuttered when trying to read aloud. “*Do I belong here?*” I internally questioned. “*Maybe I do, but I will need to prove myself.*” This self-talk began my journey from experiencing imposter syndrome and stereotype threat to discovering my own unique sense of belonging and balance. Now, four years later, I realize I belonged there all along. So, what happened? In order for me to both survive and thrive, I reconceptualized what it meant to be a scholar.

Reconceptualizing the Definition of a Scholar

When I first started my doctoral coursework, I became hyperaware of how often the term “scholar” was used in my industry. As I read research articles, contributed to class discussions, and participated in professional organizations, it felt as though the term “scholar” was always highlighted. Every time I encountered the phrase, I would notice it—probably more than others around me. After deep introspection, I discovered that I had received and internalized implicit messages about what a scholar looked like and how a scholar acted since I was a child. I pictured someone like Bill Nye the Science Guy or Albert Einstein: an older White male scientist in a lab coat. I imagined someone from a two-parent home, someone in the middle class, someone whose family legacy included college. I was convinced that scholars did not come from my neighborhood or eat free or reduced lunch. Their parents were not divorced or disabled. They did not experience financial difficulty. They were not poor. They did not have stuttering problems. They did not deal with self-doubt. Scholars were always confident, always on-point, always perfect. It was as if scholars were a five-course meal at a five-star restaurant and I was a \$5 fill up box from Kentucky Fried Chicken. Again, these expectations were never explicitly stated to me, but they were reinforced in the television programs I watched, the books I read, the teachers I saw, and the types of career and professional advice I received from faculty and staff. I did not see myself reflected in the educational system, which made it difficult for me to see myself as a scholar. I must provide a clarification; these implicit messages were the result of macro-level factors such as racism, sexism, classism, and ableism. The unspoken assumption was that scholars represented dominant social identity groups, such as those who were White, male, affluent, and able-bodied, not subordinate social identity groups, such as those who were people of color, women, poor, or disabled. Armed with the knowledge of these implicit messages and their influence, I decided to exercise the power of my voice and dismantle my previous notions that were rooted in oppression. Thus, I began an iterative process to create my own explicit message about what it meant to be a scholar to me. For months I journaled, examined my past experiences, and

analyzed the world around me. My method was not without limitations, but the benefit was immeasurable. By expanding my definition, I was able to see myself, and others who had traditionally been excluded from my mental portrait.

I began my reconceptualization process by exerting a conscious effort to make the invisible visible. My previous conceptualization of scholars only included individuals from dominant social identity groups, so I wanted to intentionally incorporate individuals from subordinate social identity groups in my new conceptualization. I revisited the Merriam-Webster definition of a scholar as well the definition of a scholar that is generally referenced in my industry of higher education. Then, I started to educate myself on historical and contemporary figures that met the dictionary and industry definitions of a scholar and identified with one or more subordinate social identity groups. For example, who was both a Black woman and had completed advanced study in my field of higher education? Further, who was both a first-generation college graduate and considered a distinguished academic in my field? This exercise helped me expand my cognitive database by visualizing new images of who could be a scholar. Concurrently, I also began to affirm the ways in which I also met those definitions. While it was my former routine to shy away from that label, I now began to integrate it into my daily self-talk by reminding myself of how I fit the description. After adjusting my internal dialogue, I started to externally assert my new self-confidence by creating and sharing the hashtags #TheLifeOfAScholar and #iLookLikeAScholar on social media. I used these hashtags to distribute images on social media that endorsed scholars from subordinate social identity groups. Social media gave me an outlet to promote my reflections, interrogate the dominant narrative, and enlist supporters.

Once I established more holistic images of who I visualized as a scholar, I further expanded my conceptualization by probing the definition of a scholar as per the Merriam-Webster and my industry. I began to question if these definitions were complete and contemplated what particular elements were missing. As I journaled my observations, two omitted elements rose to the top of my list: an attention to diversity of backgrounds and an acknowledgment of failure. First, I will discuss the diversity oversight. Both definitions covertly support the idea that scholars originate from a particular lived history. For example, one of the Merriam-Webster's definitions of a scholar is a "learned person"—but how do we determine who is learned and who is not? One prominent cultural assumption is that learned people attend and graduate from college. Although I am an advocate for formal education, I also contend that schooling is only one way of knowing. There are many ways people can gain information and education outside the traditional classroom setting, and therefore, academic grades, degrees, honors, and awards cannot be the barometers for all learning. For example, I am a first-generation college graduate, but that does not mean I am the first learned person in my lineage. In fact, quite the contrary is true. My heritage is full of learned people, including creators, strategists, cultivators, organizers, implementers, and artists. I am a descendant of learned people

from a rich variety of backgrounds even though they did not attend or graduate from college. Thus, it became essential that my reconceptualization of the term “scholar” include diverse ways of learning and knowing.

Next, I will address the failure inadvertence. Both definitions glamorize triumph. For example, one of Merriam-Webster’s definitions of a scholar is a “holder of a scholarship”, or someone who has been successful in earning a scholarship. Similarly, in higher education, we use the term “scholar” to refer to someone that has accomplished a significant feat that moved our field forward. While victorious instances should certainly be celebrated, exhibiting these moments exclusive of accompanying missteps perpetuates the falsehood that perfection is possible. However, all humans will inevitably make a mistake, and that reality is not reflected in either definition. For instance, consider someone who applied to a scholarship and was not accepted on their first attempt. If they try and fail, and later try and succeed, does that make them any less of a scholar? The more I thought about it, the more I resisted the idea that a scholar had to be perfect. The academic publishing cycle provides a wonderful illustration. As academics, we submit our work to peer review to be published. It is rare for academic pieces to be accepted without revisions on the first submission. Still, if authors adhere to reviewer commentary, they are more likely to secure a later acceptance. Now in this example who is the scholar—the author who was accepted on the first submission or the “revise and resubmit” author? I would argue that both are—the second scholar’s journey just included what some may perceive as a failure.

As I continued to deliberate how failure was not included in either definition, I noticed a new relationship; both the imposter syndrome and stereotype threat were connected to the fear of being perceived as a failure. Whether concealing their true academic identity (i.e., imposter syndrome), or being mindful of negative cultural stereotypes (i.e., stereotype threat), both phenomena avoid the perception of failure. I wondered how socially reframing failure might change the constructed realities of those who suffer from these phenomena. For example, if having a flaw or error was not chastised by society but instead accepted as integral to the human experience, would those with imposter syndrome or stereotype threat still feel as though they had to protect a façade of perfection? Further, how would those with imposter syndrome or stereotype threat feel if they understood that they do not have to accept other people’s perceptions of them as their reality? In other words, what if failure was assumed to be both ordinary (i.e., everyone fails) and subjective (i.e., failure means different things to people depending on their positionality). In thinking about my childhood, I imagined how this modification would have liberated me. Perhaps I would have relaxed more in the third and fifth grade when it was my turn to read aloud, or when it was my turn to introduce myself to my doctoral classmates for the first time. In analyzing these ideas, it became paramount that my reconceptualization of the term “scholar” normalize failure as a self-defined, inescapable aspect of human nature that is also an important antecedent for growth.

Through an extensive reflection and writing cycle, I arrived at my new conceptualization of the definition of a scholar. I now define as a scholar as someone who consistently strives to learn while concurrently educating others. Scholars embody the spirit of the expression “lifting as you climb.” They come from a wide variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, including races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Scholars can gain their education formally or informally, and engage in a variety of ways of learning and knowing. No matter the concept, some scholars that get “it” on the first try, and other scholars need several opportunities to grasp “it.” Nevertheless, scholars persist. Scholars think inside, outside, and around the box. Scholars make mistakes, scholars grow, and sometimes failure is a part of the process that brings about a scholar’s evolution. Ultimately, scholars decide what success and failure look like for them.

Giving voice to my reconceptualization of a scholar was a profoundly empowering experience. Immediately, I began seeing myself, and others like me, as scholars. At the same time, it was sobering to fathom the amount of time and energy I wasted comparing myself to the prior, less holistic definitions of a scholar. Furthermore, it was upsetting to realize how I allowed my self-doubt to limit me from being my full self. I am incalculably grateful that others, such as my mother and mentors, saw potential in me, which encouraged me to pursue some life-altering opportunities, but I wonder what opportunities I missed in the process. Because of this, I desired to start a movement that would have been beneficial to me as a child. As such, during my tenure as a doctoral student, I developed two educational organizations that allow me to share my reconceptualization of scholar and help those from historically underrepresented and marginalized communities such as my own see themselves reflected in this definition. My first organization, The Life Of A Scholar, LLC., is a consulting firm whose mission is to promote the holistic development of scholars of color across the lifespan. Comparably, my second organization, The Scholar Academy, LLC., is a training institute for scholars of color. These organizations work together to promote my new conceptualization through events, support services, and media. Since starting these organizations in 2015 and 2016 respectively, I have coached and mentored scholars of color across the globe. My outreach work through The Life Of A Scholar, LLC. and The Scholar Academy, LLC. is deeply meaningful to me; it allows me to exemplify my conceptualization by helping others along my journey.

Recommendations

Reconceptualizing the definition of a scholar was how I found my space and place in the elusive ivory tower. My route was winding, but eventually, I unearthed a sense of belonging and balance that resonated with me. Aligned with my conceptualization of a scholar as someone who both lifts and climbs, I would like to share three recommendations for women of color to consider as they navigate their own

paths. My first recommendation is to be gentle with yourself as you are navigating your way. Once I learned about the imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, and intersectionality I was elated, empowered, and energized. At last, I had a language to give voice to my experiences since childhood. Since I was now educated on these theoretical frameworks, I believed I would never suffer from them again. This assumption could not have been further from the truth. The reality is we are all still figuring it out. Even as I write this manuscript, there are still aspects of imposter syndrome and stereotype threat that I am yet overcoming. In some ways, I think I will always be in the process of unlearning what I was implicitly taught and relearning what I intentionally taught myself—and that's okay. I now have the tools to identify what I am feeling which helps me make more informed decisions moving forward. So, what does being gentle with yourself look like in practice? For me, being gentle means that when I see myself acting in a way that reflects imposter syndrome or stereotype threat, I do not criticize myself. Instead, I acknowledge these phenomena are prompted by systemic issues, and thus allow the moment to inspire critical reflection on the social context I am experiencing. I ask myself introspective questions to understand the root of the issue such as: What am I feeling? What about this situation provoked this emotion? What power differentials are at play? How does the environment contribute to the situation? What messages are being promoted explicitly or implicitly? How does this current situation relate to my past lived experiences? By asking these types of questions, I can move my internal self-talk from a place of condemnation to one of emancipation. Cognitively, I use this exercise to acknowledge that my feelings of self-doubt are almost always rooted in societal factors, and while I am not responsible for creating these factors, I do have the power to reprogram how I think and react to them. I employ my new conceptualization of a scholar to support my mental shift.

As I navigate my way and reorient how I make meaning of the environment around me, I have found that isolation can be emotionally taxing. Academia can be a cold, lonely, comparative and competitive place, especially for those experiencing the intersections of marginalized identities. While reassembling how I envision and respond to my ecosystem, being in fellowship with individuals I trust has helped me develop a sense of belonging. Therefore, my second recommendation for women of color is to take time to seek out, utilize, and, if needed, develop a community. Sometimes the community is already created for you, such as a support group, and all you need to do is seek it out and utilize it. Other times, the community is not apparent, and you must do the labor of developing your own community. I have found myself in both scenarios and can attest that sometimes it takes a while to find your “perfect fit.” At first, I thought the academic advisor and student support staff member from my master's program would provide me the support I needed, but I was sadly mistaken, which left me both defensive and apprehensive about seeking support at the doctoral level. However, I am grateful that I did not allow those negative experiences to prevent me from the invaluable benefit of being a part

of a close-knit community. In 2015, I joined a strong support network for Black women doctoral students and professionals to seek solace. This organization, called DIVAS (Distinguished, Intellectual, Virtuous, Academic, Sistas), became an oasis to me as a doctoral student and remains a part of my life now that I have graduated. These women have become my mentors, *sista-docs*, friends, and even guests at my wedding. We have shared so much in just under four years. In addition to this organization, I also have developed other fulfilling, mutually beneficial personal and professional relationships with people I know and trust. In the confines of these relationships, I can vent, unmask myself, and be comforted. These relationships continue to be a great compliment to my introspective process I discussed in my first recommendation. The moral of the story is to find your tribe. Identifying those who are sincerely there to uplift you can be vastly challenging but also immeasurably rewarding.

My third and final recommendation for women of color is to celebrate your successes—no matter how big or small. The importance of applauding milestones is a lesson that I learned from my family, and admittedly it took me a while to learn it. Throughout my educational journey, my family consistently praised my accomplishments; they were intentional about letting me know that my victories mattered. Meanwhile, my pattern was to be especially attuned to my constructive criticism, and apathetic to my achievements. This cycle was both exhausting and miserable. Without pausing to acknowledge and affirm what I accomplished, I found myself disheveled. I regularly felt burnt out because I did not find, or rather make, the time to commend myself for a job well done. Taking a moment to recess and celebrate allows you to silence self-doubt, appreciate your talents, and infuse joy in your journey. Now, I intentionally modify my behavior to a more balanced approach of applauding and improving. In the midst of striving to be a better me, I also prioritize delighting in my wins. Sometimes I celebrate internally, through self-reflection, journaling, prayer, and worship. Other times I celebrate externally, such as sharing my special news with my family and friends or indulging in excursions to my favorite spa and comedy club. I encourage you to find a way to celebrate that is meaningful to you and engage in it often. I have found that building my own reward system helps me to center myself and enjoy my journey more.

Conclusion

In this critical autoethnography I discussed pertinent memories from my childhood and young adulthood using the theoretical lenses of the imposter syndrome, stereotype threat, and intersectionality to contextualize my experiences. While systemic issues unquestionably prompted the self-doubt I experienced throughout my narrative; I also shared how I prevailed (and continue to prevail) over the imposter syndrome and stereotype threat by reconceptualizing the definition of a scholar. I began this critical autoethnography with a quote from Audre Lorde and would like

to return to this quote as I close. As she affirms, I had to define myself for myself. It was not enough for my family and mentors to see me as a scholar. I had to see myself that way for the title to become real to me—I had to believe in myself. I hope that my story encourages women of color, particularly from backgrounds like my own, to also see themselves as scholars.

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Tales from the Ivory Tower

Women of Color's Resistance to Whiteness in Academia

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Abstract

Whiteness in the academy has so impacted the lives of women of color such that the stories, identities, and experiences of women of color are often silenced, minimized, and chastised. Notwithstanding the deliberate erasure and marginalization of these stories, this article pays homage to critical auto ethnography by boldly presenting the stories of women of color in the academy. Particularly, this article draws from the stories of three women of color in the academy: a Pinay/Filipina assistant professor, a Black female doctoral student, and a Mexican American female researcher. These stories reveal how whiteness in the academy continues to wreak havoc in the lives of those most marginalized while also presenting how women of color resist. In the end we present some recommendations that institutions of higher education can apply to truly honor diversity and inclusivity.

Keywords: Racism, Whiteness, Higher Education, Women, Race, Feminism, Stories, Auto ethnography, Critical Auto-Ethnography

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Introduction

“F.U.B.U.”

By Solange

When you know you gotta pay the cost
 Play the game just to play the boss
 So you thinking what you gained, you lost
 But you know your shit is taking off, oh
 When you driving in your tinted car
 And you're criminal, just who you are
 But you know you're gonna make it far, oh

When you feeling all alone
 And you can't even be you up in your home
 When you even feeling it from your own
 When you got it figured out
 When a nigga tryna board the plane
 And they ask you, “What's your name again?”
 Cause they thinking, “Yeah, you're all the same.”
 Oh, it's for us

All my niggas in the whole wide world
 Made this song to make it all y'all's turn
 For us, this shit is for us
 Some shit is a must
 This shit is for us

Solange's song, F.U.B.U.—for us, by us—is a prophetic mantra that reminds women of color in the academy that although we exist within the intoxication of whiteness within the ivory towers (see Schick, 2000) we are never to be defined by anyone else other than us, regardless to the onslaught of attempts to control our minds, body, and identities. Too often are women of color in the academy expected to placate whiteness with “Yessums” and head nods, as if our role in the academy is nothing more than strategically pimping out our Black and Brown bodies to glitter their brochures as proof of diversity on campus, all while using our intellect and forced complicity to stroke their egos of whiteness (see Berry & Mizelle, 2006; Gutierrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Niemann & Dovidio, 1998; Villalpando & Delgado Bernal, 2002). Additionally, whiteness in the academy works by presuming their forced and make believe friendships with women of color are sincere when they are simply a fictive network to cosign their white agendas (Matias, 2016). *We ain't your friend. We're your employee and you remind us of this relationship EVERY SINGLE DAY.* Notwithstanding how Beckys (well-intentioned white women who nonetheless reek of whiteness in ways that oppress women of color) parade us like Black and Brown “besties,” otherwise known as house slaves, we, the authors, take this opportunity to divulge just how whiteness attempts to control our work, bodies, and sense of self.

Yancy (2017) argues that the white gaze “replicates the history of whiteness as terror” because it is used to reduce the Black body to “an eater of shit, and a drinker of urine...a monster, something freakish, abnormal, and capable of the most disgraceful acts” (p. xxxi). Just as Yancy posits how the white gaze is used to demoralize the humanity of Black bodies, so too does it break down the humanity of women of color in the academy. That women of color in the academy are hired because of their expertise—often more qualified than many of their white counterparts—but once captured within the confines of the ivory towers is relegated to some subservient status, forever reminds us that “white women have assumed positions of power that enables them to reproduce the servant-served paradigm in a radically different context” (hooks, 1994, p. 103). This is especially true within a field like education, whereby a majority of K-12 teachers, teacher candidates, teachers obtaining a masters degree in education, professors of education, collaborating teachers and administrators are all white, and particularly, middle class white females. Per Yancy’s argument, not only does the white gaze exist, it can also mutate in such a perverse way that it becomes specifically focused on women of color. That is to say, the white gaze can develop a specific tunnel vision, so to speak, that it produces a gendered white gaze that wreaks havoc and terror on the lives of women of color.

For white men (and other men of color who internalize whiteness), their gendered white gaze upon the Black and Brown female body—we strategically use the word “body” instead of “woman” because such a process reduces our humanity to sexual objects—exists to serve “the ends of white male desires” and not that of mutual professional respect (hooks, 2006, p. 368). These men’s false pleasantries and seemingly kind behaviors are still motivated by ulterior motives that it become, as hooks so bluntly puts it, “fucking [as] a way to confront the Other” (p. 368). Yet, although there is a litany of literature that clearly detail how men fetishizes women of color—*always the sancha never the wife* (Paz, 2008)—we, like Davis (1981) so posits, will focus on white women, especially those who consider themselves to be an “ally” or “liberal.” The purpose of this fixation is primarily because the field of education has historically produced a unique context whereby white women, particularly educators, have been promoted into power or has been upheld as morally astute above that of women of color in the same field (see Hudson & Holmes, 1994).

We, the authors, are primarily concerned with this context because we are women of color (Filipina/Pinay, Black, and Mexican American, respectively) in the academy (faculty, doctoral student, and research staff, respectively) and our Brown and Black lived experiences matter, especially within spaces that claim to be committed to cultural diversity. Furthermore, as administrators, professors, students, and staff members claim to be working towards educational equity, inclusive practices, and/or social justice we often do so from different social locations. And these social locations are essential to recognize because if the structural context, wherein these social locations reside, already upholds whiteness in order to maintain institution-

alization of white supremacy, then those social locations that advance whiteness will be preferred over others. That is, although many diversity workshops claim that we all have perspectives to bring to the table, hence the need for diversity and inclusion, white perspectives will continue to dominate the space precisely because the space is already upholding whiteness. As such, the perspectives of women of color are often marginalized, rendered biased, ignored, or minimized as “just your story” when, in truth, such stories are routinely expressed from women of color all over academia.

In fact, this argument that “it’s just your story” recently happened to one of the authors. During Matias’ tenure case despite six glowing external letters, she received one scathing letter from one administrator who attempted to liken Matias’ stories from her research on whiteness to Adichie’s¹ cautionary TedTalk of “a danger of a single story.” Two things were wrong with this pairing. First, Adichie is talking about her story as a Nigerian in a British colonial empire and how Black stories are rarely heard amidst the whitening of stories. Therefore, Matias’ stories are not the danger here. As the only brown-skinned Pinay who grew up in public schools in urban Los Angeles her stories of teacher education in the very white field of teacher education are the stories that are silenced in the academy due to whiteness. Therefore, to use Adichie’s TedTalk against Matias was a gross manipulation of Adichie’s entire point. Secondly, what the administrator did not consider is that Matias’ stories are not a single story² because they echo the same screams of many women of color in the academy before her—some at the same institution (e.g., Allen, Orbe, Olivas, 1999; Berry & Mizelle, 2006; deJesus & Ma, 2004; Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Gutierrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). The only difference here or, more accurately stated, what is sadly the same-o-same-o business is that, that administrator like the many before her, refused to listen. Therefore, in our pursuit to bring to the academy different perspectives that truly honors the stories of those most marginalized in the hopes to provide a more educationally equitable setting we share with our readers our tales from the ivory tower.

Theoretical Framework

This article theoretically employs several theories to best capture the meanings behind our experiences in the academy.³ For one, we use critical whiteness studies (CWS) because such a platform provides an overarching theory of that which marginalizes our lives: whiteness. By calling out/exposing, characterizing, and critiquing whiteness we do not seek to demonize individuals, precisely because whiteness “reproduces itself regardless of intention” (Dryer, 2008, p.12). Be it as it may, whiteness will occur whether or not whites, or those people of color who are indoctrinated by whiteness ideology, believe themselves to be intentionally malicious. Hence, we do not investigate one’s intent nor do we expose them for

the sake of humiliation. Instead, we identify how whiteness is operating so that (1) we fully understand its impact, (2) honor those stories, voices, and identities most oppressed by whiteness, and (3) begin to dismantle the stronghold of institutional white supremacy together. In fact, Scheurich & Young (1997) prophetically wrote, “One of the worst racisms...for any generation or group is the one that we do not see, that is invisible to our lens—the one we participate in without consciously knowing or intending it” (p. 12). Knowing that whiteness, and its subsidiary element, white privilege, “is not visible to its holder” (Wildman & Davis, 2008, p. 114), proves the necessity as to why women of color, and other marginalized identities must speak out about their lived experiences with whiteness. Upon identifying acts of whiteness, the hope then is that those who are enacting whiteness will acknowledge their own behaviors, emotions, and speech that continues to racially microaggress people, and in particular, women of color. Although this is often the goal of critical whiteness studies, we operationally employ it differently. In her book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, hooks (1995) argues the following:

Black people still feel the terror, still associate it with whiteness, but are rarely able to articulate the varied ways we are terrorized because it is too easy to silence accusations of reverse racism or by suggesting that black folks who talk about the ways we are terrorized by whites are merely evoking victimization to demand special treatment. (p. 47)

Knowing that Blacks, moreover women of color, have not had to opportunity to speak against the violence of whiteness for fear of being silenced, as demonstrated in Matias’ tenure case, we take this moment to unapologetically share our stories of how whiteness terrorizes us. That is, this is not, as Solange’s lyrics so eloquently reminds us, about teaching them as is the usual application of CWS. Instead, this is about us speaking our Truths in response to enactments of whiteness.

Hence, in order to speak our truths against whiteness, we also employ Black feminism, Chicana feminism, and Asian Pacific American feminism in our stories to best capture our response to whiteness. Black feminism, for instance, is one such theoretical field that recognizes the need for Black women to speak out their truths especially since silence will not protect them. Lorde (2007) warns us of this when she states the following:

Even within the women’s movement, we [Black women] have had to fight, and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our Blackness. For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call america, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive, not as human beings...And that visibility that makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the sources of our greatest strength. Because the machine will grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners must as bottles, and we will still be no less afraid. (p. 42)

As Lorde (2007) recognizes, silencing *our* stories is not an option, especially when whiteness strategically and manipulatively attempts to mute us. Whilst Black feminisms cautions us about silencing our stories, Chicana feminism, as Castillo (1997) asserts, “recognizes the worth and potentials of all women” (p. 47). In these revelation women of color, particularly Latinas or Chicanas who “traditionally have been [maimed as] tortilla-makers, baby producers, to be touched but not heard” (Chavez, 1997, p. 37) are speaking out against racism and sexism so that they “shall never live on our knees again” (Anita Sarah Duarte, 2007, p. 195). The focus on the community, family, and *la raza* become vital components for Chicana liberation. Adding onto Black and Chicana feminism, Pinayism (Filipina/Pilipina Feminism) is “a process, place, and production that aims to connect the global and local to the personal issues and stories of Pinay struggle, survival, service, sisterhood, and strength” (Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento, 2009, p. 179-180). As Tintiangco-Cubales & Sacramento (2009) argue, “Pinayism in academia is not just about theory production” (p. 185), rather, it’s about Pinay educators “bring[ing] forth their Pinay perspective by sharing personal narratives. These stories illustrate the communal nature of teaching that they bring into the classroom, which provides a process of humanization for both the teacher and the student” (p. 185). As such, the demands for stories from women of color are not just for the sake of spreading *chisme/tsismis*. Indeed, sharing our stories is a deeply personal act of revolution.

If the underlying purpose of studying race is about recognizing our humanity and the processes that seek to help others recognize that, then the focus of our struggle in response to whiteness, just as Bell (1992) captures in his story of “Afrolantic hope,” becomes the symbolic reminder of our humanity. Returning to Solange’s lyrics, if they don’t understand these stories then so what. “This shit is for us.”

Method

Methodology Behind Critical Autoethnography

Whiteness works in ways that deliberately attempts to silence our stories by claiming “it’s just your story.” This minimizing maneuver is beautifully captured in Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva’s (2008) argument of white methods, white logic. That certain white researchers can lay claim to objectivity while denouncing other scholars’, mainly those scholars of color’s, work as biased, subjective, or that their stories as just “too narrow of a dataset” based upon that scholar’s race, is essentially “arguing that race is a proxy for an individual’s biological makeup (p. 6-7).” And, when acknowledging that “when whiteness becomes normative, it works like God” those white researchers who, many of whom are full professor, deans, and/or presidents of universities, render research by scholars of color as biased, also act as if they are God, determining what is and is not biased research (p. 13). This is all determined while those gatekeeping researchers have the privilege to ignore, overlook, or assume they have no own biases, especially as they sit in their corner offices holding

full titles ignorantly wondering why a majority of corner office holders look, think, and speak just like them. Therefore, we acknowledge that white methods and white logic hegemonically dictates the research world by deciphering what is and is not biased methods.

In fact, we again refer to Matias' tenure case for a concrete example of methodological bias. Although studies of whiteness are not a monolith for it draws from a variety of research methods such as qualitative interviews, theoretical hermeneutic interpretations, or critical race theory's counterstorytelling, Matias' administrative letter included a phrases that alluded to her lack of "empirical research" and how she should engage in more "traditional research methods of whiteness." Frankly speaking, *who did leading scholars of whiteness like Peggy McIntosh interview?* For that matter, *who did leading educational scholars, John Dewey and Paulo Freire interview?* There are two things wrong with this critique. One, as Mills (1959) argues, researchers limit their own sociological imagination when they too narrowly fixate on the precisions of qualitative and quantitative techniques of research, a process which he coins abstracted empiricism, instead of opening their minds to new ways of researching. Mills decries this narrow approach to research methods when he states:

I wonder how much exactitude, or pseudo-precision, is here confused with 'truth'; and how much abstracted empiricism is taken as the only 'empirical' manner of work... (p. 72)

Two, Mills (1959) clearly problematizes how gatekeepers of research pervert the nature of empirical research, opting only for a narrow definition that indicates techniques of qualitative and quantitative methods without giving credence to other methods such as theoretical methods. Mills argues further that those—what we, coin here—*empiricists* are more committed to techniques than doing the investigative work of social science and thus self-aggrandize their own importance in research. He states:

Moreover, as for 'importance,' surely it is important when some of the most energetic minds among us use themselves up in the study of details because The Method to which they are dogmatically committed does not allow them to study anything else. Much of such work, I am now convinced, has become the mere following of a ritual—which happens to have gained commercial and foundational value—rather than, in the words of its spokesman, a 'commitment to the hard demands of science.' (p 72)

Research Method

Therefore, in order to move away from research methods that too narrowly fixate on empiricists definitions of what constitutes research methods, we opt to include critical autoethnography, because it "is a research method where authors can link their personal selves to their cultural selves" (Jones, Taylor, & Coward, 2013.

p. 3). In fact, with regards to critical race pedagogy, the use of autoethnography can provide a more “promising connections that can move graduate level teachers and teacher educators toward becoming more transformative caring agents” (p. Hughes, 2008, p. 81). That our stories are actually accepted as a formidable process of understanding race and gender in a racist and sexist society is what attracts us most to critical autoethnography. Too often does whiteness in academia render our stories as nothing more than stories used to denigrate white folks. Not only is this thinking defensive, it is also a blatant refusal to acknowledge that the lives, experiences, and intellectualism that women of color offer to the university is exactly what they claim to want—diversity. In the end their blatant refusal to learn from the stories of women of color in the academy clearly indicates how white supremacy operates. Meaning, regardless to whether or not they want to admit it, these gatekeepers deeply believe whites are superior beings who can learn nothing from inferior beings like women of color and will do anything to strategically denounce their expertise. In order to move away from the self-censoring our stories we strategically operationalize them here through critical autoethnography and capturing our stories and experiences in the academy.

By critical autoethnography we first shared our experiences together and captured key experiences. Then we engaged in the literature of CWS, Black Feminism, Chicana Feminist, and Pinayism to analyze such experiences. Finally, we captured our experiences in the academy and share them in story form to illuminate to our readers how we make sense of our experiences. We do not do so to generalize the experience for all women of color in the academy. Instead we seek to offer a small piece of interpretation of how we, as women of color, experience the academy using the existing literature of whiteness. We hope that by offering our stories and our analytic lens to these stories others will feel empowered to come out and share their stories. In doing so, we ultimately hope to gain a better picture of what academy life is like for more women of color.

Our Stories

Exotic. Submissive. Feisty: The Vitriol of Whiteness on this Pinay

*Colorblanco*⁴ is a vast land where ideologies like rugged individualism, cowboy attitudes, and fake Midwest politeness run feral amidst the wild, wild, whiteness. In this space not only is there a large presence of white folks, but there is also a large presence of whiteness. Whiteness here is like Aspen trees, all stemming from a single seed but sprouts up everywhere, and in this case, in everyone regardless to whether a person has white skin. Here, whiteness operates in the minds of both whites and people of color especially when they Bogart identity proudly displaying their “Colorado Native” bumper stickers, which blatantly disregards the Native Americans who were slaughtered before them. Also, each year our university’s presidential commencement speech relays the story of how Denver’s first mayor

was a Klu Klux Klansman and how the university—embodied as the white savior—stood up to racism by allowing Jews onto their campus; yet, no mention of Blacks. Therefore one can understand how driving around Denver is as surreal as a Salvador Dali painting because as they pontificate liberalness in sayings such as “I voted for Obama” they do so amidst historically racist communities still proudly displaying “Covenant Community” and refusing to rename parts of town that were named after Klansmen like the town of Stapleton.

I present this *Colorblanco* landscape so that one best understands the level of shock my mere presence had upon this whitened space, let alone the radical, resistant or, as some say, unapologetic scholarship I brought with me. I was young, proud of my Brownness, and fierce in my objective for racially just education when I first arrived. Similar to *The Wizard of Oz*'s Dorothy's well-known motto, I, with my petite, voluptuous frame, long dark hair, brown skin, almond-shaped eyes, and Spanish surname was clearly reminded that I was *not* in LA anymore. I was stiletto. They were Crocs and Birkenstocks. I was the first ever tenure-lined faculty of color, specifically hired into an urban teacher education program after teaching in LA and NYC and earning a doctorate degree in race and ethnic studies in education. They were white educators, claiming to be experts of teaching my kind—some of who did not earn doctorates or have taught beyond Denver city proper, let alone have any meaningful relationships with woke folks of Color. Their white gaze was multifaceted, complete with wonder and awe of how I, the student of color they presumed to be helping, became their equal. I was exotic and different to their plain vanilla and my boisterous and passionately in-your-face attempts to bring in radical education was offsetting to them. Clearly, like Cho's (2003) assertion that Asian Pacific American (APA) female stereotypes impact APA women in the academy, my mere presence could not escape the stereotypes as “politically passive and sexually exotic and compliant” (p. 358). Essentially, I was as DeBord (2003) so encapsulates, a spectacle or *weltanschauung* that “has become objectified” (p. 118). *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

To clarify for those who are unfamiliar with Pinays we are often racially ambiguous causing one to question whether “she is Asian or Latina” especially when our phenotypes often suggest Asian, yet our Spanish cultural norms and surnames suggest another (see Ocampo, 2016). Eyes turned and I felt the white gaze (Yancy, 2006) in a variety of ways. *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.* First, one of my older white colleagues assumed I was Latina and said to me, “I've had several Latina doctoral students, you know” as a way to develop some sad fictitious relationship with me (see Matias, 2016). Such a racialized and sexualized maneuver mirrors the dating behavior of white men who tell Asian Pacific American women they have dated an Asian girl before as a lame justification to date more Asian American women. Others stopped by my office feeling obliged to instruct me to wear more lotion because of the dry Coloradoan climate, justifying it with “my nephew is an adopted Korean.” WTF?! Others pointed out how “shapely” I was, how high my heels were,

how I was such a “pretty little thing” or how shocked they were to see my hair in its naturally curly state. The audacity to assert labels on my Filipina body, subjecting it to racial and gender microaggressions, is not only disgusting, it was telling. Because amidst their need to racially identify or characterize my gendered body they were trying to control it. Clearly, they were actively racializing and sexualizing my Filipina-ness. *Speak when told. Move when directed. But be pretty for my fetish of you. Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

After a year of careful observation, per the advice of my own professors, I started asserting my presence beyond their submissive imagery of me. In these assertions I highlighted where aspects of curricula, pedagogies, and philosophies were imbued with whiteness, cautioning them that in its usage it replicates the same racist educational system they *claim* to want to dismantle. Shocked, however this time beyond the mere presence of my body, and directly at the boldness of my intelligence, they retaliated with immense vitriol. There were times they took turns screaming at me. Some were so emotionally unstable that they ended up periodically standing and sitting atop tables while others pounded their fists on the table or waved their arms in the air. All of these behaviors eerily reminded me of some kind of over-the-top snake wielding church revival whereby bodies are convulsing and contorting. But beyond recognizing their own behaviors in response to my Browned⁵ mind, body, and willed spirit, they projected onto me, gaslighting me to believe that I was the problem—a sad emotionally manipulative maneuver used by emotional abusers. In the end, they knew I was a single motherscholar of color who had no connections in Colorblanco and “punished” me with night courses, leaving me frantic to find childcare for my twin toddlers. Luckily, my then associate dean, a Black woman, helped by othermothering my twins at night (Case, 1997). Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.

It wasn't only this incident. There were several. One time a self-proclaimed liberal, attractive-looking white female⁶ student—herein typified as Becky—was so perturbed about me teaching about race that she sought me out during office hours to scream at me. Another Becky was so bothered that I was her professor that she went to my office hours, refused to sit down, and while verbally berating me with stupid questions such as “Do you know what the course description for this course is supposed to be” opted to stand above me with her arms crossed. It was almost as if she was screaming down at a women who had wronged her. That student eventually dropped my course and re-registered when the course was taught by an older, white female professor, despite the fact that we had similar readings. Another time, upon hosting one 45-minute lecture on race, another group of sorority Beckys took it upon themselves to circulate a petition behind my back in a futile campaign to get me fired. Although the litany of literature acknowledges whitelash to studying race, the kind of vitriol of these young, attractive, white female students strangely reminded me of the rage behind a jealous girlfriend, especially one who just found out her white man was canoodling with an attractive women of color.

Essentially, I felt as if they were actively racializing and sexualizing my body with APA stereotypes, while responding with extreme hate to that same hypersexualization. *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

Wanting to test my gut feeling, I had my students read Yen Le Espiritu's (2001) chapter, "Ideological Racism and Cultural Resistance: Constructing Our Own Images." Espiritu describes how Asian Pacific American women are either characterized as "cunning Dragon Lady or the servile Lotus Blossom Baby" (p. 196). Regardless to which characterization is employed on APA women they "both exoticize Asian women as exotic 'others'—sensuous, promiscuous, but untrustworthy" (p. 196). *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

Quite telling from their responses to the reading is that my Beckys were not only aware of such stereotypes they already had intimate knowledge of it and even developed feelings about it! One white woman shared a story about how her own white male friends often talked about "banging" APA women—a phenomenon previously described by bell hooks' (2009) as *eating the other*. Another described her deep disgust for "their" men's fetish over APA women. And yes, many of them used the word "our" to describe white men, which implies a certain sense of possessiveness towards white men—a possessiveness that would generate a sense of loss if one believed something was taken away from them. Never once in this exercise did the Beckys comment on how "their" men's sexual fetishization towards APA women made them feel or how that might impact how they view or relate to APA women. In fact, they deflected at every turn focusing on how white men are lame, too easily manipulated by APA women, or straight disgusting. According to them, this racial fetishization and hypersexualization of APA women only impacts white men, yet they say this with such vitriol towards white men *and* APA women that it clearly impacts them too. *Exotic. Submissive. Feisty.*

In the end this fetish pits white women against APA women, as if young, strong, attractive women of color, in and of itself, are a latent threat to white women's sense of security or sense of home. And, since white women have established a sense of place or home within the academy, especially in a field like education where a majority of educators are white females, my entrance into what they perceive to be their home becomes a threat, making them hold more tightly onto their whiteness and lashing out more boldly.

Interlude: This Moment

By Solange

If you don't understand us and understand what we've been through,
then you probably wouldn't understand what this moment is about.

This is home. This is where we from.

This is where we belong.

Bold. Brown. Brains. Solange's lyrics forever reminds me that despite how unwelcomed or estranged I am made to feel in this academic space this *is* my

home—‘tis where I belong. Because within the vastness of *Colorblanco*’s whiteness, exists an academy whose stereotypical characterizations of me sadly defines them more so than it does me. Refusing to feel like a forever foreigner (Park, 2011) inside my own academic home and refusing to withstand their vitriol, rage, and vehemence when I don’t perform submissiveness, docility, and servility I stand. Appalled and, at the same time, threatened that I am bold enough to assert my humanity and expertise—while they attempt to control my body, mind, and spirit with their racialization and sexualization of me—I again stand.

I stand tall—all five feet of me—realizing that their awe of how unapologetic I am is a stereotypical presumption that women of color should be apologetic for asserting themselves. In the end this is not my issue. Rather, this is *their* issue with me being at home with the boldness, Brownness, and beautifulness of my mind, body, and soul. Instead of identifying, realizing, let alone be cognizant enough to welcome it, their vitriolic projections becomes a sad display of their own white insecurities. Even amidst that, I stand.

All Skinfolk, Ain’t Kinfolk

One of the most insidious components of whiteness is how it infects the minds of people of color that transforms into plantation politics. Baldwin (1963) has described this as an illness that eats away the souls of people of color. Upon entering my PhD program I have grown accustomed to people of color still believing that ‘massa tools will dismantle the massa’s house’ (Lorde, 2007). These people of color earned some sort of financial success but in moving up the hierarchy ladder as a non-threatening token person of color, meant never talking about race. Yet, my firm sense of solidarity with all people of color stems from my activism in student protests in Ferguson, Missouri. This firm solidarity made me give other people of color the benefit of a doubt. Upon the acceptance to my doctoral program I was initially slated to work with two women of color. Since I was a woke, critically conscious person I, like hooks (1994) also attests in her experiences with white teachers post desegregation, knew that whiteness, in all its pervasiveness (see Leonardo, 2009), is everywhere. In fact, after years of educational trauma with white women teachers and professors who never believed in my potential to earn any advanced degrees, one can understand why working with women of color was so liberating. As such, I fantasized about the bold fierce women of color that will encourage and nurture me throughout my PhD experience. And then there she was.

Having read her work on whiteness, I knew instantly I wanted to study under a particular female professor of color (herein called Doktora). She was the epitome of the magically manifestation of my academic hopes and dreams. She was a woman of color, a motherscholar, and was “unapologetic” in her attack on whiteness. Once accepted, I was elated. To add to my joy, another female professor of color then contacted me. I shall call her Professor X. Professor X’s research agenda was creating a high school program that teach social justice to high school students

who come from urban backgrounds like myself. Such a program made me even more ecstatic. I was not only accepted to the program to work under Doktora, but also received a research assistantship with this other female professor of color. I recall telling my partner that this is almost too good to be true. I soon realized I was right. The events that followed accepting my assistantship with this other woman of color has solidified within me that *all skinfofolk ain't kinfolk*.

Whiteness is like any other abusive relationship. The signs of abuse were not as obvious at first but I was financially dependent on this research assistantship and therefore like those who are often abused are also forced to endure terrorism of whiteness (hooks, 1994). In the beginning Professor X gave responses to diversity and inclusion in ways that never attacked white supremacy. *Warning sign number one*. The avoidance of talking about larger structural issues of race at first troubled me, but since I was so enamored by having a female professor of color I initially chose to overlook it. I was in disbelief and thus I chose to be willful ignorant of some of this professor's problematic ideologies. It was not until I realized, as Matias (2016) posits, that whiteness can infiltrate the mindsets of people of Color that I recognized the problem. Whiteness does indeed impact people of color in ways that replicate the same dynamics as the field slave and house slave during plantation times. This "house nigga" mentality is described in hooks (1994) work.

One mark of oppression was that Black folks were compelled to assume the mantle of invisibility, to erase all traces of their subjectivity during slavery and the long years of racial apartheid, so that they could be better, less threatening servants. (p. 30)

Another aspect that made me wary was that the teachers chosen to lead these courses on social justice embodied all factors of a white saviorism (Matias, 2016). To not acknowledge how whiteness can impact the delivery of culturally responsive teaching only furthers the agenda of whiteness (Matias, 2013). Hence, I was horrified at these white women replicating the same racist behaviors I had experienced when I was a kid. Yet, because whiteness works in emotionally manipulative ways I simply began doubting myself, ignoring my gut feeling that something was awry or, better yet something was (a)white. So I decided to wait until I was in the classrooms to observe for myself if my assumptions were true. Sadly, I was not disappointed.

One of the first classrooms I entered was a white female nonnative Spanish-speaking teacher telling her class filled with Latino students how she "gets them" because she learned Spanish and lived in Mexico for a summer. I watched as these Latinx students rolled their eyes. I further listened as she stated that color does not matter because we all bleed the same. After expressing my concerns about colorblind racism to Professor X she immediately rebuffed my claims telling me that I have not been a part of the program long enough to question the astuteness of the teachers she had chosen. She further invalidated me by stating as a woman of color she would "know" if her white teachers were not able to teach the course she designed. I im-

mediately thought two things. One, why is she so defensive? Two, her invalidation of my claims made it clear how deep her investment in whiteness ran.

The final installment of the whiteness tale of horror came when addressing student experiences. Because I am adamant to eradicate the suffering of Black and Brown students I endured this research assistantship. In my mind I thought if I were not there then who would fight for these students? Professor X became very perturbed with my insistent claims that the teachers of her program were incompetent to teach such topics. I tried offering a suggestion that native Spanish speaking students should be afforded an opportunity to present their end of the year projects in Spanish. To this suggestion, she was repulsed claiming students needed to learn English because it was their best chance to success. And this was coming from a self-identified Latina. For me this was a marker of whiteness because to decry one's own language feels like hating oneself. In fact, I learned that adopting whiteness, which is in and of itself, adopting self-hate, exacts a toll, regardless to whether or not that person is white. According to Thandeka (2001), the cost of adopting whiteness is one's self esteem. And when someone loses their self-esteem and develop increased self-hate they lash out with rage. This rage was then projected onto me when I merely suggested the importance of Spanish language in education. The rage was fierce in its abuse towards me that I started doubting my own life experiences. Instead of identifying whiteness as a problem I was erroneously deemed the problem for simply bringing it up. She knew I was interested in studying whiteness, yet upon ever uttering the word she claimed that studying whiteness was not real scholarship!

In the end her adoption of whiteness ideology and refusal to acknowledge her association to it clashed with who I was and it was time to part ways. Here I was an "unapologetic" Black woman with a big Afro committed to stopping the patronizing educational experience of Black and Brown high school students. In my refusal to ever be complicit in inflicting the same terrorizing pain of whiteness on these students I quitted the program and the assistantship. I never felt so free.

I could not help but be in disbelief. Why would a woman of color who I looked up to adopt whiteness? What did she get out of it? I soon realized she had institutional backing for her project. Many of the white administrators favored her and her work. It was almost as if she became their good house nigga to be paraded around other field slaves to keep others in order on the academic neo-plantation (see Matias, 2015). Like Thandeka (2001) argues whiteness is all about conditional love. If you do not comply with whiteness it will work against you. That is exactly what happened to me. Once I finally broke away from her abuse she told me "I don't think you're Ph.D. material." This hurt me deeply because she was someone who initially embodied everything I thought I wanted to be. To this, I was deeply offended. I, like James Baldwin so eloquently puts it, was not her Negro. I was not interested in playing house and field slave politico-tactics. Instead, I am proud of Blackness. My Black Power fist pik is just a symbol of my commitment to racial

justice. And, in that commitment I will never make the mistake of assuming that whiteness only impacts white people again. Although I am rightfully angry of losing a relationship with a woman of color I had initially admired I am forever reminded that *all skinfolk ain't kinfolk*. And I, as a Black woman committed to empowering my people refuse to replicate this. It stops here.

La Malinche in Academic Research

In Mexican folklore, there is not one character who is as revered and defiled as that of La Malinche, Malintzin Tenapal, otherwise, Doña Marina. Regarded as the mother of Mexico her motherhood was earned by way of her prostitution to Spanish conquistador, Hernan Cortes. Having been sold into slavery by her mother, La Malinche met her fate when Cortes purchased her. To Cortes, La Malinche gave her invaluable knowledge of the native peoples, her body, and her position in her land. The historical stories of La Malinche, portrays Mexican American women as only good on their backs, legs splayed. *Mute. Passive. Hollow*. Despite this, La Malinche was also a translator, gateway to the Americas, and the womb for a new people (the mestizo). La Malinche, both mother and whore, both essential and disposable, both producer and exploited. Loved and loathed. Monarrez Fragoso (2010) explores this commodification and exploitation of Mexican women's bodies in her analysis of the *feminicides* of Ciudad Juarez. She writes, "The capitalist patriarchal system has changed [Mexican women's bodies] into a subjected object with a new use and exchange value" (p. 67). Essentially, Mexican American women became no longer human, but instead a disposable means of production.

As a female Mexican-American researcher occupying a space in the white male patriarchy promoting academy, this dichotomy of both producer (mother) and exploited (whore) is far too familiar. As a Brown body in the academy hired to "build relationships" and manage projects involving the Latino community I too have been positioned to serve as an interpreter, gateway, and womb, minus the professional recognition or basic humanity similar to La Malinche. As Lugo Lugo (2014) explains of the Latino/a imagination, "These archetypal images are... superimposed on the bodies of flesh-and-blood Latinos/as, like a cloak of expectations" (p. 43). On my body I wear the loved and loathed history of La Malinche like a cloak. And much like the mischaracterization of La Malinche's abilities and labor and the commodification of contemporary Mexican women's bodies, my labor within academic research has been reduced to how well I serve with statements such as "*She did not bring water to a meeting,*" "*she did not make copies,*" and "*she is not a team player.*" Or, comments such as *interpersonal issues*, which is code for not allowing myself to be dominated. These are a few examples of what was included in my professional review instead of what should be included in a competent researchers review. That is, there were no report on my ability to conduct research in a competent, or even exceptional, manner.

Since the research center is rather small my white female supervisor and my

white-enacting⁷ director informed me that the office operated like a family, expressing that they hope I would conform to their family values. Known for having a caring disposition, one can understand how I was initially relieved to think this was a space where my coworkers also believed in a supportive environment such that they referred to each other as family. Yet, I soon realized their idea of family was not my idea of *familia*. As time passed, I soon learned that this office “family” meant that I was expected to share with them the intimate details of my life without it being reciprocated. I was expected to give them office *chisme* about my life—a tactic I later learned was used to control my time in and out of the office, my body as docile servant, and my mind by intellectually hijacking my work. As Frankenburg (1997) asserts of the desire for whiteness to create its own culture, “whiteness *does* have content inasmuch as it generates norms, ways of understanding history, ways of thinking about self and other, and even ways of thinking about the notion of culture itself” (p. 632). Both my supervisor and director had indeed created a culture of whiteness, one that was ahistorical (Mills, 2007), narcissistic (see Matias, 2016), and oppressive (hooks, 1992). Their culture of *family* had a clear definition that only they knew and they benefitted from, a definition that allowed them to successfully dominate my body while not having to assume any malice or culpability. Much like Ross’s (1997) analysis of whiteness and how it projects as “innocence in affirmative action discourse” both my supervisor and director’s refusal to admit their culpability in racist practice allowed them to commodify my Brown body purely for their ends, while claiming innocence (p. 28-29). This was shown during one interaction with my director. Trying to control my weekend time she passive aggressively mocks, “Mariana, now I know you like your free time on the weekends, but we need you to respond to emails and continue working.” Clearly, this “family” culture so discussed in this space was simply reproducing an oppressive hierarchy whereby I was relegated to servant-like status, subjugated and controlled. As Cortes purchased La Malinche, my body and my abilities were also purchased via my salary and what they expected in return was my servitude. I knew then that despite my boundaries and rights to privacy the culture of whiteness within my office saw my Brown body as nothing more than a laborer to be used at the master’s call. In a sad replication of La Malinche, I was not seen or valued as one of the family members. Instead I was a means of production, a commodity, a slave, a prostitute who could be exploited inside and outside of regular work hours. Because my Brown body was seen as such, both my supervisor and director felt well within their place—which was above me—to regulate, discipline, and classify my body, both in and out of the office (Monarrez Fragoso, 2010).

However, the true testament of how they viewed my body as nothing more than a Brown prostitute to be used at their demand, came when I announced my pregnancy to my supervisor and director. As with some pregnancies I was elated not only because I was pregnant and had a secure job for almost a year, but also because I just received news about my acceptance to a doctoral program within the

university. Though excited my colleagues were not as thrilled. For them, knowing that I was pregnant and recognized for my scholarship such that I was admitted into a doctoral program threatened them. One, their need to control my body was now being put to the test as my body took control over itself. Two, that others knew of my research and scholarship made them fearful of hijacking my ideas, projects, and connections whenever they so pleased. Their fear of losing control over my body and mind brought about mandated regularly scheduled meetings as a way to bully me into having an abortion. Although they never used those words they used gaslighting tactics to scare me with the struggles of being a mother in the academy and threatened me with my career claiming that it would be impossible to do the work needed for the research center with a newborn. One of them patronized me by saying, “Oh, Mariana. It’s just we don’t think you truly understand how demanding a newborn is.” Tag teaming together, the other says, “You may want to consider going part-time or leaving work completely. No one will judge you for this.” But the straw that broke the camel’s back was when they asked in unison, “Was this planned?” as if they were so disgusted that I had the audacity to have a right over my own body. Notwithstanding their emotionally manipulative behaviors often associated with whiteness I pushed back and reminded both my supervisor and director that although I appreciate their concerns my life was outside of their jurisdiction. To this they simply responded, “As family, we just want to make sure you aren’t biting off more than you can chew.”

This constant need to establish their dominance over my commodified body, which we all knew was their means of production, eventually took its toll. At times, I suffered from depression during my pregnancy and even questioned my own desires for autonomy. These are the side effects of whiteness as gaslighting. Despite their venom, they claimed innocence, as whiteness often does, saying that their concerns were just a part of helping out the family. This is tantamount to the emotional manipulation that an abuser says to his abused as a way of continuing the abuse. In fact, it is as Matias (2016) so describes, “racially diminutive emotions are entrenched in whiteness ideology” (Matias, 2016, p. 26). Instead of opting for overt rage so often associated with whiteness my colleagues who were steeped in whiteness ideology opted to feign pity. Matias & Zembylas (2014) argue how emotional displays of pity are, at times, a way to mask deeper sentiments. In their study on white teachers they revealed that although these white teachers feigned pity for their Black and Brown students, they in fact, had deep rooted sentiments of disgust for African Americans and Latinos. Such an emotional dynamic was captured flawlessly in the behaviors of my colleagues at my research center. The honest truth was my pregnancy threatened their control over my body. That my body, like the stereotypes of Mexican women, should simply be used to extent the deeds of whiteness and not of my own volition, was not only dehumanizing it was terrorizing. And I refused it, resisted it, and challenged it at every turn. Because as I assert my Mexican American identity, body, and humanity, I do so not only

for myself but for my son who, after all this, is consequently named Salvador. My savior.

Recommendations

The field of education, specifically, teaching, is replete with the understanding that educators must listen or draw from the funds of knowledge of students, meaning listen to and honor students' stories, experiences, and identities as a source of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Yet, this is only stated because there is an existing racial structure where the majority of teachers are white and when placed in an educational structure that upholds whiteness their ignoring of stories, identities, and experiences of students of color, maintains a white supremacist institution. As much as white teacher educators (professors and administrators) want to pretend that such a phenomenon only happens in the K-12 sector, the truth remains. It also happens in the academy. Suppressing, undermining, or ignoring the stories of women of color in the academy is just another attempt to uphold whiteness. In truly embracing social justice, educational equity, and diversity and inclusion, we then offer the ivory tower the following recommendations:

There is a marked difference between engaging in structural change and producing Band-Aid programming. The academy, with its forever initiatives in diversity and inclusion, often include Band-Aid programming like women of color luncheons or mentoring programs, which although are needed, will not overturn the existing hostile culture needed to attract and retain women of color in the academy. Clearly, more must be done to educate others about whiteness and patriarchy directly, which are indeed the main structural problems that oppress women of color. Avoiding such topics and providing Band Aid programming is tantamount to placing a Band-Aid on a skin lesion without ever addressing the issue of melanoma. Eventually, the lesion will return. As such there needs to be more infrastructure to support women of color in the academy beyond luncheons, mentoring sessions, and support groups. For example, those with dominant identities—in this case whites—need to go to whiteness workshops so that they can learn how their behaviors, attitudes, decisions, and ideologies are imbued with whiteness such that faculty, staff, and students of color are ostracized. It is not enough to just teach those who are abused the state of abuse. In order to stop it one must go directly to the abuser. In this case to stop the widespread of whiteness left unchecked whites and those indoctrinated with whiteness ideology need to be continuously (not one time) enrolled in whiteness workshops.

However, being aware of the abuse is not enough. Race research often over glorifies the need for awareness. Awareness is simply not enough.

There needs to be consequences to those who continue to engage in racially and gendered microaggressive ways. If the university leadership is predominantly white and has taken continuous whiteness workshops then the university should be held responsible for the behaviors of their leaders. That is, there must be punitive measure for white leaders who have many filed complaints against them just as there should be positive measures for white leaders who engage in racially promoting ways.

Instead of being allowed to engage in work harassment and bullying such as what was seen in Matias' administrative tenure letter there must be accountability for those who grossly abuse their power in their leadership role. Universities need to become more cautious of these tactics because by silently allowing such workplace bullying to happen they are complicit in the bullying. As such, they are subject to increased class action suits and litigation. To avoid these litigations the university must seriously consider all workplace discrimination complaints by faculty, staff, and students of color.

For those staff, students, and faculty of color who are experience whiteness universities should have a very transparent reporting system. Yet reporting is not enough. For example, for faculty of color going to the Ombudsmen is not enough because Ombudsmen does not advocate. There must be advocating on behalf of inclusion, diversity, and equity. The lack of advocating for faculty of color renders such "support" processes a eunuch to the cause of diversity and inclusion because plainly state it has no balls to confront issues. What is needed is a university agency that has the ovaries to stand up to whiteness and enact change in order to actualize a better more diverse campus.

Those faculty and staff who engage in research that addresses racism should be given extra merit or credence for engaging in dangerous work that the universities claim they are in support of. If a university truly claims to be about social justice, equity, and racial inclusion then they should put their money where their mouth is. Pay for it. Merit or tenure cases should place an added value to researchers who engage in diverse and socially just research. Those added values should be pair with monetary compensation. It is not enough to pontificate a mission and vision of equity, diversity, and inclusive in the university is not going to pay for those who are engaging on the groundbreaking work to make that manifest.

Beyond white leadership in the academy there must be more leaders of color who not only promote diversity but also are fully aware of how whiteness operates in the academy. Filling leadership positive with Black and Brown bodies who are nonetheless operating in ways that still promote whiteness

is not sufficient. Basically, this is putting Black and Brown leaders in the same position as Black face did in minstrels of yesteryear. Just because a leader identifies as a person of color does not mean they will promote the radical racial equity needed to equalize the playing field for other people of color. As pointed above, not all skin folk are kinfolk.

Although there needs to be professional development that directly addressed the main problem of workplace hostility for women of color—whiteness and patriarchy—there still needs to be Band Aid programs such as Sista Circles, multicultural counseling, or—dare-we say—mediation/legal services for mitigating microaggressions. These spaces are often the only space where women of color in the academy feel safe to speak their stories, truths, and experiences. As such, there should not only be more of them, but if a university claims to be committed to diversity and inclusivity, then it should back its philosophy with its pocketbook. That is, create a line-item budget to ensure the longevity of these programs.

Women of color in the academy are too often chastised, ostracized, punished, or patronized when sharing their stories about the academy. If an institution is truly committed to listening to those most marginalized then it should remove all punitive measures used to control women of color and their stories. For example, when departments issue rubrics or memoranda that categorically situates stories of women of color as mere autobiography, they also deem their voices, experiences, and lives as unworthy of the recognition of research. Punitive measures, such as these, must be removed in order to women of color to investigate their own experiences in the academy.

Finally, listen and act, not react. Too often when women of color share their stories of whiteness and patriarchy in the academy, others refuse to listen. Instead, they emotionally react defensively, as if these stories threaten a core sense of the university, when in fact, they are remarkable tales of endurance, strength, and survival in the academy. If the academy truly seeks to be a place of learning, then those who have the corner offices in the academies should take a moment to learn from others. But learning is not enough. Accountability must be had. To ensure that the university adheres to doctrines of diversity, equity, and inclusion then those in corner offices need to be held accountable for complaints made against them for workplace discrimination.

Conclusion

I Got So Much Magic, You Can Have it By Nia Andrews and Kelly Rowland

You did it from the get go, get go
 Let's go, let's go, let's go look for magic, yeah
 They not gon' get it from the get go, get go, get go, get go
 Don't let, don't let, don't let anybody steal your magic, yeah
 But I got so much y'all
 You can have it

Nia and Kelly sang this acapella interlude as a track in Solange's *A Seat at the Table* album. In it they talk about having magic, #Blackgirlmagic,⁸ which is a testament to Black beauty, intelligence, and resilience. Appropriate it is then to apply this magic of loving thyself to women of color in the ivory towers whose stories, voices, and experiences have been strategically reduced to mere autobiography, unworthy of the status of scholarly research. Resisting by not letting them “steal your magic” we deliberately share our stories—ones that are too often silenced—so our identities, experiences, and voice can finally have a seat at the academic table. Some may project onto us claiming our stories are so unapologetic, yet, in their pomposity to lay claim to the intent of our stories, we argue, “What do we have to be apologetic about?” In fact, we magically resist such derogatory language by positing that perhaps the assumed nature of apology is just a deflection of someone who refuses to own up to her own culpability and complicity of how women of color are treated in the academy. And, in their confusion as to how to place, respect, or understand our stories we once again drawn from Solange's “F.U.B.U” track:

Don't feel bad if you can't sing along
 Just be glad you got the whole wide world
 This us
 This shit is from us...
 It's all for us baby

Special Note

To women of color in the academy, you are loved because you are exceedingly intelligent, fiercely brave, and undeniably beautiful. You-are-unabashedly-you.

Notes

¹ https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

² What the white administrator also does not recognize, or possibly does recognize but refuses to admit, is that Adichie—a Nigerian woman growing up amidst a British colonial context—produced this talk to caution people, in general, how recycling Eurocentric, or

hegemonically white, stories denigrates people of color. Therefore, when those in marginalized positions, such as people of color, or in Matias' tenure case, as a woman of color in a predominantly white institution offer counter-stories they, like Matias did, are countering the dangers of the single white story. Essentially, what this white administrator did was reappropriated Adichie's argument of the dangers of a single story by erroneously likening it to stories and experiences of women of color, as a way to, once again, marginalize the stories of those already most marginalized.

³ Although we do not claim that our experiences in the academy are but another single story, generalizable to all women of color, we do claim that our participation in this special issue on women of color in the academy is just another contribution in the collective stories of our—all women of color in the academy—experiences.

⁴ Based on personal communication with critical whiteness scholar, Naomi Nishi.

⁵ I strategically employ this term to suggest a sense of wokeness in my racial identity.

⁶ I strategically acknowledge this characterization because I feel as if it has something to do with the dynamics between attractive white women and attractive women of color.

⁷ My director is a dark-skinned Latina from an affluent background who completed her university studies in the U.S. Acknowledging that she would otherwise be seen as the Brown body exploited by the academy, through her actions my director displays how people of color can adopt and replicate whiteness ideologies, behaviors, and discourse as a means to gain recognition and establish dominance.

⁸ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/what-is-black-girl-magic-video_us_5694dad4e4b086bc1cd517f4

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On Being an Academic Side Chick

Tales of Two Adjunct Faculty
in the Academy That *Trained* Them

LaWanda M. Simpkins
Dawn N. Hicks Tafari

While communing at a barbeque after a long hard academic year, we laughed and joked about our positions in the academy. Both of us, sitting beside our significant others, recounted the many acts of work and all the ways in which we had given of ourselves tirelessly to be seen as equals at our respective institutions. This conversation was all too common these days, especially with those we trusted. As we further laughed and joked, it became painfully clear that the joke was on us. All the work but little to no recognition; being invited to sit at the table, but quietly; being in the building but not at the meeting - we were the hidden, the forgotten, we were the side chick. Side chick is a colloquial term, which describes the other woman who is involved in a relationship with a man who is already intimately attached to another woman, usually his wife. In general, we despise this type of woman, and although we have never been her, we unassumingly and begrudgingly found ourselves as *her*, an *academic side chick*.

Teaching at universities as a Visiting Assistant Professor and as an Adjunct Assistant Professor in departments full of senior faculty was a traumatic experience for us. Moreover, not leaving the university and, instead, justifying the lack of reciprocal commitment with a narrative of respect was self-violence. It took three to four years to realize that we were living the un-nameable: we were the live-in

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girlfriend stuck in the quicksand of cohabitation without hope of ever getting a “ring on it.” In our stories, we share the struggles associated with being, what we describe as, a “live-in girlfriend stuck in the land of cohabitation.” We were stuck in positions where we constantly dreamed of “TenureTrackLand”—being at a university that reciprocates the commitment that we gave to it. We both had dreams of being offered a tenure-track position at some illustrious university and living out our academic lives happily respected wearing that glorious ring of tenure. However, for our first 3 to 4 years as Ph.Ds, that was not our reality. Indeed, we were both serving at illustrious universities. One of us did in fact feel very respected and loved—the other one, not so much. This story recounts two women’s journeys through the rough terrains of being adjunct faculty.

Narrative One: Adjunct or Tenure Track We are all credentialed, so why the difference?

Today, I erased my past. I opened a book entitled *Me: Five Years From Now—The Life Planning Book You Write Yourself* and saw my life five years ago. I am not that person anymore, so I erased it. I have a new reality, and it is the one that I want to talk about, write about, and actually live. It was so simple to take my pencil and erase all the things that are no longer me. I wish that it were really that simple. If it were, then I would erase my experience as an adjunct faculty at my last institution.

Adjunct faculty make up a significant part of most university faculty, especially given the decrease in full-time tenure track positions (Langen, 2011; Komos, 2012). Coming right out of my Ph.D. program, I was fortunate to land such a role. It was the perfect scenario for me, as my goal after my terminal degree was not always to teach. I was an administrator, and I was good at it; thus, I thought that would be my trajectory. As such, publishing and going to academic conferences was not high on my list of priorities. In fact, it was not important to me at all. I did and still do have my qualms about the publishing process, especially once I acquired a strong sense of the political nature behind it. Nonetheless, an adjunct position was perfect for me, as I was able to assess if I, in fact, wanted to be in the classroom.

After only one semester as an instructor, I knew that I had found my calling. Much like my days as an administrator, I felt the immediate impact that I had on students, which further validated not only my decision to get my doctorate but also to utilize my doctorate to teach. I was all in. I taught 3-4 classes each semester, advised the majority of the students in my program, attended faculty meetings, and even found time to participate in professional development. I was very excited about my new journey.

My first year was much like a roller coaster. I had many highs, turns and twist coupled with a few dips along the way. Although I was classified as an adjunct faculty member, my department chair treated me as if I were tenure-track. As such, others around me treated me the exact same way. At the time, I did not know that

being an adjunct (in some colleagues' eyes) meant that I wasn't equal to tenure-track faculty members, but I was soon to find out.

After the administration changed a few times, so did the way my colleagues received me. People who were once kind to me began to distance themselves from me. Where I was once invited to faculty meetings, I began to be conveniently left off e-mail listserves that announced these meetings, along with other pertinent departmental information. Students even began to receive me differently. I later found out that they were misguided by another faculty member to believe that adjunct knowledge was different than tenure-track knowledge: a senseless concept that has no substantial evidence to sustain it.

To exacerbate matters, as people began to distance themselves from me, an ill-intended colleague befriended me in a manner that I later found to be unacceptable: a manner that felt like and qualified as sexual harassment, to be exact. It was his strategy to be my eyes and ears in the inner circle, but it came with a price. After numerous inappropriate comments and a bold statement of "if I got a tenure-track position, it would cost me," I knew that my time at my current university was winding down. No position was worth my integrity. Things quickly worsened for me shortly after I informed the necessary entities of my harassment. Not only was my personal character publicly attacked, but classes were stripped from me and given to friends of the person in charge. Although everyone around me could see what was happening, I was left in isolation to fend for myself, which can be very difficult, as adjunct faculty tend to have very little, if any, social capital. It appeared the plan was to discredit me and silence me. It worked.

My once respected position became an entryway for people to tangle their emotional issues around my academic career. I quickly had the awakening of the darker side of what it meant to be adjunct faculty. The politics that I once understood to be true regarding publishing were also true with working as an adjunct, at my institution at least. After a few years of working in my role with no promise or desire to be tenured at my institution, I sought other opportunities. I started my position with enthusiasm and perhaps a naivety that allowed me to remain in the role as long as I did. I left with a disdain for the process but also an imprinted memory of my experience. One that reaffirms for me that no matter the position of a person at a university, we all are equal and should be respected as such, if only everyone felt that way.

As I uncover my ugly truth it is important to state that I speak it as my lived experience. I am in no way positioning my experience as one that should be accepted as absolute for others. In fact, my colleague who I once laughed and joked with about us being *academic side chicks* had a completely different experience.

Narrative Two: If They Like It, Then They'll Put a Ring on It.....Right?

As a single woman, I always swore that I would never be someone's live-in

girlfriend. I had always been the one sharing strategies with my single friends on how to ensure that they get that ring instead of just the invitation to live together. Cohabitation was never on my list of things to do. In fact, it was a no-no. I mean why buy the milk if you can get the cow for free, right? This is how I felt, and I stood my ground...until I earned my doctorate. Hence, my name is Dawn Hicks Tafari, and for the past four years of my academic career, I have been a live-in girlfriend. Yup, I'm a cohabitor. I have been giving away the milk for free, so they dragged their feet in buying this cow—no matter how fly and fabulous she is. But the truth is: I am an academic side chick.

Our love affair began in June, 2013. I had just graduated with my Ph.D. one month earlier, and I was hungry for all of the “fame and fortune” that I dreamed a doctorate would bring. And they came looking for me. They were searching for someone part-time, but after reviewing my CV, they thought I would be ideal for a full-time fixed term position that had just become available because a tenured professor had just retired, so they interviewed and hired me. It was nice to be and feel desired. I was brought on board as a “Visiting Assistant Professor,” given a gorgeous office with mahogany furniture, and three classes to teach. I did not have any advisees because that was outside the scope of my duties as a visiting faculty member. My main responsibility was to teach. I could handle that. Teaching is my passion, so I was eager and excited to do the very thing that I loved doing most. I attended department and school-wide meetings, I taught great students, and I felt valued. Most importantly, I was promised that the tenure-track position would be posted in the fall, and that I could apply for it. I was thrilled; I felt so wanted.

But as the fall of my first year at the university came to close, there was no job posting. There was no search committee being formed. I asked my chair about this; I asked him if I should be looking elsewhere. He talked to me about budget cuts and promised me that I belonged at the university. He seemed disappointed—as if he genuinely wanted me to stay, but it was what he did next that shocked and comforted me: he amended my one-year contract to cover three years. He asked if this gesture of “security” would help, and to be honest, it did. I felt wanted again. I felt needed. I mean, after all, he did not have to extend my contract for a “guaranteed” three years, right?

During those three years, I taught four courses per semester, developed a new general education course about Black males, gained dozens of advisees, and traveled to conferences via university-sanctioned professional development funds. At the end of my second year, the administrator above my chair informed me that she would be submitting a “waiver of search” to the dean for approval. This waiver would allow the department to fill the vacant tenure-track position with me without conducting the traditional search. This seemed only right to me as I had been doing the job and had proven that I was not only capable but also a good fit for the department. This administrator advocated for me, and I was hopeful. However, the dean, who was hired the same year I was, did not approve the waiver, saying that I needed to

go through the formal process. This felt like a slap in the face. I was disappointed and let down. I felt like the upper administration did not see my value.

Then, at the beginning of my fourth year, I was offered the opportunity to move into an office WITH A WINDOW at the end of the suite (newly vacated by the retirement of another faculty member). Of course, I jumped at the opportunity to have an office with a window; that meant I was moving up in the world, as only the more distinguished faculty have offices with windows! Everything was going great, but my three-year contract had ended, and I had yet to be offered a new contract—only *assurance* that a contract was “coming.” Even further, as I was beginning my fourth year at the university, there was still no tenure-track position posted. And this time, the new chair offered me a one-year contract with the assurance that the position would, indeed, be posted the corresponding academic year. On one hand, I felt valued and wanted and respected and appreciated; on the other, I felt like I was being jerked around. I did not understand why they were keeping me on this chain, dangling this carrot for four years. If they did not see me as a permanent fixture at the university, then why wouldn’t they just let me go? But I understood: they liked the benefits that my “Visiting” status afforded them. The university did not have to make a commitment to me. They did not have to pay me a tenure-track salary, even though I was doing tenure-track faculty work.

My ScholarBrother encouraged me to leave, to look elsewhere, to be open to moving for the commitment, but at first, I refused. I told him that I felt valued, that even though they had not made the commitment by creating the tenure-track position for me, they “took good care of me.” And as the words flowed from my lips, I realized that I sounded like a battered woman defending her abusive spouse and trying to justify why she stays in the unhealthy relationship. I told my ScholarBrother my revelation, and he agreed. That was a difficult moment for me. It was the moment that my staying in the Visiting position against my desires began to feel like self-violence. It felt like I was giving the university a power and control over me that was not empowering.

I did try to leave: but I did not want to relocate my family, so I only applied to universities within a 50-mile radius of my home. I even went on one job talk; however, I was not offered the position. That did not help my self-esteem and confidence. I started to feel stuck, like no one else wanted me, like I needed to be grateful that my university wanted me enough to string me along for this long. The narrative in my head was the same that I had heard in movies—the stories that abused women tell themselves about their relationships, the stories that the abuser tells the person being abused. I was unhappy but content. To be completely honest, I was not sure how to feel about my status. There were times when I felt fully valued and respected, and there were times when I felt like the side chick—the girl on the side who you go to for comfort and fun but never make a commitment.

But my story does have a happy ending. In the fall of my fourth year, “my” position was posted. I applied, completed three interviews and a job talk, and was

offered the job a few weeks before the spring semester ended. Therefore, I started my fifth year at the university on a tenure-track with two years of credit towards tenure (that was disappointing, but I accepted the position anyway... I guess they trained me well, huh?).

Final Reflections

Reliving these stories was not easy for us. Taking off our mask, especially understanding that others will see our *nakedness* is scary. This is particularly true because of two major identifiers: our Blackness and our Womanness—in that order. Fortunately, our lived experiences provide us with an understanding that strength lies within sharing our narratives (Collins, 2003). Silence conceals our experiences and somehow validates them as normal. Furthermore, we have the power of two: a bond of SisterScholars that allows us to stand in solidarity with our experiences.

Both of us were in temporary positions with possible long-term commitments. Our experiences in those positions, however, were very different. We are not asserting that being an academic side chick will yield the same results. For one of us, the experience was littered with sexual harassment, bullying, and public humiliation by colleagues and students. For the other, the experience was a roller coaster ride of genuine support and candid disempowerment. The presumption is not that the adjunct role caused all of our negative experiences. It did, however, make us more vulnerable to a hostile work environment and wavering administrative backing. Albeit true, our stories both have a happy ending. But much like our experiences, they were different. Through it all, we both learned one valuable lesson: there is no blueprint to navigate the rocky academic terrain. Though we succumbed to the lure of being academic side chicks, we both survived our tenure in that role. Faith, persistence, and trust in our internal moral compass led us to our current roles, and we could not be any happier.

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Don't Wanna Teach No White Children

The Journey Into My Pedagogy

Fran Bates Oates

Abstract

This article is an autoethnography of one African American female educator. It is the story of her social justice disposition development to teach White students after graduation from a Historically Black University (HBCU). Revealed is the personal journey of her racial identity development before attending the HBCU and the irony of the relational and institutional impact attending one southeastern HBCU had on her preparation to teach. The initial research and inquiry was to explore how attending an HBCU impacted both Black and White education graduates' social justice disposition development to teach in multicultural classrooms. From this inquiry it became clear that as a faculty member of the HBCU and an instructor in the Education Preparation Program, this African American educator had to first reflect on who she is racially, resurrecting her lived experiences from her family background within her community and the background of her early education preparation in order to make an impact on education graduates' social justice lens. This article reviews her racial and social justice development before attending the HBCU, during matriculation, and after attending the HBCU. It journals the journey of one African American female's path to her pedagogy and her level of consciousness to teach students who were different from herself. HBCUs have long been recognized for their mission and rich legacy of providing education for African American students. These Black colleges and universities have been the heart of Black racial identity development with their distinctiveness and unique ability to raise cultural awareness of Black students. The level of awareness has traditionally been for HBCUs to prepare Black students to go out into the Black

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communities and serve. Examined is how one African American female raised her level of consciousness and cultural awareness of her racial identity to prepare to go into the communities and teach White students.

Keywords: social justice disposition, autoethnography, education preparation programs, teacher preparation, HBCU, double consciousness

Introduction

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois, 1903, p. 9)

In the excerpt above, W. E. B. DuBois (1903) introduces the concept of double-consciousness, of being, what was then called, a Negro and at the same time being an American in a White dominated society. DuBois (1903) was making a poignant declaration of the African American's quest for identity. He maintained that one had to cultivate a double-consciousness of looking at oneself first and then see oneself through the eyes of a White society totally different from one's own. In contradiction to DuBois' concept, most Negroes of his time felt they did not want to be in both worlds. According to Negroes then, most were comfortable being among their own in segregated worlds that did not interact with Whites (Lewis, 1993). Jim Crow laws made it illegal to integrate, with repercussions for Negroes who tried. Some repercussions were severe, including burning their homes, lynching, beatings and whippings, and fear and intimidation. Many Negroes felt it easier and safer to comply and remain segregated. Slavery was abolished then, but integration was still illegal (Lewis, 1993) and in order to know the limits or exclusions, a Black man or woman had to view themselves from their own unique perspective, but to also view themselves as they might be perceived by the outside (DuBois, 1903).

DuBois was well educated and wanted to use his education to serve the community and show Negro men and women another lens of American society. Though DuBois experienced much criticism from his own race for this concept and his stark polarities, ambiguities, and contradictions about double consciousness, the concept received national attention and continues to be a topic of discussion (Lewis, 1993). Like many other Negroes from this era and the African American Civil Rights Movement years, understanding both worlds could make the very difference of survival for African Americans (DuBois, 1903) regardless of the criticism.

DuBois (1903) felt the development of a double consciousness had serious implications if Negroes were the only ones who needed a second sight. He spoke of the necessity of Negroes to understand the discourses and social structures of White America that were shaping the lives, desires, and consciousness of Blacks

then; but he felt the understanding of our own Black racial identity was necessary in order for the Black race not to conform to how the White world identified them (E. Allen, 1992). As I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, I felt double consciousness was literally necessary for my success; to understand and see myself as the White man saw me, and to know who I was, my history, my ancestry, my roots in order for me not to be constrained to the way Whites saw my race. Understanding my Black identity was as necessary as my knowing what the White world expected of me; it was necessary for me to have the informed ability to maneuver back and forth across the veil of discrimination that DuBois described in his writings (DuBois, 1903).

In this article, I explore how I developed my African American racial identity while growing up to be a successful educator in White America. My research interest lies in how my personal experiences growing up and my education at one HBCU influenced my development of a social justice disposition to teach White students.

Believing that social justice can be defined as both a goal and a process (Bell, 1997), I investigated how my personal life experiences and the matriculation at one HBCU influenced me to develop a consciousness of “full and equal participation” for all students in my classroom that met their individual and cultural needs (Bell, 1997, p. 3). The process of attaining this goal of social justice is “democratic and participatory, inclusive and affirming of human agency and human capacities” (Bell, 1997, p. 4). I examined how my personal experiences and matriculation at one HBCU impacted my professional habits, attitudes, values, beliefs, and moral commitment that underlie performance in the classroom, and my dispositions for this social justice definition (Council for the Accreditation of Education Preparation, 2014). Additionally, my beliefs about our “moral and ethical responsibility to teach all students fairly and equitably” are important aspects of my story (Villegas, 2007, p. 371). I explore this through my autoethnography.

Rationale

I found it ironic that a White female faculty advisor at my HBCU changed my lens of White Americans. When I entered college, I expected to only have Black professors because I had only experienced Black teachers in my education career. Upon arriving I found what I expected, many Black faculty and only one White female advisor in my program. Though I was on a campus with only Black students, I arrived with the notion that outside of this cocoon, I still had to have a double-consciousness to be an American. It was a time I had no thoughts about teaching White students or that I was arriving at my HBCU to learn how to do that.

When it became time for me to student teach, the White Cooperating Teacher at my school placement said she wanted to give some advice so I could “get along there”. She told me I should not wear my large afro, my African head wrap, or even my braids. I was told I had to wear my hair so I did not appear to be militant. Using my hands as I talked to express myself and the passion in my expression needed to be tempered, I was told. My bright colors and flamboyance in my dress was

not acceptable by my White female cooperating teacher either. She told me what *not* to wear. “You are too expressive,” she said. At the end of the first two weeks she asked for me to be changed to another classroom to do my student teaching. I was moved to an open classroom suite with all Black females (except for one of five) and all Black students who were in the remedial reading and mathematics classrooms. In my confusion of how to identify as a young, Black female and as an aspiring American educator, I did not know from whom to get advice. Resting in the confusion, I waited for someone to emerge. One day during an advisement conference, I found myself explaining my student teaching experience to my assigned advisor, a White female faculty member (for the purpose of this research, I will call her Dr. JB). It was the first time I talked to someone White about the conflicts I was facing for the first time in my life. Yet, being comfortable to talk with a White woman about another White woman’s prejudicial behaviors towards me was difficult. I felt fear to take that step, fear I would not be understood and fear there would be some punishment or negative consequence.

Arousing my awareness, Dr. JB motivated me to prepare myself to teach White students and to question my view that social justice was only for my race because of my experiences of racism. I entered the HBCU in 1970 and graduated four years later from the Elementary Education Program. Though the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had become law that banned discrimination based on race or color, the early 1970s still encompassed much resistance to integration. Thus I stayed on campus where White students did not live in the dormitories. However, I had constant contact with Dr. JB particularly during my junior and senior years. As my advisor in the Teacher Corps program, she spent many hours with me talking about what she characterized as my “gift for teaching.” Initially, I was hesitant to interact with her. I remember feeling torn between allowing her to see my world as a young Black woman and having to act a certain way to please her and get good grades. Yet, my exploration of a close relationship with my White female faculty advisor influenced my writing this article. She showed me another side of her Whiteness that I had not experienced in my lifetime. I developed a different understanding and a new consciousness of having a teacher who was very different from me, showed me no prejudice, and embraced my Blackness, my afro, my beautiful dark skin, and the Black heritage of which I am a descendent. Dr. JB developed a relationship with me that allowed me to discuss my racial identity with her.

The interrelatedness of my relational and institutional experiences at my HBCU, my lived experiences growing up, and how they both impacted my social justice lens are the basis of my autoethnography. Through deep introspections of my own experiences, I discovered how I learned to see White Americans through a different lens than I experienced growing up. I wanted to tell my story such that it impacts the way HBCUs prepare both Black and White teacher candidates to teach *all* students.

The question that guided this inquiry was: *What are the relational and institu-*

tional impacts of the HBCU on education graduates' social justice disposition for teaching? To frame this inquiry, I questioned the influential impacts on my racial identity and my social justice disposition development *before* attending the HBCU, *during* matriculation, and my social justice disposition *after* attending the HBCU. It explains the journey and path to my pedagogy.

Review of the Literature

HBCU Identity

The Higher Education Act of 1965 defines an HBCU as any historically Black college or university that was established prior to 1964, whose principal mission was the education of Black Americans. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) pride themselves in traditional and cultural descriptions of distinctiveness, coined by some as the Black college “mystique” (Willie, Reddick, & Brown, 2006) and by others as the HBCU experience that is like no other (W. R. Allen, 1992; Astin, 1993; Astin, Tsui, & Avalos, 1996; Davis 1991; Fleming, 1984; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Willie, Reddick, & Brown, 2006). Many boast of the distinctiveness as unique opportunities for African American socialization, cultural and ethnic identity, and transformational interactions with faculty. Emblematic of the African American quest for educational parity and social equality in American society, HBCUs have offered opportunities for “self-actualization and social mobility to all who sought them while teaching racial tolerance and producing alumni who have distinguished themselves as tireless workers for cross-cultural understanding and social justice” (Jewell, 2002, p. 7). Given such a legacy and identity, HBCUs should consider themselves uniquely qualified to make contributions to the ongoing quest for a truly inclusive society. In their pioneer role, HBCUs have been firmly rooted in the power of education to protect the freedom of African Americans and to place high value on social justice and human equality (Fleming, 1984; Jewell, 2002).

Numerous studies attest to the relational and institutional benefits for African Americans attending HBCUs (W. R. Allen, 1992; Astin, 1993; Astin et al., 1996; Davis 1991; Fleming, 1984). Educational researchers have investigated the particular role interpersonal relationships at HBCUs played in the success of African American students' academic performances. The findings suggested that Black college students' outcomes are influenced by the immediate surrounding social context, while interpersonal relationships represented the bridge between individual dispositions and the institutional setting (W. R. Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Willie et al., 2006). The combination of interpersonal relationships and characteristics of the institution influenced academic performance and helped to define the HBCU identity.

The HBCU trained and mentored its students toward the direction of “making constructive contributions for solutions to the difficult problems of race relations” (“The Early Years,” 2012, p. 7). Race issues and racism that had developed prior

to and after the Civil War became a focus. HBCUs had a desire to train all of their students to be social justice advocates for change and to embrace the benefits of their unique mission.

As a proponent of social equity, the unique teaching and mentoring styles of HBCU faculty interactions impacts the social justice advocacy of all its graduates who leave the HBCU to teach in public schools (Willie, et al., 2006). Hours of one-on-one mentoring and advising, the desire to eradicate the wounds of oppression and slavery, and the obligation to prepare its graduates for advocacy for an inclusive society are all examples of the uniqueness of HBCU faculties (Willie, et al., 2006).

As an HBCU, its mission clearly has always been preparing students to enter to learn all they could to depart and serve the community. For the past 40 years I have spent my entire career serving the education community, most of the time quietly, independently, advocating for an excellent education for both Black and White students. Initially, I embarked on this profession to be sure that Black students would get an education so the ripple effect would occur, and those Black students I taught would go out into the communities and do the same. Initially, I did not consider it was my responsibility as a teacher to influence the same kind of service in the White students I taught. I thought my job was just to teach my race of students.

Archetypal Model of HBCU Distinctiveness

Arroyo (2010) used a qualitative case study with a triangulated data collection strategy to develop an archetypal model of HBCU distinctiveness and to study the alignment between the model and the organization of Norfolk State University (NSU), a HBCU. The archetypal model has four dimensions: environment, achievement, identity and ethics and values. Data used for the alignment came from documentation, 11 interviews, and Arroyo's observations as a faculty member participant. To align with the archetypal model, students with "special emphasis on traditionally underserved, undereducated African American students" were used (Arroyo, 2010, p. 80). Norfolk State University demonstrated a high alignment with the archetypal model.

Of interest to my research is the environmental alignment. The environment category is divided into two domains, the socioemotional and the instrumental environments. "Socioemotional environment refers to the institution's impact on students' sense of support, nurture and social connectedness" (Arroyo, 2010, p. 82). NSU aligns highly with the model for three sources of support: faculty, racial and cultural milieu, and special programs. All of the student interviews indicated NSU faculty as the primary source and sustainer on this domain of the model. Some students made contrasts and comparisons based on their prior school experiences at PWIs. Comments from students include statements such as "all of the professors that have instructed me there made me grow socially and emotionally" (Arroyo, 2010, p. 82). Another student commented "I had professors who knew my first name and

were willing to be a resource in a time of crisis, whether it dealt with my personal life and feelings or my grade in their course. It seemed very heartfelt and sincere” (Arroyo, 2010, p. 83). This is the uniqueness that I found when I matriculated at a HBCU, and it is a uniqueness that should promote excellence in HBCUs today.

Racial Identity Development

In order for teachers to be effective with diverse students, they must recognize and understand their own world views, confront their own racism and biases, learn about their students’ cultures, and perceive the world through diverse cultural lenses (McAllister & Irvine, 2000). Teachers should reflect on their own identity development and consider how their perspectives could influence their teaching and interaction with students (Howard, 2006; Jersild 1955; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Pertinent to this, the identification of our backgrounds and how backgrounds influence our daily perceptions and actions feed our racial identity. Borrowed from the discipline of counseling, racial identity refers to a “sense of group or collective identity based on one’s perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group” (Helms & Carter, 1990, p. 3).

DuBoisian Double Consciousness

W. E. B. DuBois was a pioneering sociologist, historian, novelist, editor, playwright, and cultural critic. Without ever seeking a mass following, he eloquently articulated the frustrations and desires of African Americans and demonstrated a passion for Negro people to have more than they had before. After graduating from Harvard University, where he was the first African American to earn a doctorate, he became an impassioned champion directly attacking the legal, political, and economic system that exploited the poor and powerless (Lewis, 1993).

As a prolific author, DuBois gained the most notoriety from his concept of “double consciousness” explored in his essays, *Striving of the Negro* (DuBois, 1897) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (DuBois, 1989). This notion of double consciousness is an important concept because it reveals the condition of African Americans being forced to learn about their racial identity and history, and develop their own self-identity at the same time they are being forced to be an American and to assimilate into a White-dominated society. In the days of the Civil Rights Movement, it was a struggle to be both an African American and an American (Moore, 2005).

DuBois (1903) theorizes a ‘Veil’ that separates the two sides. In his writing the veil represented both formal and informal structures of segregation and discrimination. “Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was... shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows (DuBois, 1897, p. 194). DuBois wanted to inspire the Negro people to rise above the Veil, an idea of which he received great criticism (Allen, 2003; Reed, 1997) for not urging people to tear down the Veil. In

order to see the Veil, DuBois theorized that “the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness” (DuBois, 1903, p. 9) which he defines as the ability to perceive two worlds and see through the Veil that separates them. The first world is the world of Black America; the other was White America.

The DuBoisian theory of double consciousness is important to my inquiry because as an African American female I learned to see and be with both sides of the Veil. I felt I had no other choice. It did not appear to be a challenge to understand the culture and history of White Americans; that was all I was taught in school. My focus was on my civil rights as an African American. Understanding my own identity, my beliefs and values about White America was of equal importance to my entering the classroom and teaching others so different than how I grew up, was treated and educated.

Methodology

Because my inquiry developed from my own personal desire to interpret experiences that impacted my racial identity development, I chose the qualitative approach to my inquiry. Qualitative research is “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). The basic beliefs, epistemology, or “worldview assumptions” I bring to the research is an interpretivist perspective (Creswell, 2009, p. 3). I hold the assumption that individuals seek understanding of the world in which we live and work. As a qualitative researcher, I sought to understand my culture and my personal experiences. Based on my historical and social perspectives (Crotty, 1998), I sought to understand the impact the HBCU had on my social justice development. Using a qualitative design, I amassed my personal narratives exploring what life experiences I brought to the HBCU educational setting, and what discoveries I made about myself as a result of attending school there. Brunner (1994) affirms this method of narrative inquiry for inservice teachers. She advocates, “As students are called on to explore their own personal histories, their social, political, economic, and cultural realities through a curriculum of multiple voices, their predisposition tends to become more apparent” (Brunner, 1994, p. 235). Self-reflection becomes a means to self-discovery (Chang, 2008). Talking about race, racial encounters in my life and how they developed my racial identity as well as my pedagogy was complex and often emotional.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that describes a personal experience in order to understand a cultural experience (Chang, 2008). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, “socially-just and socially-conscious” act (Ellis & Bochner, 2002, p. xix). Ellis (2004) defines autoethnography as research, writing,

story, and method that displays multiple layers of consciousness as a form of self-reflection and writing. The method explores the researcher's personal experiences and connects her autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings.

Autoethnography is a qualitative, narrative inquiry method that offers a way of giving voice to personal experiences for the purpose of extending sociological understanding. Chang (2008) describes it as an ethnographic inquiry that utilizes the autobiographic materials of the researcher as the primary data. "Autoethnography emphasizes cultural analysis and interpretation of the researcher's behaviors, thoughts, and experiences; raising the cultural consciousness of self and others" (Chang, 2015, p. 2). Ellis and Bochner (2002) define the method as "autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation" (p. 739). Ellis (2004) writes, it is "part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture" and *graphy*, which is the application of a research process (Ellis, 2004, p. 31). I employed autoethnography to discover new dimensions of my own life and examine my own cultural assumptions through deep and intense self-reflection. It became a powerful tool for my individual and social understanding (Ellis, 2009) as the exploration of "how the context surrounding self has influenced and shaped the make-up of self" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010, p. 2).

I chose autoethnography as a way of writing that "privileges the exploration of self in response to questions that can only be answered that way, through the textual construction of, and thoughtful reflection about" my lived experiences as it related to my culture (Goodall, 1998, p. 3). Through this method I was able to draw connections from my personal life to the lives of others, "weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1997, p. 208); wanting readers to do more than read the words, wanting readers to think and feel. I extended the power of the inquiry by using dramatic recalls, poems, unusual phrasings and colloquialisms, and monologues to evoke readers to understand my position while questioning their own. I wanted to tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of so that readers could think about their lives in relation to mine. I wanted them to be able to see through my eyes, to experience what I am writing about, and to see their social justice dispositions in new ways; to see themselves anew. My autoethnography was paramount to the exploration of how life experiences and the HBCU influenced identity and racial consciousness. My methodological reflection was included in Glesne's (2016) new edition of her book reiterating the prominence of this method to this research. This is what Glesne (2016) said about my choice of method for this inquiry.

The author's story exemplifies how integral her autobiographical experiences are to her research. Consider what would be lost if she omitted her own story in a study of historically Black colleges and universities, identity, teaching, and social justice. (Glesne, 2016, p. 261)

In this inquiry, I used the method as cultural in its interpretive orientation as described by Chang (2008). Autoethnography in this sense is not about focusing on just self alone, but about “searching for understanding of others’ cultures and society through self. Self is a subject to look into and a lens to look through to gain an understanding of a societal culture” (Chang, 2008, p. 49). My personal experiences became the impetus for future exploration of White female education graduates in parallel to my autoethnography. My ultimate goal was to treat my personal data with critical, analytical, and interpretive eyes for cultural and social understanding of self and the others, particularly White female students.

My experiences now and those in the past suggested that my research interests had their origin in deeply personal experiences and my professional commitment to prepare teachers for students with more multicultural backgrounds than our own. In this inquiry, I explored how my HBCU prepared me to teach students of races different from mine and how it influenced the lens through which I learned to teach children of other races, specifically White students.

I love to tell stories. It's in my soul. Stories are the way humans make sense of their world. You may come to understand yourself in deeper ways. And with understanding yourself comes understanding others. (Ellis, 2004, p.32)

Autoethnography is a method of qualitative inquiry that refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. I love to tell stories that explore multiple layers of my consciousness and lead to new interpretations of understanding. It takes “soul,” by this I mean “opening up a deeply personal space in your life from which to create understanding” (Goodall, 1998, p. 136). We learn to see and feel the world in a complicated manner and then reflexively turn that lens on ourselves. Using autoethnography text, I made my personal accounts for this research substantive such that I wrote about my personal relationship to culture; “with a back and forth autoethnographic gaze” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37).

First they look at the ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (Ellis, 2004, p. 37)

Moving back and forth, in and out of my stories, I explored how I developed my racial identity, where I come from, and the contexts that influenced my sense of self. The gaze examined the question “Who am I?” and “what influenced my sense of self”?

My Autoethnography: My Safe Cocoon

Before Matriculation at the HBCU

Family and Community Impact. On a beautiful morning, the blue sky was sprinkled with threatening clouds that soon flowed away and welcomed the bright-

ness of another perfectly sunny day. In the early 1950s, this was the morning of my birth representing all that I would become; sunny, cloudy, bright, and beautiful. First born of two daughters, it was the day I was born to research and write this story. My Mommy and Daddy brought me home to our big two story house in a small town in Virginia. It was the place where my parents met, fell in love, got married, and began their family after graduating from a legendary HBCU there.

I remember playing in our big yard safe and secure inside of the Black iron fence with a bench and bird feeder on each side of the yard. It all seemed enormous to me as a little girl; a big White house with a red and White brick wall securing our privacy all around the back yard and a cement pond on the side with big gold fish in it. As I remember we seemed to have a wonderful life with more than many Negro people had at that time. Our neighbors and my friends were all Black. In today's language, we would be considered a 'traditional middle class family'; however, we never heard of that label and we certainly did not feel that way as Black people. Mommy told me Negroes did not have equal pay for work as White citizens did. In a time of no technology or other ways to research salaries, there was no way to make comparisons, yet they knew they were not equal in many respects. My mother and father, as well as any Negro of that time, would dare not question it.

My mother did not work the first few years we were in elementary school. After my second grade year, my mother rode to work with my father and worked on the same army base. My father got dressed in a suit and tie every day and went to work as the first Negro man to work in the army base budget department in our military community. There were many military bases in the area; naval, air force and army. Though my Daddy had many Negro and White friends on the bases, the communities where we lived were all segregated. Though my father worked on the base and was invited to the homes of White officers, he could not enter the Officers' Club or any other activities on the base; it was illegal for Negroes to enter. He was a Negro who could cook or serve during these activities, but he could not participate.

As a young girl, my mother made sure I learned about poetry, opera, and Shakespeare. She dressed me in beautiful dresses on Sundays for church with crinoline slips underneath to make them stand out, White socks, and Black patent leather shoes. After church, we went to Mrs. Jones' house, who lived two houses from us. Though at the tender age of five and six years old I did not understand any of it, I sat quietly and listened to her read poetry, Machiavelli, Shakespeare, and many more classics. I took dance, ballet and tap, voice lessons, and piano. Mommy made us speak in complete sentences, putting beginnings and endings to every word we spoke so that others knew we were intelligent. Daddy would not allow us to leave the house unless we were presentable and dressed immaculately; to him that meant hair combed, face and legs oiled down, and clothes matching from head to toe. We were not allowed to use the "n" word in our house. Now I understand that my Mother and Father were preparing me to see both sides of the binary, to have a double consciousness that would help me be successful in a White

world. It was the 'sign of the times' in which they lived and in which their parents had lived before them. My parents wanted to teach me 'levels of excellence' in all we did and in all we valued; they taught me this excellence was a standard of who we are as Black Americans. I felt safe and secure in my world as it was then.

Earliest Memories of Being Black. In the 1950s through the 1970s, I witnessed a lot as a young Black female growing up in a segregated world of overt racism in the Southeastern United States. I always knew I was a Negro, then Black, then an African American. There was no place I could go that I was not reminded of the color of my skin. Who I was then, and who I am now, is the sum total of my experiences; it is my identity as a Negro, Black, African American woman, a teacher and as a researcher. It is personal, and it is the truth as I have come to know it. It is my story.

I am a Civil Rights baby. My Daddy was active in the community serving as an advocate for education and the homeless, and representing a voice against racism and discrimination for what was then called 'Negro' men and women. It was his form of promoting social justice. My Godfather, Daddy's best friend, was the Chief of Legal Redress for the NAACP. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee. Sixteen days later, the story of my father's last day was questionable. I was told my Daddy went to the jailhouse, and in the early morning he was brought home by someone, allegedly White policemen. The next day his cold body was discovered on the steps in front of our home; his eyes shut from life forever. I was told not to question; it was best to be quiet and remember him as I last saw him. So I did what I was told. Silence was a double-conscious way for Negroes to survive in the White world. From the brutality and overt racist acts of White Americans against Negroes at that time, you learned when to speak and when to be silent. I was a Negro then and silence was a safe cocoon.

Poignant memories flash through my mind from childhood. My childhood was peppered with sickening feelings of oppression. One Saturday morning, my Daddy and I were going downtown in our all Black community to see a parade. Though my Daddy had a car, he chose to ride the bus. I was much too young to question. A 'Daddy's girl' I was, and I wanted to go where ever he went. I looked like my Daddy; I had his chocolate skin and his dark brown eyes. I loved my 6'2" tall, chocolate, dark skinned Daddy! I walked to the back of the bus with my Daddy and watched his mortification and anger as he was told to hang his head in shame for not going to the back fast enough.

My Grandfather and I had to walk on the 'right' side of the street downtown, so Granddaddy said. As a little girl, I was not sure which side was the 'right' side; yet I noticed as Whites passed us, I watched him hang his head and look away as if he had done something wrong.

One day after elementary school, I remember running all the way home because I walked on the wrong side of the street. Two young White boys were with their father who owned the store at the corner. They told me one time before not to walk

on that side when they were there, but that day I was not thinking about them as I strolled past. They gave chase but stopped short of my all Black neighborhood. I knew when I reached a certain point, I was in my safe cocoon and they would not venture too far in our neighborhood.

I went around the back of the movie theater and walked with my friends up the fire escape to see the movie "Gone with the Wind" in the cold balcony. There was no bathroom for us. If we got hungry, we could go back down to the front window and buy the leftover popcorn from yesterday. 'Colored only' was a sign I could read before I could read any book. As a young child, I saw a Negro man with burnt feet and burnt hands hanging from a tree. I saw a cross burning in the field (more than one time); even though my friend's father told us to lie in the floor of the car, I peeked anyway. He said it was a dummy; all I remember was fear and endless silence.

Education: Kindergarten through High School. I never went to an integrated school from kindergarten all the way through four years of college at an HBCU. All of our schools were in our neighborhood. Each day we walked to our elementary, middle and high schools. All of my friends were Black. Our all Black schools were full of all Black faculties and staffs. From high school, I left my close knitted family and my all Black community to go to college at an HBCU. In all my one race schools, my teachers emulated excellence. They accepted nothing less from me. They were tough and unyielding, challenging with the highest levels of expectation. Yet, their love and caring were nurturing, just like a mother is to the children she births. My interactions with them were personal opportunities to mentor and groom me for the world of injustices. They modeled what I had to become as an educator and as an advocate for Black children, men and women. Until I went to college all of my teachers were Black men and women; in college I only had one White instructor.

Racism shaped my truths about the world, my soul and my spirit. The bitterness that prevailed in my soul could have grown into the venom that would poison my spirit forever. I did not want to be with them, but my experiences taught me early in life that the best way to survive in this America was to consciously know their side of the mirror. To tell the stories was, and remains, imperative so that the stench of burnt souls will impact our lens of the still omnipresent injustices in our world.

HBCU Choice. As an African American female I chose to go to a HBCU to major in elementary education because I thought I would get the same kind of contagious drive to be the best that I received in my world at home and school, and I found it there. At the same time advocates for African American civil rights mourned the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the frustrations of racial segregation and discrimination rose to a crescendo of race riots, I chose to leave my totally segregated Negro life and go to an all Black college to get prepared to teach. My HBCU would keep me safe from the stress of experiencing life in a White world; it was my cocoon. I was clear about my choice and my reasons, but at that age, I did not have the maturity nor was I consciously aware of what be-

coming a teacher would mean. I had no idea how this historical Black college was going to prepare me to teach in the very world I did not want to enter. All I knew was that this HBCU was renowned for its excellent elementary education teacher preparation program, and that is where I wanted to be, with my people and among excellence.

During Matriculation at the HBCU

HBCU Activities. Attending an HBCU was a safe haven for me as a young Black female during that time. I felt protected and nurtured in this cocoon. I was 17 years old when I arrived in 1970. There were people who looked just like me, who came from the same humble socioeconomic background as I did. I experienced high expectations from my professors there. A Dean of Women taught us the etiquette of being educated women. Dormitories were full of young Black women excited about getting a college education. I went to all of the activities, every football and basketball game, every Homecoming, every dance at the canteen. I went to and participated in everything I could; pledging a sorority, participating in professional development, competing in talent shows, and auditioning for the jazz band. I took full advantage of opportunities there to see and hear great Civil Rights leaders like Shirley Chisholm, Louis Farrakhan, Black Panther leaders, Angela Davis, Nikki Giovanni, Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee. As I reflect, I remember:

We were junk talkin, dozen playin, bid whist 5 risers, card slappin, Homecoming yall, cabaret dressin, high steppin band playin, big leg majorettes, fine, hell week marchin in the streets, sorority pledgin, singin on the plot, hangin on the block, caf food, 50 cents chicken samages , no cars, I'm Black and I'm Proud, all Black campus. (Oates, 2015, p. 99)

HBCU Faculty Impact. As an HBCU student, I encountered extensive support, nurturing, encouragement and connection to faculty that stimulated my intellectual growth and development and inspired me to achieve a fulfilling and rewarding career as an educator. One unique and distinctive quality of my HBCU experience was my personal interactions with faculty that impacted my success. There were a number of African American faculty there; however, I was particularly impacted by the nurturing of my only White female faculty member as I participated in a federally funded program titled Teacher Corps. With all I was learning as a young adult, she changed the way I saw the world of Black and White; she calmed my anger and anxiousness. She gave me a new way of seeing things and reversed my lens about being in the world of White people.

It was very difficult to be in the Teacher Corps Program in 1973 because of so many requirements. One huge hurdle for my friends and me was leaving our campus and venturing into the city to live beyond my all Black University campus. Teacher Corps required Teacher Interns stay off campus and in the communities in which they would intern. Two other Black females and I ventured into apartment

complexes closer to our internship assignments. We did not know we were in communities where Black people had not begun to live. The manager of the complex would not let us rent any of the unoccupied units. My professor, Dr. JB, came to the rental office, argued for our rights, and personally signed for us to rent the apartment. I was shocked and amazed at her caring and support for our rights. With her same calm and patient demeanor, she took me to the emergency room after a bad car accident and even contacted my mother. At the hospital she would not allow the nurses to keep ignoring me and she stayed that evening with me until they finished.

My future plans were often a topic of her discussions with me; she questioned me for specifics each time we talked. Little did I realize that she was preparing me to face the challenges of teaching in integrated schools. She was supportive, and she pushed me to be clear about my future as a teacher. Dr. JB told me I would be teaching White students. Still with a nervous reluctance, this White female faculty at my HBCU gave me a personal assurance that I could do it; I could be successful. She assured me I would keep my all Black world; however, I had to speak, dress, teach, and be such that who I was being was accepted in the White world I was now entering; a double consciousness seemed to be required more than I realized before.

Dr. JB was the first White faculty at the HBCU (and in my young life time) to have candid conversations with me about the discriminations I encountered such as why the White man would not rent the apartment to us. At the HBCU, individually or in unplanned meetings we talked about what we would face in the White world with our Dean of Women, a Black female. In many courses, we had assignments to read or write about specific Black personalities who were civil rights leaders of the 1960s and 1970s; familiar names such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, or Black inventors. Seldom did we talk about racial tensions or issues openly in course settings. Our discussions and exposure to the civil rights movement were explored when the University had presentations or lecturers or there were planned meetings for that purpose. During those times White students were not involved; they did not participate in any activities on campus. In addition to those experiences, Dr. JB helped me realize and develop my disposition for teaching White students.

HBCU Impact. During those years, my most profound breakthrough was the awareness that I was graduating from my all segregated life to teach both Black and White elementary children. I never thought about teaching White children. I never thought about needing to be Black, and at the same time, to see and understand my White students, their White parents, and the White teachers with whom I would work side by side. It was a cultural shock for me. During my matriculation at the HBCU from 1970-1974, most course assignments and campus activities reflected the civil rights struggle and examples and models of how to go out into the Black community and serve for more political success. We did not directly discuss how to teach White students or what their learning styles were as White learners. We were shown who they were racially as it related to racism and discrimination and

we were taught how to have a double consciousness to survive politically. At the HBCU, as well as at home, I was taught with great expectation, to value a good education, to be articulate in my speaking, and to be an excellent reader and writer as keys to my success as a Black female leaving my safe cocoon and going out to work into the White world.

All of my experiences with teaching and working with young children prior to college centered around volunteering for the Head Start program during the summers and the Summer Youth Program where I tutored in my own classroom with six African American males. I never thought about working or teaching in integrated classrooms; I had never seen them before. Little did I realize I would graduate from my segregated world and teach students who were different from me in every way; my students would be coming from their own world, which was all White and foreign to me. At that age, I was not conscious that all I had witnessed would affect who I became, my identity in this world, and my identity as a teacher of White students. All I wanted to do was work with my own people, my own race. Without consciously knowing what I was doing in the early 1970s, I felt I was advocating for the education of young Black children; and that was all I wanted to do.

After Matriculation at the HBCU

Two months before graduation from the HBCU, I was offered a full-time teaching position. Excited about my future, I did what most first year teachers do; I began gathering materials and making activities for teaching in an elementary school. During my interview with the principal at one elementary school, my excitement was disturbed by what my parents and Dr. JB told me, be prepared to face discrimination. The principal informed me if he said something that sounded prejudice he probably meant it to be. His honesty was shocking to me as a 21 year old. I thought in this professional setting I would not experience such. Adverse to what I expected, the Black teachers there told me to be quiet, not to question, and to understand that he was "the White man" in charge, they warned me. Again, my surprise was met with silence and I conceded to what my Black colleagues believed was the way we were supposed to be; to stay in my lane. I thought this was the way to be successful in my career at that time. Silence yielded to the usual habit of silence.

My success in the classroom did not take the same consciousness with the students. In my first years of teaching, I was in schools with majority White students and teachers. The first days of teaching, there was no difference in the way I felt about the White elementary students. I automatically welcomed them in my classroom and began teaching them without question. The elementary students came in with no filters and they did not seem to care that I was African American. It was not until my White students' parents became involved that the color of my skin became a reason for discussion. Some White parents questioned me being too young and inexperienced to teach their children. Others told the principal they would be watching what I did if their children remained in a classroom with a

Black woman. The principal never visited my classroom, but called me to the office to report that parents had complained about me teaching their children. There was never a specific reported incident that warranted White parent complaints. I often felt that no matter what I did, the principal would still complain to me. In the beginning I didn't want to teach White children. I taught in these conditions for four years before becoming an administrator. I felt in a new position I could have more of an impact.

My experiences as a school administrator did not erase the stigma of racism. As an adult, the memories continued. In 1989, I arrived at the office where I was principal in rural North Carolina on a Sunday after church, and I found a burnt cross at the window of my office. The janitor told me it was best to be quiet in all of these matters, and I did what I was told out of fear; fear what would happen next if I said anything. Fear turned into anger that so many endured so much; and it did not seem to end.

As the years of my teaching experience progressed, it was the White students in my classrooms that witnessed to their parents about the kind of teacher I was and how well I taught. I began to understand how my lived experiences influenced my disposition development about teaching students who were different from me. Now it became paramount to help prepare future teachers that would do the same.

Thirty-two years after graduating from the HBCU, I began to work as a higher education clinical faculty and then as the Elementary Education Program Coordinator of the very program and at the same HBCU from which I graduated. My passion for teaching soared when I became responsible for preparing students to teach. With the Department of Education focus on a conceptual framework of social justice, I began to contemplate what that meant for me and how I would prepare my candidates to be social justice advocates. Hence, I began my reflections of how I developed my beliefs, my dispositions, about fair and equal opportunities for all students to learn. Beliefs, memories, and repeated discriminatory events surfaced to my consciousness as I reflected, and emotions that gripped me to the core emerged. Yet, I continued to deeply reflect on my life.

For many reasons, I felt because I am an African American female, I could understand the stories of African American female education students that attended my HBCU. However, I did not know or understand how White female students that I have taught perceived the conceptual framework of social justice in their preparation to teach. The irony of a White female HBCU faculty impacting my social justice disposition development led me to inquire about my impact as an African American female on both my White and Black graduates. Because a White female helped to change my lens of the White world, it is my desire to impact the White female graduates in a way that would refract their lens about teaching children of color and that they would see themselves anew as a result of our interactions. Equally it is my desire to share my story with Black students who will be teaching students very different from themselves as well.

After graduation from the HBCU, my autoethnography helped shape my conversations with Black and White education graduates. Prior to this inquiry I did not have open conversations with White education graduates about the injustices in the world or any racial identity issues; however, I did talk with Black students about what to expect.

Conclusions

Before attending the HBCU, as I was growing up in the South, my parents directed my racial socialization in my segregated world. I went to segregated schools and lived in segregated communities. In my home, my parents and grandparents talked to me about racial discrimination and modeled how to have a double consciousness when there were social or direct contacts with Whites. I knew what prejudice was because my parents and I experienced it daily; unbelievably, I still do. In my home and neighborhood we talked about racism and discrimination, yet we lived outwardly in an atmosphere of fear during my early growing up years. Jim Crow racism justified brutal and overt acts of racial oppression previously described. In contrast to today, during the pre-civil rights era discrimination was enforced overtly with signs, cross burnings, and marches in the street by the Ku Klux Klans (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). The old fear of 'Negroes have a place and they should stay in it' was prevalent. As I wrote my autoethnography, I was instantly hooked by the old habit of fear; fear I would get in trouble; fear that I would hurt someone's feelings or that someone would see me as harping on the past too much; fear that even the death of my father would be questioned by the White man if I went too far; fear I should not speak. Before attending the HBCU and during, silence was what I did outside of my own race and culture. I did not question, I did not ask questions about Black and White issues, and I did not openly question color blindness, Whiteness, White privilege, or White females educators' preparation to teach students of color.

During attendance at the HBCU, the most distinct impact of the HBCU for me was the interpersonal relationships with faculty. These findings validated the research of pioneers such as Fleming (1984) and W. R. Allen (1992) regarding supportive faculty at HBCUs. I received support from both African American and my one White female faculty. Ironically, it was a White female faculty member who was the most honest about my Blackness going into a White classroom. We had honest and open conversations about the discrimination I experienced at my teaching internship and out in the community. So I could teach White students who were different from me, she helped me open my view about the White race and refract my lens to see beyond what I had experienced. I began to see with new eyes. As a White woman, she could tell me what the White world would do to me and what I could expect from her White view of my Black race. My Black Mother and Father, as well as other Black adults, taught me about what to expect; however, they told me from their lived experiences as a Black person experienc-

ing a White world in the midst of the Civil Right movement and a segregated South.

After matriculation, I graduated to teach in classrooms where there were only Black and White children during my tenure. Because of my matriculation at the HBCU, I was able to understand the connection and the benefit of learning and reflecting on what teaching both races meant in my social justice disposition development. As a result of this deep self-reflection, I was able to reflect on my own identity development and consider how my perspective of the White world could influence my teaching and interactions with White students, their parents and other White teachers and administrators (Howard, 2006; Jersild, 1955; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Distinct to the archetypal model of the HBCU (Arroyo, 2010) is the mission to educate, empower, and elevate Blacks. This mission serves as a foundation that now must be coupled with the challenge of raising the critical consciousness of White students attending HBCUs as it continues to impact the racial identity of the coming generations of Black students.

Developing a critical consciousness means to critically reflect and act upon one's sociopolitical environment (Freire, 1973, 1993). HBCUs must provide opportunities for its education graduates to think critically and reflect on accepted assumptions about race, but also to be able to reframe their thinking about class, gender, ability, appearance, age, sexual orientation and all the other identities. Learning to see how our lives, history, and ways of thinking and feeling perpetuate existing structures of inequality is crucial to self-reflective practices. With deep self-reflection, this high level of consciousness is the ability for each of us to individually critically examine who we are and who we are as racial beings; not only to reflect, but to also take actions of advocacy for an all inclusive classroom and society.

As faculty in a HBCU teacher preparation program, imperative is the opportunity for deliberate, open and honest conversations about race, culture, Whiteness, Blackness and White privilege without the old habits of fear and being silent. This story began with my not wanting to teach White students because of all I had experienced, and it journeyed to my deep self reflection of who I was as a person and a teacher teaching a race of children different from myself. It is the story of my path to discover my pedagogy. The process is still pertinent today, and it must be duplicated for teacher preparation programs to develop social justice dispositions in their Black and White graduates. Imperative is that HBCUs parallel their distinctive legacy of social justice advocacy with opportunities to deliberately impact their White education graduates' social justice disposition to teach African Americans and others students who are different from themselves. Equally, HBCUs must continue to lead Black students to the same self-reflection of their racial identity development as they prepare to teach White students.

Future Considerations

This research project began with an inquiry into White females education

graduates' racial identity development and the impact one HBCU had on their social justice disposition development. From this inquiry it became clear that as a faculty member and instructor at the HBCU, I had to first reflect on who I am racially, resurrecting my lived experiences from my family background within my community and the background of my early education preparation. It is recommended to extend the study to more HBCUs who have teacher preparation programs. Given this research was conducted in one southeastern state, and given the racial population in public schools has changed across the country, further research should be done at HBCUs in other regions of the United States to compare and determine the extent to which HBCUs are preparing their Black and White graduates for social justice dispositions. Extending the study to include traditional and nontraditional students would provide additional data and a comparison of how nontraditional verses traditional age college students are impacted by attending HBCUs.

This research project involved extensive self-reflection. Other future considerations for research could include the impact of teacher candidates becoming reflective practitioners and an analysis of how self-reflection activities affect social justice disposition development. Of importance to future studies is the development of a social justice curriculum for teacher preparation programs at both HBCUs and PWIs. I would suggest further research include investigations of HBCUs with components of social justice education in the curricular. The effectiveness of teacher candidates trained through a social justice perspective should be studied in comparison to the academic success of their students.

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A Seat at the Table

Womanist Narratives of Black Mothers in Doctoral Programs

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Abstract

Often the monolithic notion of being a Black woman silences how diverse groups of Black women experience the academy and dissertation process, especially those who are pursuing the doctorate while mothering. This paper focuses on the narratives of three Black women, who share how their racial, gender and mothering identities, and roles associated with these identities, affected their journey to the doctorate. This work is shaped by Womanist Theory, and the researchers use methodological tools centered on Black women, such as Sister-to-Sister talks (Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Participants share how the intersection of their identities informs their research agenda, and why their commitment to completing the doctoral journey was fueled despite the challenges each experienced.

Overview and Background

Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) define Sister-to-Sister talks as an Afrocentric slang to describe congenial conversations or constructive exchange about life lessons shared between Black women. This study was prompted by Sister-

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to-Sister talks amongst the authors and their peers who were also Black women. In the midst of these exchanges we came to the realization that motherhood bound us to one another. As a result, we forged a unique collective focused on navigating the doctoral socialization process, and ultimately surviving and thriving as Black women in the academy. The insight gained during these conversations prompted us to examine the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs.

Black women who opt to pursue a doctorate must often decide whether we will be true to our nature, our spirits, and our community or if will we pick up the master's tools, and wear a mask (hooks, 1993). Many do not discuss the trauma that Black women engaged in the doctoral and dissertation process endure. However, as we address the trauma that is happening to us at the hands of agents of the state it is equally important for Black women to shed light on the trauma experienced in the academy. Each of the participants pursued doctorates at different institutions and had unique experiences and challenges. The degrees or the pursuit of the degrees were steeped in overcoming various barriers. It is through highlighting these barriers that we aim to identify systematic injustice and oppression that few discuss in the public sphere.

The super-myth that Black women are excelling at higher rates than their male counter-parts reproduces hegemonic and sexist ideals about the Black woman. Several scholars argue that Black women in the academy have unique experiences, and despite higher numbers of Black women enrolled in degree programs, social attitudes create (and recreate) racist and gendered microaggressions (Collins 2000; Rollock, 2011; Rogers 2014; Sealey-Ruiz; 2007; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solorzano, 2009). However, research regarding Black women in higher education largely examines the undergraduate experience. Literature concerning the experiences of Black women in graduate school is sparse, and research pertaining to the experience(s) of Black mothers in graduate school and doctoral programs is relatively non-existent. There is an overwhelming need to address the invisibility of Black mothers in doctoral programs. The role of Black mothers is compounded with intersections of sexual orientation, relationship status, ethnic identity, and class. Such a multi-layered existence demands a more unique approach to inquiries regarding socialization in academic spaces, and how it continues to marginalize and foster racist ideologies about Black women.

An examination of the Black mother's experience in doctoral programs highlights the ways in which Black women disrupt the status quo. This work illuminates the sexist, gendered, and racist attitudes embedded in the doctoral socialization process, specifically at predominantly white institutions. We have vowed to dismantle these ideologies as we frame and develop our research agendas.

Scholarly Significance

During the past several decades, a number of demographic shifts have resulted in more women and people of color enrolling in and completing doctoral programs

(Offerman, 2011). Women now receive nearly half of all doctorates, and within group data indicates that Black women acquire almost 70% of the doctorates conferred to Black students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). While there is an increase in women pursuing and obtaining doctoral degrees, they have lower retention rates in comparison to their male colleagues (Nettles & Millett, 2006). Attrition research has found that many women leave for personal reasons like marriage and children (Gardner, 2008). Further, in examining time to degree completion in a doctoral program, family issues like childcare and marriage prevent women from finishing early (Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004). Other challenges include a lack of mentoring and socialization and little or no access to research opportunities (Ellis, 2001; Patton & Harper, 2003). Not surprisingly, women, and Black women in particular report lower levels of satisfaction with and commitment to their doctoral programs than their male and white counterparts (Ellis, 2001). Collins (2000) asserts that women of the African Diaspora can be defined or categorized in two ways: as individuals who have unique lived experiences, and as a subgroup within a marginalized population. Due to the historical objectification and exploitation of Black women, non-Black individuals tend to make damaging stereotypical assumptions about us. This informs behaviors and judgments, which then informs the lived experiences of Black women. All of the aforementioned serve as the impetus for this work, which centers Black women in the academy, and Black mothers in particular.

Points of Reflection

This work aims to shed light on how:

- Black women make sense of the socialization that takes place in doctoral programs.
- Black mothers navigate the complexities of being both a mother and an academic.
- Black mothers create and sustain mechanisms of support during their doctoral journey.
- The sharing of narratives transform/influence the experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs.

Theoretical Inspiration: Womanism

Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

—Alice Walker

Alice Walker's multiple definitions of the term "womanism" in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, sheds light on why many Black women prefer the term womanism to Black feminism. Walker offers two contradictory meanings of

womanism. On the one hand, Walker clearly sees womanism as rooted in Black women's concrete history in racial and gender oppression. On the other hand, this term, taken from the Southern Black folk expression of mothers to girl children "you acting womanish," suggests a womanist worldview accessible primarily and perhaps exclusively by Black women. Womanish girls acted in outrageous, courageous, and willful ways, attributes that freed them from conventions that had been long limiting white women. However, womanish girls wanted to know more and in greater depth what was considered good for them. They were responsible, in charge, and serious.

Despite her disclaimer that womanists are "traditionally universalist," a philosophy invoked by her metaphor of the garden where room exists for all flowers to bloom equally and differently, Walker simultaneously implies that Black women are somehow superior to white women because of the Black folk tradition. Defining "womanish" as the opposite of "frivolous, irresponsible, not serious," Walker constructs Black women's experiences in opposition to those of white women. This meaning of womanism sees it as being different from and superior to feminism—a difference allegedly stemming from Black and white women's different histories with American racism. Walker's much cited phrase, "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (1983, p. 12) clearly seems designed to set up a comparison where Black women are "womanist" while white women remain merely "feminist." As womanists, we intentionally approach this work with courage and seriousness, as it provides a much-needed focus on the intricacies of the academic and psychosocial experiences of Black mothers in doctoral programs. Like womanish girl children, we want to know more and in greater depth what is considered good for these women, and for us. Our identification as womanish allows and encourages us to be accountable for ourselves, and the women with whom we have ancestral bonds.

Building on the groundbreaking works by Toni Cade Bambara, Ntozake Shange, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde and other Black women who "broke silence" in the 1970s, Black women in the 1980s and 1990s developed a "voice," a self-defined, collective Black women's standpoint about Black womanhood (Collins, 1990). We are committed to sustaining this tradition. In this paper all three participants offer themselves as a Black woman in a predominantly white arena. Their stories are unique but blend at intersections and then spread out into individual tributaries, which mimic the experiences of Black women and Black mothers in the academy. There are spaces of togetherness and spaces of utter aloneness. The purpose is to highlight these stories and offer possibilities to create more spaces of togetherness and support.

Methods

The three women who took part in this study came together through a personal network of Black mothers who had engaged in the doctoral completion process.

We used a blended ethnographic and narrative approach for this work, and felt this was necessary to share personal and reflective analyses as a means to illuminate participants' experiences. Using ethnographic research methodology permitted us to honor the narratives that are needed in contemporary literature pertaining specifically to the cultural diversity of Black women, and their experiences in higher education. Utilizing narrative inquiry also allowed us to primarily focus on participants' experiences. However, the narrative approach permitted an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which participants' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This hybrid methodological approach permitted us to deeply consider race/ethnicity, gender and parental status, the intricate ways in which they intersect, and how they create a distinct experience that must be centered in research regarding Black mothers engaged in the doctoral completion process.

We approached this work fully aware of participants' need to process and make sense of the academic, familial, social and cultural experiences that took place during their doctoral journeys. During the course of a year participants shared their perspectives publicly, and consistently connected via telephone and in private group chats on social media. Thus, the conversations and narratives took on different forms. The women wrote and read one another's individual stories and discussed them. They also took notes and recorded conversations to capture moments shared together. They chose to sit down with one another because they recognized common themes amongst themselves and wanted to explore and process their lived experiences in person. "The Table," the setting described in this piece, is based upon one moment throughout an on-going data collection period. This is deep personal work; therefore, a safe and transformative space emerged between the participants, who were three women that engaged in the doctoral completion process as Black mothers. The authors transcribed their conversation using the pseudonyms Toni, Alicia, and Maya, and all the themes that emerged as central to their stories were used to create a unified story. The personal narratives, notes and recorded conversations, and themes served as the authors' data set.

The Table

If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair.

—Shirley Chisholm

It took four months of planning to finally bring the three women together. For over a year they spoke on the phone and met virtually. They shared narratives via email and online. However, all three women had not met in person until this day. They gathered at Toni's home on the far end of Brooklyn. "Where exactly are we? What part of Brooklyn is this?" Alicia asked once we were all seated and present. With a bit of awe, and more than a modicum curiosity, Alicia posed these questions as if this haven was somewhere that no map or coordinates had discovered. Toni

replied with a hint of annoyance in her voice. After all, since welcoming the other two women into her home she had already responded to this inquiry twice. However, as a newcomer to the space, there was something warm, sacred, and affirming about it. For Maya, it made the four and half hour drive from her home worth it. For Alicia, the train and bus journey was worthwhile as well. The warmth radiating from Toni's home came from the Caribbean colors on the walls. We all sat at a large circular wooden table in the dining room, and placed a recording device at its center. The day began with several cups of tea, which were made after Toni pulled out a seemingly endless array of boxes and bags. We quickly became engrossed in their stories, but eventually emerged from the light- and full-hearted conversation to order Chinese food. In the hours that followed there were more cups of tea—a consistent warming agent that helped buffer the chilling outside temperature, and accompaniment to a day full of conversation.

The pitter-pattering of Toni's daughter's feet above us as we spoke—a young girl child present—reminded us of our journey. From time to time we would notice her watching us, as we had watched our mothers, aunties, and friends gathering around the kitchen table during girlhood. It brought back memories, and all of us at the kitchen table (re)created a historical, then spiritual place. Maya noted that she could not recall the last time she had seen such a piece that resonated with her. Being seated at a round table evoked a spirit of African-ness that despite our diverse ethnic identities, reinforced the connections and lineage of our lived experiences as Black women and Black mothers in the academy, America, and the world. This made each of us feel at home. The table symbolized no head or beginning—just a cycle, or continuation of our legacy, energy, and work as Black women, and as Black mothers in the academy.

Setting the Table

Kitchen table conversations are commonplace amongst Black women, and they tend to happen in the company of family and close friends. This was illustrated when all three participants confirmed feeling “safe enough” to sit at The Table and talk about what they couldn't openly discuss in public. They described it as being able to “take off their masks,” and speak freely about the world outside. Two of the women, Toni and Maya were undergraduates together, and reconnected through social media when Maya realized that Toni was also pursuing a doctoral degree. In the interim, a prominent Black woman scholar introduced the third participant, Alicia, to Maya at a women's writing retreat. Maya then introduced Alicia and Toni. All three women agreed that they have served as a pillar of support and force of affirmation for each other ever since.

While at The Table with the three women, the authors listened for shared experience(s). During these moments, the women often provided both confirmation and affirmation with phrases such as “Amen!” and “Ain't that the truth!” A great

deal of laughter and tears also expressed their recognition of a connection. During several points in the conversation, the women described how each experienced raising one or multiple children at various stages in their lives. For example, Toni entered her doctoral program with a toddler and an 8-month-old. Maya had a child who was in the first grade at the beginning of her doctoral journey. At the time Alicia started her program her two children were in elementary school, and she had recently moved to the United States.

There was also variation with regard to each woman's familial status. Toni, who is married, lived and studied in her home city. Her in-laws and parents were present and a great source of support. Maya chose to pursue her doctorate in the Midwest—12 hours from her family. She co-parented with her son's father in the same city throughout her coursework; however, due to relocations (on both their parts), Maya mothered as a single full-time parent throughout her dissertation process. Alicia was a single mother throughout her entire journey. As a result, her children's formative years were largely spent on the university's campus.

The women noted that the meeting happened because Black women, their mentors, "critical badass sistahs," reminded them that they are brilliant and capable, and not "in this alone." They all stated that they were encouraged to bond with other *sistah-scholars* to create together, and help "bring each other along." As they sat around the circular table, the room became a spiritual space—each woman acknowledging a shared or common thread. While discussing and processing how they were connected, three themes emerged. They include the prevalence of racial and gendered encounters, managing motherhood and relationships, and the importance of mentorship and affirmation. The analysis weaves together the individual voices of the women to create a manifestation of what they learned about themselves and one another as they engaged in critical reflections.

Narratives: The Women Speak

Racial and Gendered Encounters

The racism and sexism that persists within the walls of the academy is a pure reflection of the dealings that Black women experience in society.

—Maya

Despite the growing number of Black women in doctoral education programs, many suffer from racial battle fatigue (Gildersleeve, Croom & Vasquez, 2011; Rollock, 2011). This refers to the emotional, psychological and physiological distress racially marginalized groups are often subjected to, and the amount of energy they expend coping with the fight against racism (Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011). Racial battle fatigue is particularly applicable to Black women, who are often burdened with managing multiple roles (e.g., mother, caretaker, provider, etc.), while working in environments steeped in White-Anglo traditions and ideals. Participants spoke

at length about having to “separate” their identities, or “conform” if they were in a specific context. Although they asserted that this was tiring, they noted that dealing with racial micro-aggressions was especially burdensome. The women noted that microaggressions, or repeated exposure to subtle and covert racial slights (Sue et al., 2007), were quite prevalent. For example, white students often questioned and expressed their surprise at how articulate, well rounded, or educated they were. In some instances, white classmates became hostile. Toni shared how a white woman continuously “fought” her in the classroom:

She spent the entire semester battling with me. This may seem like hyperbole, but she literally had a response for every comment I made and went out of her way to critique my opinions. I did not initially take it personally, but one day another white classmate approached me in the elevator and noted that she had observed it as well. At that moment I thought back to the beginning of the semester. The war-monger had cornered me in the stairwell, and told me I was ‘really smart.’ It became crystal clear. She was jealous, probably racist, and apparently under the assumption that dumb [Black] people were being admitted into doctoral programs.

Toni stated that the conflict made her “tired.” Maya agreed, and then responded, “That is the impact of racial battle fatigue.”

According to the women, dealing with an assessment of their writing ability was also challenging, as it often came across as racially charged. Maya expressed a belief that “our writing is never good enough because we can’t write in our own voice.” Interestingly, she also stated that sharing narratives (in ways similar to what she was engaging in with both Toni and Alicia) would allow others to “see where they are coming from,” and “view them differently.” All three women agreed that they struggled with the writing process during their journeys, and stated that although academic rigor is common in doctoral programs, they often received feedback that was blatantly cruel. As a result, they would regularly question or doubt their progress. Two of the women—Alicia and Maya—openly admitted that it was a “tough topic” to discuss because being told “you aren’t good enough” or “you are going to struggle” hampered their motivation. Alicia shared the following, which details what happened after an interaction with a white faculty person:

I remember meeting with her one day where she was trying to convince me to leave the program because she said my writing would never even allow me to be awarded a Master’s degree. I felt humiliated, downtrodden and so uncared for that I literally took two online classes for the next full academic year. No one asked about me, no one inquired as to whether I needed any kind of support. Nothing.

Alicia highlighted the isolation that many Black students in doctoral programs endure, which Maya described as feeling “like you don’t belong in their world.” In and of itself, “feedback” can be a microaggression. It was not uncommon for the women to assert that conversations with faculty made them feel unprepared and unworthy. Maya stated, “One faculty member told me her parents made her find

errors in the *New York Times* growing up, so she grew up learning how to write at home.” Such an interaction, which made Maya question her own upbringing, could cause Black students to believe that both their families and communities failed them. Indeed, Black students in predominantly white spaces tend to suffer from physiological, psychological and behavioral stressors intermittently (Collins, 2000; bell hooks, 1993; Smith et al., 2011). To protect themselves, Maya stated, Black students stifle their own voice and take on another—typically a Eurocentric one. Ironically, this results in the continued suppression of their identity.

Toni, Maya and Alicia all referred to “repeated intellectual battles” with their male counterparts. They were particularly troubled however, by what they perceived as unfair treatment by Black men in academic spaces. Alicia explained that it was not uncommon for the accomplishments of Black students and faculty who were women to go unnoticed, while the institution highlighted the scholarly achievements of Black men. “There was this one Black professor. He won an award and was all over the website. What about the Black woman who won an award too? She has done... is doing amazing work. He basked in it. He could’ve found a way for her to be acknowledged as well.” Maya confirmed that she had witnessed similar occurrences, but also explained that an internal conflict may take place when Black women are slighted by Black men in academic spaces. “There are moments when we are cut by their actions and words, and we feel that we have to take it in stride because we don’t want to publicly discuss or engage in conversation in front of ‘company’.” Toni expressed her belief that this protection is not always reciprocated:

One of the most impactful experiences I had while in my program transpired during the first time I publicly presented my scholarly work. At the conclusion of my lecture, I was confident the presentation went well. I received accolades, but the very last comment... the only negative comment came from a Black male student, who stated that although I explained why my research is important to the field of higher education, the presentation would have ‘been stronger’ had I discussed its applicability to students in the K-12 sector, and that ‘I needed’ to look at this area of education. I was stunned. We were the only two Black students present, and in a moment when he could have supported my work—this man—this Black man—chose to criticize me. I remember thinking, ‘Is he serious?’

Another point of agreement amongst the women was when Maya asserted, “Black women do all the ‘heavy lifting’ with little or no reward.” Maya described feeling shocked and betrayed when a Black male colleague supported a Black male student who attempted to poach her scholarly work and dismiss her intellectual abilities:

The experience was unbelievable. You expect this from them but not my male counterparts! Nothing prepares you for the battles that happen between us [Black men and women]. The brother was co-opting my style... on my back. This happens I suppose, but as women who spend time away from our families, and sacrifice to create this work...

we have to find ways to fight back. So I didn't publically address the behavior, but I did pull the brothers aside and had intentional conversations with them.

Maya's decision to "pull the brothers aside" illustrates the covert behavior many Black women engage in when they confront Black men about gender-based slights. Also noteworthy, is the participants' opinion that Black women contend with invisibility on the basis of both race and gender. Each woman expressed that academic spaces often operate in ways that prioritize the scholarly endeavors of men and white women. "It is important to understand that Black women operate in a very unique space," stated Toni. "We are in academia dealing with racism, and a great deal of gender-based challenges too." Maya agreed, and explained why she believes Black women overwhelmingly contend with an interesting intersection of 'racial and gendered battle fatigue':

Black women silence ourselves when Black men attack us. It is not because we are incapable of engaging in prolonged discussions or defending our ideas... it is more so because we feel the discussion shouldn't happen in front of the 'company.' However, the irony is that they repeatedly commit these offenses or address us in ways that publically marginalize us... and our contributions.

Managing Motherhood and Relationships

Sometimes you plan what happens and then sometimes you just have to wing it.
—Toni

Each participant began their doctoral program with children, but were mothering at different stages. The women explained that they often had to 'wing it,' because there is no official manual regarding how one should mother while engaged in the doctoral process. Because of differences in relationship status, the women had varied experiences. During their journey, Toni was married, but both Alicia and Maya separated from significant others. They openly admitted that they had to manage multiple responsibilities, which led to making sacrifices. Alicia stated, "I didn't start cooking again until after I defended." This drew laughter from Toni and Maya who agreed, and also stated that besides coordinating meals, they oversaw their children's academics and extracurricular activities. Maya noted that she believes Black mothers live up to additional expectations:

Racist and sexist systems in this country create added stress. Black mothers have to find inner strength to press on. We have to survive and thrive... model for our children how to manage the extra load.

There were several moments when each woman openly discussed the importance of family throughout the doctoral process. Toni's parents and in-laws assisted her with rearing her children, as they knew their help would be an integral part of her ability to complete the program. And while Maya was no longer in the same city as her family, she received a wide range of emotional and spiritual support

from them. Alicia, whose ties to her family also remained strong, explained that for many Black mothers pursuing a doctorate, going back to the place where you feel safest is often a necessity. She shared:

When my marriage fell apart, my parents spoke to me on the phone. My father was adamant that I come home. 'Bring the boys home,' he said. My mom grabbed the phone and asked me if I wanted my PhD. I said I did and she said, 'Then stay... whatever it takes... stay and finish this. Don't let him win. Don't let him break you. Follow your dreams and goals.'

Their approaches were different, but in that moment the both of Alicia's parents were trying to protect her, or keep her safe. Interestingly, Toni and Maya received similar advice from their own mothers when the pressure of balancing their academic and personal lives became overwhelming. Maya stated, "There are moments when only our mothers can save us, and offer us a perspective that becomes a resounding theme throughout the experience."

Although their family and friends understood and appreciated the significance of a Black woman acquiring a doctoral degree, each woman had to spend time educating their loved ones about the dedication it took to complete the program. They often took "short-cuts," which were difficult for their families to process. Toni explained:

Once, my mother-in-law told me to 'go change into appropriate clothing' after showing up for my daughter's birthday party and noticing my attire... a t-shirt and sweatpants. That was closely followed by a tense exchange with my mother who wanted to know why I decided to order food for the party instead of 'cooking it myself.'

Maya had similar experiences with her mother, who regularly reminded her that her son should always "come first," even if it meant not using her time in the most effective ways. All the women stated that while pursuing their doctorate they had two committees. The first determined the quality of their academic work, but the second, a family committee, evaluated and critiqued their mothering. Yet, they noted the irony of being first-generation scholars raised in families with Black women who routinely made sacrifices. Maya shared why she thought it was unfair for their families to not understand what they were going through:

When times get stressful as first-generation scholars, we want our families to recognize we are working our asses off, and they beat us up... However, the entire [doctoral] process is a Eurocentric idea and construct, and families of African descent place value and emphasis on community and participation in community. The notion 'I am because we are' centers and guides our engagement. Therefore, we are able to be doctors or aspiring doctors because our mothers and their mothers sacrificed. They actually mothered in a specific way that allowed us to focus on schooling and avoid specific pitfalls... but they don't understand that.

The amount of time dedicated to their degree programs impacted participants'

close relationships in other ways. Toni recalled drastically reducing the amount of quality time she spent with her husband. “I poured that energy into completing my program,” she stated. Maya and Alicia also noted that the personal growth they experienced during their journey encouraged them to reduce or cease their interactions with people who were once close to them, but no longer “for them.” In many instances, this included both family and friends. It was common for the women to express that they could not “afford” to add any more stress to their lives.

The women at The Table also discussed their experiences creating or sustaining relationships in academic spaces beyond the classroom, and expressed that being a mother consistently “stood out.” Toni stated that her interaction(s) with other doctoral students at conferences frequently resulted in feelings of self-doubt and insecurity. Many of her peers were working on projects that required them to travel, and were also able to move from one location to another with their advisors. Because of her familial situation (as both mother and wife), she was primarily stable. Toni often wondered if her work was as significant as theirs, or if her experience was as well rounded. She stated that for many mothers, feelings of self-doubt and insecurity also manifest during conferences because they are spaces overwhelmingly focused on academics (i.e., research and publication) and leave little or no opportunity for those who balance the roles of both mother and academic to discuss or process their experiences. “I often felt as if it was taboo to mention my ‘other’ life,” she said. Toni also expressed that conference spaces were isolating because although Black scholars were present, there were very few Black women and virtually no Black mothers. Toni would be “anxious” to get back home to “escape” the loneliness of rarely having individuals present that she could relate to. However, she also stated, “In retrospect, I wonder how many other Black mothers were in these spaces... how many of them were thinking and feeling just like me.”

For Alicia, the financial toll of being a single mother was most salient. She explained:

When my colleagues spoke about their presentations I just felt more isolated and alone. No one knew that at this point I could not afford to attend conferences. I was living below the poverty line with my kids and the department did not provide any compensation to attend... at least not enough for a single mother raising two kids by herself.

Maya also stated that the financial costs associated with conference travel were most burdensome. Throughout her doctoral program, she shared rooms with colleagues, and divided costs. All the women expressed that not being able to travel to conferences (due to familial or financial reasons) is particularly challenging because the doctoral socialization process demands that you attend them. It also requires students to create knowledge that will be shared with those who can benefit from their work. This results in chunks of time being mentally, emotionally, and physically disconnected from loved ones. In fact, participants explained that even when they were with

their families, their minds were usually elsewhere. It was not uncommon for them to struggle with feelings of guilt, and stress. Toni described this in-depth:

The doctoral process is unfamiliar to most people, and even more foreign to many children. My children regularly asked if I was still ‘working on that paper.’ Understandably, they couldn’t comprehend why I was unable to spend a few hours at the park, or accompanying them to the movies. I often joke that for my children, the best part of ‘dissertating’ was the fact that they ate a substantial amount of pizza rolls and popcorn shrimp—two of their favorite foods. The worst part however, was coming to terms with the fact that I didn’t spend as much time with them as a mother probably should. I still struggle with that guilt, and have decided to share my narrative because somehow, I believe it will compensate for the sacrifices I made while in the program.

Toni, Maya and Alicia all agreed that the doctoral process does not recognize the demands of mothering, and often made them feel like they had to choose either their children or their program. Maya noted that not “choosing” her child could make him more susceptible to systemic oppression and violence. For example, after moving to a predominantly white neighborhood with her son, Maya decided that her mothering identity had to come first, particularly when he began to get older, and white teachers started to target him. “I had to be there for him,” emphasized Maya. Toni and Alicia—both of whom shared this sentiment—also felt compelled to “be there” for their children and shield them from societal harm. All three women were adamant that they did not “choose,” but “figured it out.” Maya stated, “Choosing one over the other was not an option. I want to be clear that our point is that we are challenged in unique ways and we had to figure out how to center and anchor ourselves in our work without sacrificing our children.”

While each woman discussed challenges faced while pursuing a doctoral degree, they all stressed the importance of Black mothers embracing the journey, finding ways to seize joy, and understanding very early on that each of their identities has different demands. They noted that failure to do so can “kill the spirit.” Maya shared the following:

As Black women and mothers it is relationships—familial and romantic—that make navigating the doctoral process either smooth and seamless or chaotic and uncontrolled. However, this is where the beauty and fearlessness that we attribute to Black women comes in. Your brown soul and body may be battered and bruised. You may be barely standing. But then you hear your children come through the door and you get yourself together. You begin your routine.

Mentorship & Affirmation

Had it not been for my Black female advisor, I would never have completed my doctorate. Despite her being diligently and violently traumatized by her own colleagues in the department, she managed to support and metaphorically drag me through the process.

—Alicia

Toni, Maya and Alicia all discussed the role of mentorship in their respective journeys. Toni explained that she was fortunate enough to receive mentorship from two women whose academic careers had already been established. They helped her set goals and mold her professional aspirations. Toni's mentors were also "very open" about race- and gender-based challenges she would likely encounter, but provided her with insight about how to navigate them. Maya and Alicia echoed this sentiment. Yet, unlike Toni they received mentorship from the Black women who served as chairs of their dissertation committee. Both Maya and Alicia spoke about having direct access to someone who was willing to "hear them," and had first-hand knowledge about where they "were coming from." While at The Table, Maya recalled her conversations with Toni and Alicia, and described their mentors by stating the following:

The mentors we had challenged us. But they also showed us love and care and listened when life felt heavy... They helped us find spaces to emotionally heal and then sent us on our way to write. They made us believe that the world was our canvas... led us and pushed us out there. They told us who to connect with and where to be. They helped us figure out how to navigate this journey.

Alicia explained that she was pleasantly surprised when her mentor approached her at a conference. "She asked how she could support me, and within a week, was the chair of my dissertation committee." If she was not "found" by her mentor, Alicia asserted she would not have completed the program. Her chair provided an invaluable amount of support and guidance. Toni, whose relationships with her mentors became stronger during the dissertation process, similarly explained, "Ultimately, I crossed the finish line because I was lucky enough to have women who saw more in me than I saw in myself."

Each woman identified their mentors as individuals who "pushed" them in ways they would not or could not push themselves. They also noted the significance of having mentors that were equally concerned with their academic and personal lives. Maya expressed that it is particularly important for Black mothers in doctoral programs to have mentors who understand the importance of family and children. This is because in the academy one's performance is often assessed based upon a single, white, male-dominated construct. Alicia noted that it is important for mentors to realize that Black mothers engage in the doctoral process to better their lives, and the lives of their children.

When asked about relationships outside of mentoring, all three participants stated that their connections to *sistah-scholars* were a vital part of their journey. These Black women, all at different stages in the doctoral process, and many of whom are mothers, serve as a source of strength and inspiration, and provide advice, as well as solace and support. They buffered feelings of isolation, and encouraged the women when they believed their work was inadequate. Most importantly, they made what they were engaged in "feel real." *Sistah-scholars* were living examples

of who Toni, Maya and Alicia wanted to be, and what they wanted to contribute to this world. Toni's sistah-scholars, including Maya and Alicia, would often state, "Girl, if I can do it, you can too!"

Toni, Maya and Alicia expressed that it takes a special type of mentoring to keep Black mothers in, and get them through a doctoral program. They discussed the importance of being guided by those whose ways of knowing and doing are grounded in Afrocentric ideals. Maya described the significance of her mentor baby-sitting her child by noting that such an act is largely tied to the collectivistic nature of communities throughout the African diaspora. Toni explained that her mentors consistently stressed an obligation to "lift as you climb." This refrain guides much of the work Alicia's mentor engages in with Black women who are new to a career in academia. Overall, each woman agreed that no matter what their professional ambitions are, Black mothers who embark on the doctoral journey need mentors that can guide them academically and personally. Alicia further explained:

We trusted their guidance and clung to them. These relationships were not all rosy, but they were consistent and reliable. I am fortunate... and have found myself ready to offer advisement and encouragement to other Black women... to Black mothers in the academy.

Discussion

Toni, Maya and Alicia all identified the doctoral journey as an experience rife with encounters rooted in both racism and sexism. Each woman had to frequently contend with stereotypical notions when they voiced dissent (e.g., the "angry Black woman"), and had their intellectual abilities and research interests questioned on a regular basis. In addition, it was not uncommon for their views regarding race and racism to be challenged. Besides a multitude of negative race-based incidents, participants explained that their gender often made them the target of caustic remarks, hostile behavior, and even academic or intellectual theft. Their experiences validate the supposition that Black women occupy a unique space—one where both race and gender contribute to their marginalization.

All three women had distinct doctoral journeys that were primarily shaped by the intersection of their racial identities and gender, but parental status as well. While their families appreciated and supported the pursuit of a doctoral degree, they often had to educate their loved ones about the dedication that is crucial to completion. This caused tension, as each woman expressed that it was difficult for family members to accept their preoccupation with writing and research, and emotional or physical absence. Thus, familial encouragement of the endeavor was apparent, but so was a lack of understanding. This was exacerbated by an academic culture that seemingly forced the women to choose between their children and their course of study. Nevertheless, they rose the occasion, and their sacrifices became strategic. Toni, Maya and Alicia became more adept at learning how to

manage multiple responsibilities. This suggests that Black mothers who complete the doctoral degree journey must actively engage the process with resiliency and resistance.

Each participant expressed that a lack of opportunities to communicate or process their experiences (as a Black woman, mother or academic) resulted in feelings of frustration and/or isolation. However, all three women derived support from relationships with *sistah-scholars*, or other Black women throughout academia—many of whom are mothers that were pursuing, or recently obtained doctorate degrees. Because these relationships were symbiotic, both the women and their *sistah-scholars* were able to reap the benefits. Toni, Maya and Alicia also noted that besides their *sistah-scholars*, they had minimal access to women with a similar background and/or comparable challenges. Mentors were a notable exception, and credited with “pushing” them, and ensuring that they had realistic expectations about what it means to be an academic. In addition, mentors provided wisdom about Black womanhood and Black motherhood, and served as role models. All three women agreed that their ability to navigate a doctoral program while mothering was the result of having mentors who recognized their intellectual abilities, passion, and commitment, and encouraged them to remain motivated. This was frequently described as going “above and beyond.” It was not uncommon for mentors to offer a safe space for the women to be emotionally vulnerable before providing them with advice and reassurance. These narratives indicate that for Black mothers, support and guidance from a mentor can be crucial to their completion of the program. It is no wonder why participants stated, “We salute them.”

Implications

Throughout the past few decades, wide-ranging perspectives have emerged to describe Black doctoral students’ experiences and socialization (Gay 2004; Lewis, Ginsberg, Davies, & Smith, 2004; Nettles, 1990). Yet, beyond a few noteworthy exceptions (Grant & Simmons, 2008; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Patton, 2009; Turner & Thompson, 1993), very little research has focused on Black women engaged in doctoral study. And an extensive review of the literature as well as data recorded by the National Center for Education Statistics reveals a significant gap regarding Black mothers pursuing the doctorate. Indeed, most areas of study focused on mothering in the academy does so in general (racial) terms, and fails to mention or pay adequate attention to the specificity of mothering while Black.

In 2015, 12% of the Black students enrolled as undergraduates in the nation’s colleges and universities were Black men, and 15% were Black women. For post-baccalaureate study these numbers were 11% and 16%, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016c). In addition, Black men acquired about 6% of the doctoral degrees conferred in 2015, while Black women received more than 10% of doctorates awarded that year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b).

These figures suggest continued growth in the amount of Black women pursuing doctoral degrees, and likely, an increase in Black mothers. In spite of this, there has not been a consistent effort to study, and shed light on either group. However, research has shown that many Black doctoral students do not refer to their programs as supportive of their research agendas and academic endeavors, and often perceive their campus climates as racially hostile (Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011). Black doctoral students are also less likely to have access to adequate mentoring opportunities (Blackwell 1989, 1991), and more likely to enter doctoral programs less prepared than their White counterparts (Pruitt, & Isaac, 1985). Furthermore, scholars have noted that for many women in doctoral programs, familial matters such as childcare and marriage extend their time to degree completion, serve as the primary reason why they do not persist, and may even dissuade them from pursuing an academic career (Gardner, 2009; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004; Quinn & Litzler, 2009). Yet, research that highlights the ways in which Black women's doctoral status intersects and interacts with their race, gender and parental status is scarce. While the experiences of Black men in the academy are unique, so too are the experiences of Black women, particularly those who are mothers.

Given the value of relationships such as those forged amongst *sistah*-scholars, programmatic efforts which facilitate similar interactions may present Black women in doctoral programs with opportunities to learn and grow with women whose ways of knowing, doing and being are not unlike their own. This may include support groups facilitated by Black women on the faculty who are knowledgeable about the experiences of Black women engaged in the doctoral journey, and able to assist these women with building both camaraderie and solidarity by sharing their narratives. Collins (2000) has noted that such an act is one of resistance, and can be especially empowering for Black women. We acknowledge that these efforts would require doctoral programs to increase the presence of Black faculty persons who are women, a group that comprises only 3% of the nation's full-time instructional faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). Yet, given that Black women received over 10% of the doctoral degrees conferred in 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b), we fully support such a position, and in fact, deem it necessary.

Doctoral programs should also consider a consistent allocation of funds to assist students with travel to professional conferences. We have all benefitted from the relationships created with other Black women in these settings. This was due to special interest groups and informal socials that foster connectedness by presenting a space for those with shared experiences and identities to provide one another with personal and professional counsel. Conferences also provide pre- or post-conference mentorship and/or writing institutes. Given the dearth of Black women with a faculty rank in higher education, these institutes can provide an opportunity for Black women in doctoral programs to create and/or strengthen relationships

with other Black scholars within and outside of their programs. The benefits of Black students having access to, and receiving support and guidance from a Black faculty person include emotional, academic and professional encouragement, and the transference of social and cultural capital (McLean-McKessey, 2015; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Patton, 2009) – all of which have been established as positively correlated with retention (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Blackwell, 1989; Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014; Johnson-Bailey, 2004; Nora, 2002; Nora, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977). Ironically, research has shown that an inability to acquire the aforementioned is the primary reason why retention rates for Black students remain bleak (Allen, 1992; Blackwell, 1991; Harper, 2009; Pena, Bensimon, & Colyar, 2006; Pruitt, & Isaac, 1985; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tinto, 1993). If given adequate access to Black women in the professoriate, Black women enrolled in doctoral programs may be much more likely to persist.

Finally, support for Black doctoral students who are mothers should also be prioritized. This includes practices that are intentionally inclusive. While pursuing her degree, one of the authors, Rogers, contacted a professor via email to inform him that her young son—for whom she had no childcare—would be accompanying her to class. The professor replied, “I hope he has his questions ready!” Such an act is representative of the ways in which faculty can provide support, and buffer the challenges that are unique to mothers pursuing the doctorate. Additional inclusionary efforts should focus on the structure of programmatic affairs. Because mothers are often put in a position where they must choose between themselves and their children and/or significant others (Gardner, 2009; Maher, Ford, & Thompson, 2004), efforts that foster the presence of family must be given serious consideration. Encouraging the inclusion of children and/or significant others in spaces traditionally reserved for doctoral students and faculty (e.g., receptions, networking events, department-sponsored symposia) enables family members to gain a better understanding of a process (and domain) they are not directly involved in. The authors all note that during their doctoral journeys, inviting family members into the aforementioned spaces resulted in their loved ones identifying the process as less abstract. What followed was increased support from children and/or significant others. Thus, the exigency of appropriate shifts in both research and practice are clear. Institutions have a duty to train and serve students in the best ways possible, but without concerted efforts to retain all doctoral students, the academy and society as a whole are in jeopardy of losing an opportunity to access a great deal of talent.

Final Thoughts: Lessons Learned at the Table

While our sample is small, there is power in telling the story of a few, particularly because the experiences of Black women are so often couched in a broad narrative about us. In addition, we are often presented as juxtapositions of white women or Black men. We view this as problematic and disruptive to the critical

conversations that need to transpire about the distinct position of Black women in academia with regard to both womanhood and motherhood. Thus, the intimacy of this work was purposeful. It was our intention to begin with three Black women who engaged in the doctoral journey. These narratives revealed their challenges, and how they found solace amongst other affirming Black women within and outside the academy. This illustration of the dynamic power of the relationships amongst Black women rebuffs the myth that we do not build or sustain community, or work collaboratively.

We assert that more work on the Black mothering experience by Black women and Black mothers is needed. Frameworks such as Sister-to-Sister talks (Few et al., 2003), Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1990; 2000), and Womanist Theory (Walker, 1983) should be continuously weaved into the fabric of inquiries regarding Black mothers in higher education. Continued exploration of Black mothering experiences can help us all gain a better understanding about how Black women are marginalized and silenced while striving to be their best self.

Perhaps most importantly, Toni, Maya and Alicia gave permission to themselves and one another to “put work down” and be there for their children. This meant they wouldn’t finish first, publish first, or present everywhere they wanted to. These women had to accept that they might move slower than those who are single and unwed. Maya stated,

Our walk will be incomparable and our battles will be plenty. But, we have to trust the process. As Black mothers in the academy we have to walk in our own light.

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Seeing It for Wearing It

Autoethnography as Black Feminist Methodology

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We [Black Feminist Anthropologists] are rarely cited, although our ideas (and our experiences) may be appropriated and used without permission. [...] For the most part, despite the rise of innovative approaches and styles of ethnography, as well as a flood of critiques about the racist and colonialist history of anthropology, minority scholars (Black, Native American, Latino/a, gay, and others, including some women) still struggle for credibility in the discipline; we battle a rising tide as our attempts to speak as situated anthropologists are viewed with “objective” suspicion or dismissed as “essentialist.”

—Irma McClaurin

Why Black Feminist Anthropology

In 2009, on a late November Monday, I walked into the second-to-last meeting of my first-year theories seminar in Cultural Anthropology at a top-10 institution in the southeastern United States. I was the only Black woman to have been extended and accepted admittance into this particular doctoral program in several cohorts, so needless to say, I was the one Black woman in the classroom. On this day, I was made painfully aware of the ways Black scholars, specifically, Black women scholars continue to struggle for credibility in the discipline. After nearly three full months of reading Durkheim, Weber, Marx, Malinowski, Freud, Evans-Prichard, Geertz, Boaz, and a seemingly never-ending barrage of dead white men who made a name for themselves studying the colonized peoples of the world, I was excited that we had finally arrived at the first person of color and third woman on

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the syllabus, Zora Neale Hurston. We had been assigned excerpts from Hurston's *Mules & Men*, an (auto)ethnographic account of Black folktales collected in her hometown of Eatonville, Florida and other locales in the Black American South. It is also worth noting, of all the assigned readings, Hurston's was the only work on the entire syllabus for which the page numbers were not specified, but I didn't think much of it at the time. I arrived in class prepared to discuss Black southern dialects, tall tales and the role of myths in Black epistemological cosmologies or, at the very least, what it meant to be doing fieldwork among a people to which and whom one belongs.

We began the class discussing Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*, Clifford Geertz's reading of Benedict's work in *Works and Lives*, and Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. As it was clear that we were shifting our discussion to Hurston's work, the professor says to us, "Zora Neale Hurston's work is experiencing a revival and I feel like it's important to put her on the syllabus but I don't really know what to do with her work so, talk amongst yourselves." Though I was not necessarily surprised by this professor's lack of willingness to critically engage Hurston's work, I was baffled at how to respond to her indifferent dismissal at that moment. I had read *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a high school student but I had never engaged Hurston as an Anthropologist prior to my graduate studies. I later learned that Hurston once taught at my alma mater, North Carolina Central University, an HBCU across the once literal and now proverbial railroad tracks, from Duke University. This professor's lack of regard or recognition for Hurston's contribution to the field of Anthropology and her documentation of Southern Black Epistemologies is a salient example of the phenomena described by Irma McClaurin in the opening epigraph. Despite Hurston's groundbreaking work in "native anthropology" and her contributions to experimental ethnography, she remains largely uncited and understudied in the broader discipline of Anthropology. This early interaction with this racist anthropologist during my graduate studies began my obsession with Hurston work, my ambivalence toward the field of Anthropology, and my fascination with autoethnography as a method of critical inquiry and scholarly writing.

The primary method of inquiry which distinguishes "anthropology" from other scholarly disciplines in the American academy is "ethnography." Historically, that anthropological/ethnographic inquiry has been concerned with the colonized, dispossessed (non-Euro-American) other. We (students of Anthropology) are taught that ethnographic inquiry requires a peculiar simultaneity of distancing from and drawing closer to a given researcher's subjects/object of study. Zora Neale Hurston is rarely given credit for her early theorizing of ethnographic methodology in which she deploys the spy-glass as a metaphor to offer insight into her decision to record the African-American folklore of her Southern childhood and the subsequent difficulty she encountered in attempting to do so. In the very text my anthropology professor proclaimed she did not know how to engage, Hurston offers a theory of

methodology that is profoundly Black Feminist in its attention to the ways in which theory must be grounded in our lived experience:

From the earliest rocking of my cradle, I had known about the capers Brer Rabbit is apt to cut and what the Squinch Owl says from the house top. But it was fitting me like a tight chemise. *I couldn't see it for wearing it.* It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could see myself like somebody else and stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of Anthropology to look through at that. (Hurston, 1990)

She goes on to explain that she went back there because it was home, it was safe, and folks there wouldn't been too impressed by her newly acquired education. Most of all however, she returned to Eatonville because she believed and knew it to be full of rich ethnographic data that she believed to be worthy of documentation and study. Hurston's familiarity with the subject matter and the producers of said subject matter, made the prospect of recording the tales of her youth not only seem possible but worthy of documentation as well as critical inquiry because she did not hold the racial biases many of her classmates and teachers held about southern Blacks. Her closeness however, required a kind of distancing which can stir a certain discomfort in people who are typically stigmatized, othered and otherwise devalued in their respective societies.

Feminist scholars/activists have long contended "the personal is political." Autoethnography, rooted in the feminist theorization of the personal as political, is, as a disciplinary practice, largely a product of the "reflexive turn" in Anthropology that occurred in the 1970s, despite Hurston's critical deployment of autoethnography decades earlier (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Behar, 1993). In the *Handbook of Autoethnography*, Stacy Holman Jones offers the following definition:

... auto-ethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Auto-ethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living. (Jones, 2013)

Black Feminist scholars and activists from the late 1970s through the early 1990s charted impressive intellectual territory in calling attention to the multiple ways in which structures of inequality permeate every aspect of oppressed people's lives (Hurston, 1942; Combahee River Collective, 1974; Lorde, 1984; Crenshaw, 1991). Irma McLaurin argues for Black Feminist Anthropologists specifically, "telling our stories," "bearing witness," and "testifying," otherwise referred to here as autoeth-

nography, is “an innovative strategy of knowledge production” through which “Black Feminist Anthropologists may theorize and textualize our situated positions and elevate our subjugated discourses to levels recognized by both margins and centers of the discipline” (McLaurin, 2001). Johnnetta B. Cole argues that in order to BE a Black feminist anthropologist one’s inquiry about the human condition must include “an analysis that is informed by a sense of the importance of ‘race’ and of gender.” Beyond the intellectual work, Cole further argues that a Black feminist anthropologists’ work must DO something, it must “participate in some way in the active struggle against racism, sexism and all other systems of inequality.” (Heyward-Rotimi, 1998).

With respect to my own work, my parents’ tales of activism are not unlike the southern fables of Brer Rabbit for Hurston. They are the thing with which I am intimately familiar, the tales that shaped my being in the world, the experiences stirring my curiosity about possible parallels in my own lifetime, the stories that led me to Venezuela and allowed me to see the familiar in the supposedly strange and ultimately forced me to return home to the US South to conclude my doctoral research. In many ways, it was not until I went off to graduate school, that I could more clearly see who it was for wearing it, that I could begin to interrogate the stories I was reared with and observe them as they were operationalized throughout the African Diaspora and it was Black Feminist Anthropology, more specifically autoethnography that helped to me to begin to explore that which I always already intuited.

Always Already Existing Struggles for Black Liberation

As an undergraduate in the mid-late 2000s, I began to hear rumblings of a socialist revolution taking place in Venezuela. In our earliest conversations about what was occurring in Venezuela, I remember witnessing my father’s excitement as he instructed me to keep my eyes on Venezuela. “One day,” he warned, “I might find myself wanting and/or needing to get out of the United States.” He always made it very clear that he believed travel and exposure tend to nourish the imagination and expose us to new possibilities. It was this encouragement to travel for the sake of learning and political exposure that drove me to the discipline of Anthropology, a field that would allow me to travel with the financial support of the university and continue to encounter peoples of the African Diaspora. Through my studies of Spanish Language and Afro-Latino cultures as an undergraduate, I began encountering Afro-Venezuelans attesting to the importance of Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution in college classrooms, local Black-owned bookstores and even entire conferences dedicated to understanding the revolution from Afro-Venezuelan perspectives.

When I began my graduate studies the political landscape of the world looked different. Intrigued by what I understood to be a socialist revolution committed to improving the material and socio-cultural conditions of Black/African descended peoples, unfolding in my lifetime, I set out to study the role of Afro-Venezuelans in the Bolivarian Revolution. Because Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez were comrades

and Cuba supported Venezuela's revolution I was also curious if Venezuela had learned from the racial mistakes Cuba made as it birthed its communist revolution. I was interested in Venezuela because of the way my parents often praised the role of Cuba in both African and African Diasporic liberation struggles when I was a child. My parents are members of the All African People's Revolutionary Party and as such imbued me with the values of Pan-Africanism from birth, defined by Dr. Osageyfo Kwame Nkrumah in *Class Struggle in Africa*, as total liberation and unification of Africa under an All-African socialist government." (Nkrumah, 1970).¹ As a child, I was intrigued by the stories my parents and their friends would tell about their political work with South Africans, The American Indian Movement, Palestinians, etc. The breadth of knowledge and sophistication they seemed to possess when they spoke of international and domestic communities of African peoples struggling for liberation was overwhelming as a child but would later come to drive all of my scholarly inquiries.

Not long after I completed coursework and began to conduct fieldwork, my interlocutors in Venezuela would often ask me about what kind of political work I was engaged in at home. I admit to being very intimidated by these questions at first because I was not directly tied to any specific organization at that point. By the summer of 2013 that all began to change, and my attention was drawn back to my place of birth, the United States of America, largely as a result of the chiding of my Venezuelan comrades. I am forever grateful for those reminders that the political life of the U.S. impacted the political life of Venezuela and that I could not be of real service to Afro-Venezuelans or the Bolivarian Revolution more broadly if I was not engaged in the struggle on my home turf. This particular example is illustrative of the ways Black Feminist Anthropology and/or Autoethnography necessitates action on the part of the researcher.

Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution had been unfolding for more than a decade when a generation of Black and Brown youth in the United States had the thin veil of American democracy ripped from our eyes following the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. Jolted into action through the desire to believe the (in)justice system could work in our favor, at least once, Black and Brown youth all over the country took to the streets to demand the arrest of Trayvon Martin's murderer. Only through public outcry, was George Zimmerman arrested, charged and tried. A new generation was convinced of our ability to affect change. Zimmerman's subsequent acquittal was met with mixed emotions. Some were angry enough to keep pressing on and others were resigned, once again to the truth of a country that *neverlovedus*.² Events reached a tipping point in 2014 when Black and Brown youth across the United States watched live, as Mike Brown's 18-year-old body lay face down in a streaming pool of blood just steps from his home in Ferguson, MO. Through the echoes of a mourning mother and a seething community, the giant of youthful, righteous, Black and Brown indignation awakened and the need for this comparative research project was undeniable.

I began asking myself, what did it mean that mass social movements were flourishing in both the United States and Venezuela? How significant was the fact that both countries were experiencing these upheavals under the leadership of their first respective, self-identified, “Black/Afro Presidents?” Why, in Venezuela, were Afro-Venezuelans taking to the streets to protect their budding national political project while Black and Brown youth in streets of the United States were there precisely and defiantly in response to ballooning state violence and repression? Could this be proof that socialism better served the material and cultural needs of Black and Brown peoples? And, perhaps most fundamentally, how did these Black/Afro peoples (particularly women and youth) become politicized and radicalized to the point of action? These questions swirled in my head for years as I struggled to find the connections, articulate the necessity of studying Black social movements in Venezuela and the US at the same time and rejecting the traditional anthropological trend to deem myself an expert on a particular country.

At various points in my graduate studies I was quizzically asked why I was taking on such an enormous task of doing comparative research. Every time I was asked the question I was baffled because I didn’t quite know how to articulate why I deemed comparison necessary. Why couldn’t I be a good colonial anthropologist and just go study “the strange” foreign people? I realized that it was because my interest in Venezuela was not as an outsider, a voyeur but was a product of my own possessive investment in liberation as a woman, a Black/African diasporic person, as the product of a working-class family, as a member of a globally dispossessed people. The research wasn’t purely intellectual, it was in part a utilitarian search for liberatory alternatives for myself and my people. What I now understand is that the liberal individualism of the American academy rendered my intellectual preoccupations illegible to many of my so-called colleagues and professors because of their “freedom” to be nominally invested in their subjects of inquiry. Even now, after having completed my dissertation, I am still hesitant to claim expertise about Venezuela as a country. My work is the product over just over a year of research in a particular urban area of Venezuela, among a particular subset of Venezuelans who self-identified as “Afro.” To claim, or even the desire to claim any level of expertise over a people whose identities, politics, and ways of being are constantly in flux is a product of the hubris of the colonial institutionality of Euro-American Ivory towers that I vehemently reject. I understand Black feminist autoethnography as Black women’s attempt to return to a belief in the power of our productivity informed by a rigorous inquiry into our lived always already intersectional struggles for liberation.

Finding the Research in Fieldwork

I was first introduced to the histories and cultures of Afrodescended peoples in Latin America by Dr. Marco Polo Hernandez Cuevas, an Afro-Mexican professor of Spanish language and literature at North Carolina Central University. Dr. Hernandez

was my college advisor and a constant advocate. He didn't just *introduce* me to (Afro)Venezuela, he encouraged me to learn more about Venezuela in a moment when its shifting politics were allowing the struggles of Afro-Venezuelans both domestically and abroad to become increasingly more visible. The struggle for visibility is so central to the lived experiences of Afrodescended peoples across Latin America that the word visible has been made into a verb, *visibilizar*, meaning "to make visible" or perhaps more pertinently, "to recognize." This understanding of the act of making ones lived experience visible is essential to the lexicon of the struggle for self-determination and consciousness-raising among Spanish Speaking African descendants and Black women alike. To encounter, document, and analyze the stories of Black Women and Afro-Venezuelan peoples is an active attempt to make visible that which has been intentionally obscured by white supremacist patriarchal structures and institutions.

In the fall of my junior year in college Dr. Cuevas told me the Modern Foreign Languages department would be hosting Afro-Venezuelan scholar/activist Jesus "Chucho" Garcia as well as Geronimo Sanchez-Gonzalez, one of the top administrators at what was then referred to as the University Institute of Barlovento, Venezuela's only Historically/Predominantly Black Serving Post-Secondary Institution, which has since been renamed in honor of Afro-Venezuelan socialist guerrilla, Argelia Laya. The talk covered a range of topics, however, the one that stuck out to me most was the discussion of "*pedagogía cimarron*." *Cimarrones* (maroons) are formerly enslaved Africans who escaped their captivity and went on to form community with other formerly enslaved Africans. In some cases, those enslaved Africans also formed alliances with local indigenous populations, a practice more common in Latin America, though not unheard of in the continental United States. In its most basic sense, "pedagogy" is the art, method and/or practice of teaching. A maroon pedagogy can and should be understood as a weapon of history, a method of bearing witness to modes of resistance, struggle, freedom and dignity passed down from enslaved ancestors to present communities of African descended peoples fighting for liberation.

I was privileged to have been afforded a full academic scholarship for my undergraduate studies at North Carolina Central University, an Historically Black University in the heart of Durham, NC, adjacent to the Hayti Heritage Community commonly referred to as the Black Wall Street.³ Despite being notoriously under-resourced and staffed by overworked faculty, I had the good fortune of being meticulously nurtured and encouraged by NCCU's overworked and underpaid faculty and staff. So much so that, with no personal intentions of pursuing a graduate degree upon entering college, my Eagle community laid a path to the PhD that I would only later recognize. My scholarship afforded me the opportunity to travel domestically and study abroad several times. In the latter part of the summer of 2006, I participated in the University of North Carolina (UNC) in Washington Program, which allowed me to live in Washington D.C. for a few months while

taking classes and interning with the National Alliance of Black School Educators. In the earlier part of that summer, I spent about six weeks in southern Mexico and the following winter break in Guinea, Conakry. Following those trips, I spent the spring semester of 2007 studying abroad in the Dominican Republic.

I embarked on these journeys primarily with the intention of improving my Spanish language skills, however, having never traveled abroad I was equally motivated by a desire to see more of the world and my father's encouragement to learn by doing. I grew up surrounded by communities of several different nationalities, but I had no idea what their home countries were like. My first trip abroad to Southern Mexico was typical and without incident, or so I thought until I began to decompress. I had a series of experiences that would only be elucidated as I continued my studies of Spanish language and as my interest in Spanish speaking African diasporic communities grew. On several occasions while in Cuernavaca, I was asked by random strangers if they could touch my skin and/or if I was from Jamaica or Cuba. Most of these inquiries felt benign enough until I spent a semester in the Dominican Republic (DR). In the DR, I experienced a visceral form of racist bigotry I had never previously encountered, despite being born and raised in the US, a country plagued by a history of racial trauma and paranoia. I was regularly solicited as a prostitute on my daily walk to school; my Professor Blas Jimenez, an internationally recognized poet, was referred to as "*negrito*" (a term he found racially offensive despite being aware of the claim by many Spanish speakers that it is a term of endearment English speakers are too racially paranoid to appreciate); and I was often assumed to be Haitian and subsequently accused of lying about such when I denied any known ancestral connection to the country. While enrolled at PUCMM in Santo Domingo, two classes, one on Dominican Culture and another on African Heritage in the Dominican Republic, helped me begin to interpret my racial encounters in the DR. They exposed me to the peculiar history of the island of Hispaniola and the centuries-long tense relations between the two nations inhabiting the island. When I left the DR, I was so angered and likely traumatized by my experiences that I couldn't speak well of the country for years. I did however desire to continue my study of the Spanish language as well as the histories and cultures of Afro-Latin peoples.

As a child, Howard University offered a kind of cultural and intellectual refuge for my family and their political community. It was a relatively safe and consistent meeting space for my parents and their fellow Pan-Africanist comrades. My family religiously planned and attended African Liberation Days in Malcolm X Park (Meridian Hill), with most of the smaller political meetings and discussions being held on the campus of Howard University. The very first African Liberation Day (ALD), then referred to as Africa Freedom Day, took place in Accra, Ghana in 1958 after Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of independent Ghana, called for the yearly commemoration of the progress toward African Liberation, and to symbolize the determination of the people of Africa to free themselves from foreign domination

and exploitation. The very next year, Malcolm X addressed an Africa Freedom Day rally in Harlem, NY. The first properly named African Liberation Day to occur on US soil did not take place until 1972. In 1976, my father stopped at nothing to attend his first African Liberation Day, hosted by the A-APRP. He was so determined in fact that, when his car broke down on the drive from North Carolina to DC, he ironically, hitched a ride on the back of a watermelon truck the rest of the way. In the past forty-two years my father may have missed one or two African Liberation Day celebrations and as a result, ALD is a more commemorated “holiday” in my family than Christmas, why Howard University will also be situated at the center of my political consciousness, and a significant reason why I remain committed to the legacy and mission of HBCUs.

So, it was no surprise that as a college student, with a little change in my pocket and my own car, that I made my way to Howard University as often as possible. In April of 2008, I curiously attended a symposium at Howard University titled “What’s Up with Venezuela? Participatory Democracy or Democracy as Usual.” Despite Chuchó’s visit to NCCU a few years prior, I hadn’t kept up with Venezuela, so I was unfamiliar with what was happening there. I remember wondering who and what motivated such a specific conference at the time. I arrived and found myself in rooms of Spanish Speaking Black folks attempting to explain the myriad ways Venezuela offered a hopeful, and increasingly viable alternative to neoliberal economic governance through wealth redistribution programs and 21st-century socialism. The conference, convened by the Venezuela Solidarity Network, hosted over 200 solidarity activists from across the US, interested in studying and understanding the revolutionary changes sweeping Venezuela. I remember being awed by the number of darker skinned Spanish speaking people discussing radical change in their home country. I also remember being excited and a little intimidated by the level of nuanced sophistication apparent in the way they discussed the progress and pitfalls of the Bolivarian Revolution. One of the featured panelists at the conference was a representative from the Network of Afro-Venezuelans, Jorge Guerrero, who, at the time, also served as Venezuela’s Consul General in New Orleans, Louisiana. Jorge offered a panel presentation on the growing communal council programs as an alternative to neo-liberalism.

That people were suggesting Venezuela was somehow threatening to the US because of the alternatives it modeled was something I had only ever really thought about in relation to the Cuban Revolution up to that point. I associated hopeful alternatives with the Civil Rights, Black Power and African liberation struggles across the continent working in conjunction with the Cuban Revolution. I primarily believed such alliances to be a relic of an era I was not born to witness. Finally, I remember people defending the Venezuelan revolution while simultaneously critiquing it, declaring it their responsibility to ensure the revolution served them, that it was not Chávez’s job alone. This symposium essentially solidified my interest in Venezuela. The choice of the symposium organizers to highlight Afro-Venezuelan voices and

to host the symposium at the nation's premier HBCU signaled the importance of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution, in particular Afro-Venezuelan's support for said revolution and the subsequent impact on the African Diasporic community. My father was and is fond of reciting the following quote from Kwame Nkrumah's 1957 speech in recognition of Ghana's Independence from the British, "We have won the battle and again rededicate ourselves... Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of Africa." (Nkrumah, 1957) I think Nkrumah's direct meaning here is clear, but I also take the inverse of this statement to be true, anywhere there is a struggle being waged for Black/African liberation, Africans, whether continental or diasporic should support said struggle. This proclamation is why I found it necessary to conduct research in two places when I was in grad school and refused the label of expertise. I do not intend to become an expert on a given country. My desire is to conduct research in the service of Black/African liberation, and as such I will follow the fight in whatever country it presents itself so long as I have the linguistic capabilities to do so.

Fumbling Through Methods

During the summer months preceding my final year of doctoral studies, nearly ten years after our initial encounter, Chucho and I found ourselves together again on the Campus of North Carolina Central University. A few weeks prior to our reconnection, I was sitting in the basement of Lilly Library at Duke University with my husband Joshua when I received a Facebook message, from Chucho. He wanted to inform me of his new post as Consul General of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in New Orleans, Louisiana. In the ten years or so since we'd met, he evolved from being best known as a highly published scholar/activist, to serving as a Venezuelan ambassador to Angola, Mali and Burkina Faso and on to his present position as Consul General in New Orleans, Louisiana. Those accolades alone say much about his dynamic capacities. Chucho further inquired about how I was doing and how my research proceeding since we last spoke. When I informed him that I had moved into the final stages of completing my dissertation he asked me to remind him what it was about.

At that I was still struggling to distill the content/argument of the dissertation but came up with something to the effect of a comparative project about radical black organizing in the US and Venezuela. After telling him a little about my desire to write more about the process of becoming radical for Black/African descended peoples, he said he would love to read my work and assist me in any way he could. He instructed me to call him, immediately, so that we could discuss the subject in more depth. I immediately began to panic. My respect for his work and achievements, and my qualms regarding my ability to complete the task I had begun sent me into avoidance mode. Somehow, I forgot I had previously given him my number, so when I did not immediately call him, he called me. I did not

answer the call because of my anxiety about speaking Spanish on the phone. He called a second time, which I still did not answer and then proceeded to message me on Facebook again. Because Facebook allows your network to see when you are active online, I couldn't pretend I didn't see his message. I responded, saying I was in the library and had bad reception, which was not a total lie, I was in the library but my reception was perfectly fine. I told him I would call him back later when I had a better signal, which of course I never did.

About a month later I received an e-mail from Baiyina Muhammad my mentor, advisor, and sista-friend at my alma matter NCCU, about a program taking place at the end of August titled "Jazz & Words: A Much Needed Conversation." She went on to explain that the program was to be a discussion of a new book entitled *The Afro-Mexican Ancestors and the Nation They Constructed*, written by none other than my former advisor Dr. Marco Polo Hernandez Cuevas. When my partner and I walked into the Alphonso Elder Student Union at NCCU I spotted Chucho immediately. He was standing, wearing a knit dread cap in the colors of the Rastafarian flag with the ends of his graying cornrows exposed at the back, a black shirt, jeans and sandals—not all that different from the way he looked when I first encountered him almost a decade earlier. I explained to Josh that Chucho was kind of a political celebrity among Afro-Latinos, particularly among Afro-Venezuelans and that he had offered to help with my dissertation but that I had been avoiding him out of insecurity about my Spanish.

As we approached, I was relieved to find him next to a familiar face. Chucho was conversing with Ajamu Dillahunt, a founding member of Black Workers for Justice⁴ and long-time family friend and political comrade. Ajamu and his wife Rukia had been organizing black workers in North Carolina for over twenty years and had a relationship with my family since before I was born. They also had children who were the same age as my two older siblings and they attended high school together. I smiled and was greeted warmly by Ajamu who looked a little relieved to see me. I think he was relieved because he and Chucho were struggling to communicate and he knew that my Spanish was better than his. When Ajamu introduced me, Chucho immediately realized who I was and chided me for never returning his call. I bashfully explained my insecurities about communicating in Spanish over the phone, specifically my discomfort with words often becoming muddled in my ears and that not being able to read the lips and body language of the Spanish speaker seriously inhibits understanding for me. He gave me a knowing laugh, told me he was still interested in my project and said "not to worry because we could always communicate in Spanglish." Fortunately, at this point the program was about to begin so we both took our seats.

The title "Jazz & Words" doesn't reveal much, however, given the prestige of NCCU's Jazz Studies program we assumed we would run into some of Josh's former Jazz instructors and sure enough, Robert Trowers, one of his former trombone instructors opened the event with several "Jazz Standards." The first was "Afro

Blue,” originally written and composed by Afro-Cuban Latin Jazz Percussionist Mongo Santamaria and recorded live on April 20, 1959, at the Sunset Auditorium in Carmel, California. The best-known recording of Afro Blue is featured on John Coltrane’s 1963 album *Afro Blue Impressions*. The song has been recorded and released by no less than thirty different artists including McCoy Tyner, Dianne Reeves and most recently by Robert Gasper and Erykah Badu on Gasper’s album *Black Radio*.

Opening the program with this performance facilitated an introductory discussion about the mutual contributions and collaborations between Blacks in the US, Afro-Latinos and Africans. *Afro Blue*, a love song, pays homage to the rhythmic influences of our African ancestors, those maintained and those forgotten, as the lead vocals allude to that cultural memory with “*Dream of a land my soul is from, I hear a hand stroke on a drum.*” The song is one of the earliest Jazz Standards written with the rhythmic 6/8 time that is often felt in African and African Diasporic music such as Highlife and most Afro-Cuban music. Written in the throes of the Civil Rights Movement and made popular by John Coltrane as the Black Power Movement was budding, celebrating the *cocoa hue* of our skin, along with all the other *shades of delight* offers a Jazzy declaration that Black is Beautiful. *Afro Blue* or African Blue references the rich, deep color of the night that often-provided enslaved Africans cover for their plans of escaping to freedom. The song represents generations of collaborations between musicians of the African Diaspora.

The panel for the program was itself, also structured to represent the diversity of African Diasporic perspectives. In addition to Dr. Cuevas and Chucho Garcia, the panel included Dr. Christina Cabral, the first Afro-Uruguayan woman to receive a PhD, and Ivorian Scholar/Howard Professor Dr. Celement Animan Akassi. The program lasted for about three hours and introduced many interesting conversations about the newly released text by Dr. Cuevas. He shared some of his personal history which, over the course of his entire academic career, drove him to explore the often-observed existence and contributions of Afro-Mexicans. The degree to which Afro-Mexican contributions have been erased from the narrative of Mexican nationhood was so thorough that the book and subsequent discussion were predominantly concerned with documentation. While documenting the historical contributions of Afro-Venezuelans and African descended peoples in the United States continues to be an important political objective, the existence of the first self-declared presidents of African descent in the U.S. and Venezuela have facilitated an opening in national and popular dialogue about race, nation and belonging. The program concluded that evening with an announcement of a follow-up discussion to be hosted the next day.

We returned the following evening to screen a short film by Chucho entitled “Por Aquí Pasó Chávez,” loosely translated to mean “Chávez was here.” The film merged footage from Chávez’s 2006 visit to the capital city of Bamako, Mali with present-day footage of interviews with people who were some of the benefactors of the programs Chávez helped to implement and fund in Mali. The footage of the

trip shows Chávez speaking to the people of Mali declaring “we are one people”. He goes on to proclaim the shared histories of colonization and slavery are what unite Latin Americans and Africans in their present fight against neocolonialism. He closes by asking them to receive the words of solidarity from the Venezuelan people and reaffirms his commitment to working together for liberation and development. The film goes on to cover the 17 Malian students studying in the “Salvador Allende Latin American School of Medicine” and another 12 studying textiles elsewhere. The film shows a Malian community named Venezuela, which is comprised of more than one hundred houses that were built with funds from the Venezuelan government. Finally, the film pans to a mission named in honor of Simón Rodríguez⁵ also constructed with funds from the Venezuelan government, which was serving more than one-thousand students at the time.

In his comments after the film, Chucho made comparisons between the Venezuelan national heroes Simón Bolívar and Hugo Chávez and Malian national heroes Sundiata and Modibo Keita. He noted the many instances over the course of the film when people said repeatedly that Chávez is not dead but that his spirit lives on through the legacy of his work and the continued collaborative support of the Venezuelan government. Additionally, Chucho explained that initiatives like the ones in Mali resulted from his country’s mission to build South-South relations. Under Chávez’s leadership, the program to build South-South relations resulted in the opening or revitalization of 18 embassies across the continent of Africa. Chucho instructed us to be on the lookout for collaborations between the Venezuelan government and the people of Jackson, Mississippi as they were working to continue a project spearheaded by the late Chokwe Lumumba until his untimely passing in 2014.

Though the film was brief, and skeptics may likely read it as propaganda, it highlighted precisely the type of program that initially drew me to Venezuela. Over the course of my undergraduate and graduate career, Venezuela was often covered by American news outlets. Many of those news features demonstrated, perhaps unwittingly, that the Venezuelan government was concerned with the well-being of poor US citizens of color in ways that the US government was not. In August 2005, the United States witnessed one of the worst and costliest man-made natural disasters in its history. When Hurricane Katrina struck the US (making landfall in Mississippi and Louisiana), Venezuela and Cuba were among the first countries to aid, even before the national, state, or local Louisiana governments. The US state department rejected these offers of assistance (Lake, 2005). When, in 2010, Haiti was devastated by a massive earthquake and subsequent tremors, the US State Department once again, attempted to block much-needed aid from Venezuela as well as other foreign aid (Janicke, 2010). Additionally, thanks to Venezuelan owned CITGO Oil’s heating oil subsidy, thousands of American citizens received free and/reduced heating services for several brutal north-eastern winters (Reardon, 2011). The Venezuelan government’s decisions about aiding marginalized and disenfranchised populations in the United States prompted, for me, questions about

how similar demographic populations were impacted by domestic programs in their country. More importantly, however, these attempts on the part of the Venezuelan government made me consider that it was indeed possible for African descended peoples to have a different relationship to an American nation-state, one that actually treated and cared for us as citizens as opposed to a problem that needed to be exterminated.

With this final vignette, I hope to convey the haphazard ways in which researchers who are driven primarily by a deep internal investment may simultaneously always already be aware of the tensions that animate that which they choose to study and painfully unaware of how to go about conducting the study at the same time. Retelling and writing out the ways in which I fumbled through my own ethnographic research is a reminder of how painfully ill-equipped American academics are at helping young ethnographers figure out exactly how to conduct ethnographic field research. I also hope, however, that despite the realities that we sometimes find ourselves stumbling through our research that as long as we are driven by Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole's call that our research DO WORK in the service of eliminating racism, sexism, and classism, that we will always find ethnographic that sheds light on the daily battles Black women and the communities we belong to, wage in the name of our freedom.

Conclusion

I have always had a rather contentious relationship with formal schooling. Though I have mostly been a lover of learning, I have experienced teachers attempts to devalue, invalidate, misread, and/or make invisible the lived experiences of Black/African descended peoples. Just as my first-year theories instructor had no idea what to do with Zora Neale Hurston's work, an earlier teacher had no idea how to make sense of the reality that not all enslaved persons left the plantation immediately following emancipation. When I was about 9-years-old, my third-grade teacher tried to force an a-historical notion of "happy slaves" on my classmates' young impressionable minds. On this particular day we happened to be discussing the conditions of servitude for most enslaved Africans in the United States. I cannot remember the larger context of the conversation but what ensued was something that has remained with me to this day, for better or worse. The teacher began to talk about what happened after the emancipation proclamation was issued, specifically, that some, if not many, enslaved persons chose to remain on the plantations under their former masters' "care" despite being "granted" their freedom. Her explanation for why this occurred was that those enslaved peoples were happy with the condition of their lives in bondage.

As an adult, I could attempt to rationalize her fumbled effort to explain why some folks remained on the plantation after emancipation, as a product of her own ignorance and prejudice. Perhaps she truly could only understand remaining on

the plantation after being freed as a “choice” that formerly enslaved persons made because their “quality of life” was better on the plantation than what they would have to face out in the world on their own. Of course, a more sinister interpretation might attribute her version of events more to what Kwame Ture in his famous Black Power speech delivered at UC Berkeley, referred to as an “insidious subterfuge for the maintenance of white supremacy,” for the moment however, I will not contemplate her intentions, only the implications of her chosen narrative (Carmichael, 2007). The most egregious assumption she made was in attempting to convince our young minds that, when given the true opportunity to choose freedom, if freedom could actually be attained, almost no person would choose bondage. What she chose not to convey was that the “decision” to remain on the plantation for some was not simply a matter of the desire to be free or remain in bondage but resulted from a fear of the unknown, and in some cases known, dangers of being a black person out in the world with no official ties to white ownership, and further exacerbated by a lack of resources to sustain themselves once “free.”

To be born and raised-up in bondage and to have no clear view of how to establish a free life in a world where black lives were constantly threatened if not accompanied or vouched for by a white person, and to decide to either pursue or accept one’s freedom was a bold decision that for most, promised a life of precarity and uncertainty. Given a thorough knowledge of the history and conditions of bondage in this country, the degree to which an enslaved person’s “happiness” informed their decision to leave or remain on a plantation was likely very limited. These newly emancipated peoples understood that “freedom ain’t free” and they had not to figure out how to pay for their freedom. This was, perhaps, my earliest autonomous understanding of what it meant to use history to “learn lessons” and “define our own essence” (Mawere & Mubaya, 2016).

Now, perhaps this woman truly made these comments from a place of ignorance, and perhaps my first year theories professor really didn’t know how to engage Hurston’s work, and perhaps my dissertation committee really struggled to understand the impetus and the utility of undertaking multi-cited field research, but too often such “ignorance” stems from generations of attempts to, downplay the horrors and atrocities of slavery and subsequently convince the descendants of the victimized that the “peculiar institution” wasn’t quite so bad and therefore our present circumstances of life cannot be linked to the enslavement of our ancestors; disregard the agency and subjectivity of Black/African peoples; individualize that which is communal and systemic. This linguistic sleight of mouth allows the white, wealthy ruling classes to reframe understandings of the past and present in their favor. If history is a weapon, “history” never being simply what happened, but stories of what happened and the lessons learned therein, autoethnography is the body capable of firing that weapon.

Every choice to write and recite a particular history in a given society, to examine our own lived realities, to observe ourselves observing, teaches us what came

to be and in turn, what we understand as possible. History is simply the events of a far-off past, autoethnography allows us to situate ourselves and those to whom we belong in ways that help us understand and shape our presents and our futures. Black Feminist Autoethnography takes those both a step further and forces us not only to situate oppressed peoples, in my case, peoples of African descent in the United States and Venezuela's experiences but to attempt to theorize and operationalize those observations in the service of liberation because we cannot afford to passively ingest the damning histories put before us. We must, and do actively seek out histories that demonstrate the possibility of a better world from which we can decipher the necessary tools to construct our own freedoms. Oppressed peoples must always understand that every tool, if held properly can serve as a weapon. Ultimately, when properly deployed, autoethnography is the Black feminist work of documenting our narratives, the intersectional work of interrogating and examining the global nature of our oppression and our liberatory struggles. The most critical contribution of Black Feminist Autoethnography is that of presenting oppositional knowledge which demonstrates the ways in which our individual preoccupations are linked by histories of struggle, as well as our liberation. Furthermore, the work of Black Feminist Autoethnographers is to document that which we always, already know to be true, that our fates are linked, and the struggle continues.

Notes

¹ He further dictates that this must be the primary objective of all Black Revolutionaries throughout the world. This objective, when achieved, "will bring about the fulfillment of the aspirations of Africans and people of African descent everywhere. It will at the same time advance the triumph of the international socialist revolution, and the onward progress towards world communism, under which, every society is ordered on the principle of – from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

² A 2013 digital activist campaign launched by the Dream Defenders in Florida. Search #neverlovedus for more information.

³ Durham, North Carolina's Hayti Heritage Community is commonly believed to have been named after Haiti, The First Independent Black Republic in the western hemisphere. In 1911 Booker T. Washington visited the Hayti community and commented that he found a "city of negro enterprises" (58). The community was home to the North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, Lincoln Hospital and North Carolina College for Negroes, later known as North Carolina Central University. In 1959, only one year after his country gained independence from France, President Ahmed Sekou Touré was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws from NCCU during his tour of the American south.

⁴ BWFJ is an organization of Black workers formed in 1981 out of a struggle led by Black women workers at a K-mart store in Rocky Mount, North Carolina against race and gender discrimination. After organizing a boycott of the local K-mart store and reaching out to workers at other workplaces and communities, Black workers and community activists from 10 counties met at the First Missionary Baptist Church in Fremont, NC in June 1982 to form BWFJ as a statewide organization.

⁵ Rodríguez, known during his exile from Spanish America as Samuel Robinson, was a Venezuelan philosopher, educator, as well as Simón Bolívar's tutor and mentor. *Mission Robinson* is one of the Bolivarian Missions implemented by Hugo Chávez in 2003 is named in his honor. The mission uses volunteers to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to Venezuelan adults who were illiterate. In addition to its civilian focus it also sends soldiers to, among other places, remote and dangerous locales to reach the most undereducated, neglected, and marginalized adult citizens to give them regular schooling and lessons.

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An Autoethnography

So, You Want to Attract and Retain Diverse Faculty???

Melva R. Grant

Abstract

This is an autoethnography about epistemic injustice (i.e., diminished credibility as a knower) and resilience of an intersectional tenured faculty member who transformed harm into opportunities for rebuilding intellectual confidence and for exercising intellectual courage. Personal stories are used to examine and make explicit epistemic injustice harms by situating them within everyday contexts (Glesne, 2006). The purpose of this essay was to introduce theoretical perspectives with different language for improving discourses about an old challenge, racial bias, and to make explicit the types of harms experienced. Important research questions are posed for consideration by researchers. The stories shared in this essay and their implications will hopefully influence administrators, researchers, and faculty to see the need for reconceptualizing the ways they support diversity within their institutions. These stories and the implications demonstrate the complex subtlety of supporting diversity and this is especially important for institutions who audaciously pursue the goal of attracting and retaining diverse faculty.

An Autoethnography

This story is about how writing an essay about epistemic injustice (i.e., diminished credibility as a knower) and resilience that transformed harm into an opportunity for rebuilding epistemic confidence and the reemergence of intellectual courage. Additionally, my story uses language outside the context of racism that may be useful for adoption by others who have been marginalized or are underrepresented within

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spaces that feel less than ideal and likely uncomfortable. I identify intersectionally as a Black woman, STEM (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) professional, wife, and Nana, who has earned tenure in the same year that President Barack Obama, the first Black president, left office. I research and teach at a predominately white institution (PWI) that is ranked as very high research by Carnegie classification and is located in the southeastern United States in a state where the schools shut down for two years in resistance to school desegregation and where one would expect large support for the 45th president.

This essay is an autoethnography; I use personal stories to interrogate and make clear experiences situated within complex sociocultural contexts (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Glesne, 2006). One less obvious purpose for writing this essay is to afford intellectual enlightenment for administrators of PWIs who claim priorities of attracting and retaining diverse faculty, but lack understanding about supporting such faculty or implications related to extant cultures within their student bodies. A second purpose is cathartic, self-healing the harm from my most recent epistemic injustice experience. Stories from my life are shared in the following pages and interspersed with the introduction of different theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and language for communicating injustices related to racial bias; process and product are intertwined (Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011). In my stories the bias is racial, but the perspective and language introduced in this essay can be applied to other biases, such as gender, sexual orientation, etcetera that allow others to tell their harm stories in a way that is less emotion-laden so their voices can be heard by those in power who need to hear. This language segregates the harm from the unpleasantness that accompanies the language of racism, oppression, and for some multiculturalism.

My argument is that extant language of racism has limiting effectiveness because it carries negative cultural implications, such as demonization or othering. The language of racism requires that someone be characterized as racist, and once labeled they may be demonized within the community, rendering the language ineffectual. For those being harmed by racism or other 'isms there appears to be no recourse, understanding, and no change. Further, if one's harm story is silenced or goes unheard, healing is delayed. There is an underlying and consistent theme for the stories shared within this essay, when a harm is identified, heard, and acknowledged, resilience emerges. Conversely, when the harm is unheard or silenced, as is the case for the most recent instance of epistemic injustice described in the final story, the harm devolves and requires something more to get to resilience.

This essay is not about racism, it is about epistemic injustice (i.e., diminished credibility as a knower) and resilience. The stories shared within this autoethnography focus on epistemic injustices that have manifested persistently throughout my life, but until recently I had no language for describing the experiences. Further, I had not realized the harmful nature of these experiences or recognized the persistent resilience battle that had been waged by others and myself for protection. I believe

sharing my stories of these recurring experiences and the persistent resilience battles will be familiar for many others, especially those whose identity is readily observed like mine—darker skin, nappy locked hair, and an urban American vernacular coupled with a curvaceously feminine body, Black woman. My stories make explicit instances of epistemic injustice and resilience in hopes of helping others to find language and actions for resilience and self-healing. This is particularly useful for those who find themselves lacking epistemic confidence or diminished intellectual courage due to persistent epistemic injustice, a state that Fricker (2007) called epistemic oppression. In other words, epistemic injustice is a harm for which there is no foreseeable remedy and until we do something different nothing will change; more simply, “continuing to do the same thing and expecting a different outcome is insanity” (Einstein, n.d.). Let us stop the insanity by bringing this injustice to light.

During my life, I have found success through resilience learned through a life that started at birth in the basement of a hospital governed by Jim Crow laws—a life persistently influenced by my identity. I have not always lived in this city, but I attribute my return to this southern space as a life come full circle driven by opportunity and fate. On occasion, I pass that hospital where I was basement born on my way to the university where I am employed as tenured faculty.

Every time I pass that hospital, I am reminded of the dark past for Blacks in America, the people who fought and died so that I could be who I choose; these thoughts strengthen me during times when I am tempted to give up, when challenges appear insurmountable. While this particular story is uniquely mine and perhaps not useful for others, I believe that my experiences are not unique, especially for women of color or other underrepresented people in many institutions in many locations who may benefit from the ways that I transformed harm into empowered opportunity through strategic decisions that afforded choices for engaging myself and others. Choosing to write this essay is one example of a strategic and intentional choice of self-healing for professional empowerment.

Situating My Stories: Theoretical Perspectives

Epistemic Injustice

The particular harm that I have experienced repeatedly and persistently during my life and the focus for this essay finally has a name, *epistemic injustice*. This term emerges from feminist philosophy and was defined by M. Fricker (1998): credibility is culturally assigned and follows social power structure norms “so that the powerful tend to be given mere credibility and/or the powerless tend to be wrongly denied credibility” (p. 170). M. Fricker (2007) in time clarified that, “. . . the root cause of epistemic injustice is structures of unequal power and the systemic prejudices they generate” (pp. 7-8). She defines two types of epistemic injustice: (a) *testimonial injustice*, when someone’s credibility as a knower is diminished by another’s perception of that person’s identity (E. Fricker, 2002); and (b) *hermeneutic*

injustice, when someone's credibility as a knower is diminished, and there is no shared social or cultural communication to make the wrong understandable for either the wronged or those who perpetuate the injustice (M. Fricker, 2006). More simply stated, epistemic injustice occurs when a person's credibility is deflated because of another's positioning.

Epistemic injustice that is persistent and systematic is referred to as epistemic oppression and constitutes the "most surreptitious and philosophically complex forms of testimonial injustice" (M. Fricker, 2007, p. 58). Further, Fricker posited that epistemic oppression requires well-intentioned bystanders who are able to not see prejudice or bias, as well as not recognize harm manifested as deflated credibility of marginalized knowers. The result is epistemic silencing or pre-emptive epistemic injustice – the harm is that the knower's credibility is again being deflated from another's positioning. The actions of the bystander becomes a secondary instance of epistemic injustice that reifies the original injustice. For clarity, consider an overly simplistic overview of identity and positioning theory.

Identity and Positioning Theory

Identity is a complex construct and it cannot be defined in isolation (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). Identity theory suggests our identity is collective, comprised of multiple of identities, some are observable and others are not, and the collective identity define who we are at points in time and contexts that are socially and culturally mediated. For example, a university professor enters a classroom and begins setting up materials to teach, and students are there by virtue of class schedules. Most would conclude at that time in class, the professor's identity is teacher. This follows social identity theory, positioning theory is an extension of or further articulation of this—when a person or group selects or assigns a particular identity at a given time and context (Harré & Langenhove, 1999). We position ourselves, first order positioning, and others position us, second order positioning, but always within a context that is socially and culturally mediated. Interestingly, the two identities, first and second order, do not always align even when the time and context do. Thus, if that same professor were seen in a grocery store buying food another shopper within the store is likely to position the professor as a shopper. On the other hand, if a student from class were to see the professor at the store, the student is likely to position the professor as shopping teacher, while simultaneously the professor may self-identify as Mom. Ford's (2011) study of women of color faculty and White students provides several examples of student positioning that diminish faculty credibility and refers to the occurrences as (mis)recognitions, but I would characterize them as examples of epistemic injustices.

Faculty of Color in the Academy

"Historically, faculty of color have been woefully underrepresented in higher education" (Tuit, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar, & Griffin, 2009, p. 65). The National

Center for Education Statistics (2016) shows the number of doctor's degrees¹ earned by Black women continues to rise consistently and more steadily than all categories of women measured from 1976 to 2015. Black women faculty are often the only one, Black and/or woman, in a department or college; being the only one has been referred to as solo status (Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, & Thompson, 2007).

Social psychologists introduced stereotype threat (i.e., stress related to positively represent the entirety of one's race or ethnicity), and then together with critical theorists and others over time have articulated the negative influences on performance of marginalized people impacted by stereotype threat for both learning and in the workplace (e.g., Hutchison, Smith, & Ferris, 2013; McGee & Martin, 2011; Schmader, Toni, Hall, & William, 2014; Steele, 1997; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). These findings lend insight as to why so many Black women professionals informally share stories that depict credibility deflation or sometimes they lack language capable of accurate articulation of experiences, and simply categorize the experience as disrespect. When the harm cannot be named or discussed due to lack of language, Fricker (2007) defined it hermeneutic epistemic injustice. I posit many, if not all, of these types of credibility disrespecting stories might be better characterized using the language of epistemic injustice.

As the number of diverse faculty increases, so do instances of marginalization. The social science literature offers findings related to individuals or groups of faculty performance as well as those from institutional perspectives. Credibility deflation and authority devaluing were prominent themes with respect to individualized or group faculty performance and especially for women of color faculty (e.g., Bernal & Villalpando, 2002); Elias & Loomis, 2004; Pittman, 2010; 2012). Tuitt et al. (2009) described faculty of color choosing to work at PWIs experiencing challenges from several fronts within the academy, including research, teaching, and service: a) having their research discredited by peers especially when dealing with issues of race or ethnicity; b) being unwelcomed in classrooms and their credibility diminished by students; and c) being stereotype threatened causing them to exert greater effort for success. Broader institutional findings by Samuel and Wane (2005) suggested institutions reconceptualize evaluation criteria, administrative support, and interrupt negative faculty and students reactions to create a more inviting environment for diverse faculty. While, Harper's (2012) extensive higher education literature review of more than 250 articles suggested that higher education scholars must go beyond their sterilized study of race and critically examine racism if the goal is to create institutions where people of color are no longer marginalized.

Epistemic Injustice & Resilience Through Stories

My most recent instance of epistemic injustice has been systematic and persistent for over a year and has impugned my credibility as a knower and reached the point of being epistemic oppression—testimonial injustice that is persistent and

systematic (M. Fricker, 1999, 2007). The initial harm was perpetrated by students and then intensified through secondary epistemic injustices by administrators' inability or unwillingness to take a courageous stand in support of me as a credible knower and perhaps risk financial gain (i.e., cohort tuition). The result of this epistemic oppression for me was a loss of epistemic confidence and intellectual courage (M. Fricker, 2007). However, worth noting and informed by the work of Young, Anderson, and Stewart (2015), this might also be labeled hierarchical microaggression, the administrator's withholding support for my credibility. Further, when administrators take these types of actions, they are epistemically impactful for faculty given the connection between professional identity and status within the academy (M. Fricker, 2007; Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015).

As a Black woman teaching graduate level mathematics courses to primarily White women, I was accustomed to students not automatically affording me credibility as a mathematics knower at first glance due to my observable identity given extant stereotypes about the incompatibility of Black women knowing or doing mathematics (Allen & Friedman, 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, I was a gifted mathematics doer starting early on in my life and I was rarely if ever afforded a priori mathematics knower identity; not now and not then.

During third grade, my mother met with my teacher to understand why she failed to call on me to answer questions during mathematics class. The teacher indicated that she lacked sufficient time to answer "all of my questions," as my hand was always raised. My mother suggested that she call on me because I likely raised my hand to provide answers to asked questions. Much to my teacher's chagrin, she admitted she had never considered this perspective.

This experience represents my first memory with harm due to epistemic injustice. In third grade, my response was crying and disliking school. I told my mother, which prompted her to talk to the teacher. Parental advocacy is required for mathematically able children who are marginalized or minoritized in school environments in order to facilitate their children's opportunities for brilliance (Leonard & Martin, 2013). In this vignette, I share my first lesson of resilience that was taught implicitly by my mother. While I claim this story as an example of childhood epistemic injustice or oppression, even though the associated harms described by Fricker (2007) failed to manifest, even though this was an experiential norm for me during my pre-college schooling. Perhaps as a child, the harm was unnoticed; I was naïve enough to not allow my intellectual courage to be dampened or epistemic confidence to be challenged. Worth noting, after my mother met with the teacher, she instructed me to continue raising my hand in class when I had answers or questions and to let her know if the teacher failed to call on me such that I felt unfairly treated again. I recall this instruction from my mother to be very empowering, epistemically and otherwise. From my limited perspective as a third-grader, I believed that my mother was very powerful, she had "told" that teacher, and the teacher had to change. I

do not actually recall if she changed or if the problem was fixed in that class, but I suspect something changed for two reasons: a) my mother has always been a very direct and convincing woman; and b) to this day, I continue to struggle to not offer my ideas within most settings.

I attest that I never liked school at any level because I was often the only Black girl, solo status (Sekaquaptewa et al., 2007) and my *knowing* never seemed to be a given within the predominantly White institutions (PWIs) where I attended. There were two exceptions to my school loathing, the first was when I attended schools where the student body was predominantly Black from ages 16-20 years. The second exception to my school loathing occurred when I chose to go back for my initial graduate degree, which was a very intense one year program, where there was precious little time for anything beyond study and student teaching.

I created the opportunity to attend predominately Black schools after 10th grade, I was 15 years old and made a case for change:

Epistemic *justice* experience: In the 9th grade I convinced my mother to allow me to attend a school in the city, it was a school with a predominantly Black student body on the edge of the city and was considered a “good” high school, and my cousin attended the same school. I attended that school for my sophomore year full-time, but because I excelled in mathematics, in my junior year I attended high school part-time and then went to a local HBCU to take mathematics and earn credits for high school and college. For my senior year, I only attended college, but earned dual credit, awesome!

During this five-year period, my race was the majority race in the institution, but in mathematics class at the historically Black college or university (HBCU) my gender was often underrepresented, but I excelled in this space anyway. My *knowing* was never questioned by teachers or peers, my mathematics intellect was readily and proudly accepted, and my teachers and peers regularly acknowledged me as a gifted mathematics knower publically. Several of my teachers were Black for the first time in my life. I met the first Black woman faculty at an institution of higher education who was a Ph.D. credentialed mathematician and I looked up to her, but I do not recall ever telling her; knowing the things I know now, I deeply regret not telling her of my admiration. As a mathematics knower during that time I was epistemically confident and courageous, graduated from high school and the HBCU with high honors, and the reasons for my success are well documented in the literature (e.g., Berry III, Ellis, & Hughes, 2014; Leonard & Martin, 2013; Walker, 2006) and the things highlighted here articulate several of the reasons.

While at the HBCU and because faculty and administrators were aware of my mathematics intellect, I was one of several students targeted to pursue engineering studies when a state PWI came to our HBCU in search of minoritized students who might succeed in their engineering program. This occurred in the early 1980’s when affirmative action (i.e., legislated mandates to diversify private industry and institutions) was in full effect. The offer to pursue an engineering degree was af-

forded to a privileged few top mathematics and science students at the HBCU, and included a full academic scholarship and paid internships when school was not in session in return for good grades. Not a bad deal.

I entered a dual degree program while at the HBCU. The deal was struck to increase minority enrollment at a regional PWI and in return I could earn two STEM undergraduate degrees in five years, again awesome! The down side for me was that I had forgotten that I did not like school and forgotten what it felt like when my credibility as a knower was not a given, but I was quickly reminded upon my arrival at the large PWI research university that was technically located in the southern United States. I found others like myself in the Black Engineers Society (BES) and together we found strength and support and most of us made it to graduation.

While I remained the only one in most classes while earning my STEM credentials, my membership in the BES sustained me and provided much needed solace during hard times.

There was one very unpleasant epistemic injustice experience during my time as an undergraduate student at the PWI that exemplifies the challenge faced by many during this time related to affirmative action and racial tension. I believe I was targeted because of identity prejudice and power inequity, often underlying impetus of epistemic injustice (M. Fricker, 2007). I had out performed my peers, who were primarily White males in an astronomy course.

My professor accused me of cheating in a very public way. At the time, while I was outraged by the accusation, I had no tools to fight. I felt very frustrated. I called home for support. My mother took immediate action. . . . I watched as she helped this tenured department chair in the college of sciences to understand in her very direct and convincing way how a grave injustice had been perpetrated against me (i.e., her beloved daughter who was a routinely high achiever, and of demonstrated high integrity) by a professor in his department (i.e., who she believed held racial bias). She then made it clear that she was not ignorant of the internal workings of universities, described her intent to pursue the matter through to the university president who supported affirmative action, and then through legal actions if her daughter was not exonerated from this false and unjustified claim. The chair was convinced and shortly thereafter, the professor made a public apology to me.

My contemporary interpretation of this situation is that this administrator was committed to diversity and my success, and his commitment when tested went beyond the written policy or surface implementation of affirmative action. He took a stance that interrupted potential harm to me by standing with the solo status young Black woman in opposition to a privileged faculty member whose perspective was stereotypical for that time and within that environment. To this day, I do not know if there were repercussions for that professor as a result of the administrator's decision, but I never encountered him again during my final year. I graduated and BES recognized me for earning one of the highest GPA's among graduates that year.

Reflecting on this event now, I can clearly name the harm as epistemic injustice, specifically an instance of hermeneutical injustice (M. Fricker, 2006, 2007) because at the time I lacked language for explicitly describing the experience that sought to diminish my credibility. Additionally, worth noting, had the administrator found me guilty of cheating I would have been expelled from school, lost my full academic scholarship, and likely not graduated. Unlike my third-grade experience, as an undergraduate college student, I recognized that harm was intended and I immediately stood to face it boldly. My mother's explicit and sustained resiliency training in my life was a part of me and in full effect. This was the last time I called my mother to advocate on my behalf in the face of epistemic injustice. In this instance, I stood beside my mother defiant and fight ready. I was resilient in this experience, and as I recall it never occurred to me to quit.

During my undergraduate education, I always worked. My first job was tutoring undergraduate mathematics students at the HBCU's tutoring center. An element of the four-year academic scholarship was a paid internship at an aerospace and defense development company. During breaks and summers when I was at home and not in school, I worked by rotating through departments engaging in and learning different aspects of engineering development projects underway at the company. For the last two years of my undergraduate education when I lived away from home attending the PWI, I was hired at a fortune 100 company to write white papers (e.g., mini research papers) about STEM technologies. As a high-achieving STEM student and Black woman graduating from a well-respected university, I was heavily recruited, not only because I was Black and female during the affirmative action era, but because I had a variety of work experiences, which evidenced a high level of competence as compared to my peers of all races, ethnicities, and genders.

My undergraduate experiences at the PWI led me to vow to never return to school again backed by the full commitment of a 21-year-old. . . . I turned down several offers for free graduate school with commitments for executive leadership positions upon graduation, including one company who wanted me to study nuclear engineering and then run a nuclear power plant. I joined a fortune 100 corporation as an electrical engineer. After more than a decade and a half as a STEM professional in private industry my experiences had toughened my resolve, I adopted my mother's direct and convincing voice, and I no longer ran home crying in the face of epistemic injustice and its harm; and there were many as I was a solo status employee and was influenced by stereotype threat within the engineering field that continues to be male dominated.

My resilience blossomed during my years in the private sector as I navigated epistemic injustice and oppression in multiple forms as a solo status employee, while working my way up the corporate ladder toward the glass ceiling, which is typically lowered for Black women in most corporations. The myriad challenges are well documented in the literature (e.g., Johnson & Richeson, 2009; Roberson, Deitch, Brief, & Block, 2003; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2003; Sekaquaptewa et al., 2007).

I left private industry to make a difference in the world for other Black children like me. During the tumultuous 1990's of private industry consolidations and employee downsizings, I decided to pursue graduate school and teacher licensure.

Upon arrival for graduate studies I continued to find myself in solo or near solo status graduate courses, my knowing was not a given, but it seemed to be accepted by many if not all of the professors I encountered during my Master's program at the progressive and very large Midwestern research university. After almost 10 years, I returned for doctoral studies and I found similar acceptance from faculty, but there were differences in opportunities afforded between solo status me and my peers, but that is another story for another time. I was hired and earned tenure at the site where the most recent epistemic injustice occurred.

I was finally assigned to teach a student cohort that I had recruited for a master's level mathematics course. This graduate cohort was comprised of almost 20 women, one Black the rest White. Cohorts take classes as a group and they were at the end of the second year of a three year Master's program. The women had established a community prior to me teaching them. . . . Some students were not pleased with the grades they had earned, even though the assigned grades were reflective of their mathematics performance and other specialist's knowledge, and overall their grades were very good based on criteria for maintaining good standing in graduate level courses, as well as for elementary teachers taking a master's level mathematics course. The cohort students voiced their dissatisfaction through negative comments directed at my character in course evaluations, several students pursued actions to have grades changed, and the cohort, excluding two women (i.e., the Black woman and another woman), formally petitioned the administration to participate in deflating my credibility.

Epistemic injustice was perpetrated through discourses and language used by these students to describe me in course evaluations and in formal written communications with university administrators and representatives in the state's department of education. The initial harm was initiated and perpetrated by students; however, this harm was intensified, I would like to think unwittingly, by the response from my administration. The administrative response to this epistemic injustice was multifaceted and included: epistemic silencing and pre-emptive epistemic injustice. Unlike the administrator from my undergraduate experience of epistemic injustice, these administrators lacked courage to stand up for me as a knower. I requested and expected administrators to show courage by interrupting students' epistemic injustices. Alternatively, the decisions made exacerbated the initial harm thereby rendering the epistemic injustices persistent and systematic—epistemic oppression. I state this as a point of fact from my intellectually informed and thus privileged perspective and not as an indictment on administrators from my university. I sincerely believe these administrators lack the intellectual, social, or cultural capital required to understand my predicament which is made more complex because my epistemic oppression was situated at the intersection of the sociocultural contexts of solo status and stereotype threat.

I have come to recognize, through studying epistemic injustice from feminist philosophy theory and solo status combined with stereotype threat from social psychology, that a PWI that envisions attracting and retaining diverse faculty requires commitment beyond writing a vision statement, goals, and publishing words on the institution's website. This is doubly true for a university situated in the state that was once the capital of the confederacy in the United States and during the period after the first Black president left office and the 45th presidency and his cabinet took office. The current climate emitted from governmental leadership is steeped in messages that some claim reflects positions of misogyny, racism, anti-Semitism, and other negative-isms. Even so, I stand firm and resilient in the face of this harm.

After earning tenure, in the midst of experiencing the most recent and traumatic epistemic oppression, I immediately applied for and was granted research leave. In part, the initial impetus for requesting leave was time away for self-healing. Prior to making application for leave, I contacted an informal mentor (i.e., a long-established and successful Black woman and full professor at a southern research university) to seek guidance. She invited me to come to her university to share my new line of research (i.e., the focus of this essay) with faculty and doctoral students. At the time, I took a leap of faith and simply followed her trusted advice; I lacked intellectual confidence and courage and struggled to believe that I had anything worthy of sharing with anyone, especially with scholars or students at this particular research institution. I not only took the sage advice from this mentor, during the application process, I doubled down on it and contacted other senior mentors in my field and a potential new collaborator in hopes of securing invitations for other scholarly activities and secured two more university visits. I recently returned from my visit with my informal mentor, faculty, and students; I found the scholarly interchange and discourse epistemically restorative and revitalizing. Thus far, my research leave has been rejuvenating and has enabled me to kick off two new very focused lines of research – one is restorative and the other has potential for building a new long term collaboration and perhaps major funding over time. Awesome!!!

In the preceding vignette, I mentioned lacking intellectual confidence and courage, which is a particular type of harm that stems from epistemic oppression (M. Fricker, 2007). In addition to this intellectual debilitation, I also experienced anxiety and other physiological indications, such as increased heart rate whenever the situation or artifacts thereof confronted me via email or meetings. Looking back, what was happening is that I was metaphorically drowning because administrators were either unable or unwilling to hear or acknowledging my voiced harm. Had I not had the wherewithal to reach out to mentors outside my institution and for them to reach back to me and throw a metaphoric life preserver, I suspect this epistemic oppression may have become academically fatal.

My epistemic therapy was studying the cause of the real harm I experienced and the intellectual life saver was the visit to my mentor's university. She created

an opportunity to share my early perspectives about a conceptual framework that articulates a relationship among epistemic injustice, solo status, and stereotype threat that I posited as useful for studying intersectionality in the academy and other spaces where people are minoritized or underrepresented. The two together, epistemic therapy and life saver proved to be both intellectually restorative and revitalizing.

The restoration was so dramatic that I courageously decided during the visit with my mentor to write this autoethnography, my first, and was encouraged by my mentor as well as an experienced autoethnographer to do so with their support. But independent of whether my manuscript is selected for publication I recognized that one way to push back against epistemic oppression is to find space outside of the oppressive environment to find solace through active engagement in pursuit of intellectually stimulating and taxing activities. I believe that time is of the essence and intellectual action must be taken as soon as possible to mitigate the harm once you realize you are experiencing epistemic oppression, persistent and systematic epistemic injustice (i.e., others position you in ways that diminish you as a knower), at least that was true for me.

Conclusion and Future Study

I wrote this essay of personal stories to spread intellectual capital about the hidden challenges faced by some diverse faculty seeking permanency without harm at PWIs. Many PWIs establish goals for and appear intent on attracting and retaining diverse faculty but have not prepared for the obstacles seen and unseen that stymie the efforts. My history in resilience shaped the ways I responded to epistemic injustices and my approaches are similar to recommendations documented in the literature. Several researchers identified explicit resistance and hostility perpetrated by majority students toward minoritized faculty in ways that diminished them as credible knowers (e.g., Ford, 2011; Samuel & Wane, 2005). Other research diminished the value of minoritized faculty's research and scholarly pursuits situated in community (Zambrana, et al., 2015). Further, faculty and student complaints or actions related to these ways of diminishing credibility can manifest in the academy as harms to minoritized faculty who then must succeed within environments that some have characterized as unwelcoming or even hostile (Ford, 2011; Tuitt, et al., 2009). Some recommended support networks comprised of majority and minoritized faculty working collaboratively and with understanding of minoritized faculty challenges (e.g., Samuel & Wane, 2005; Zambrana, et al., 2015). Zambrana and colleagues (2015) recommended tailored mentoring designed to increase social capital within the academy. These recommendations constitute a starting point for action that can be led by the minoritized faculty outside her institution, if needed, and they align with remedies I sought for survival based on my history and experiences. However, this is clearly not a comprehensive remedy for PWIs seeking to attract and retain diverse faculty, which is well beyond the scope of me and my stories that shaped

this essay. However, it is clear that much more is required of institutions intent on diversifying faculty at PWIs.

There are many complex questions that need to be asked and interrogated if PWIs want to attract and retain diverse faculty, a feat that cannot succeed without tackling the messiness of race and racism (Harper, 2012; Patton, 2016). For example: How can majority faculty and administrators be trained so they can understand solo status and stereotype threat in the workplace beyond surface definitions? How might epistemic injustices be captured, shared, and recognized as a real thing that causes psychological and emotional harm (i.e., diminished intellectual confidence and courage), especially for solo status faculty who may be working through challenges imposed by both stereotype threat and epistemic injustice(s)? What role, if any, do microaggressions play within epistemic injustices experienced by minoritized faculty at PWIs? How might administrators be supported to more readily recognize and then be incited to interrupt epistemic injustices or oppression, even if doing so is perceived as individually risky? These are vitally important questions that matter to those institutions and their stakeholders who dare to pursue the lofty goal of attracting and retaining diverse faculty.

Note

¹ Includes Ph.D., Ed.D., and comparable degrees at the doctoral level, as well as such degrees as M.D., D.D.S., and law degrees that were formerly classified as first-professional degrees.

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Un réquiem para la lucha Afro-Boricua

Honoring Moments of Decolonization and Resistance to White Supremacy in Academia

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It's nice that you can claim your clan to purebred pedigree descendancy. But middle passages mark the make-up of my amalgamated Afro-Boricua's ancestry.

—Descendancy, Mayda Del Valle, 2010

Introduction

The shared experiences and othering of people of color (POC) in society serve as the impetus for framing our work as critical Afro-Boricua scholars. Our efforts to center our stories and positionalities are connected to the scant number of faculty of color in higher education in which there are only 6% Black, and 5% Hispanic (not disaggregated by gender) (NCES, 2013). This lack of faculty of color is indicative of the legacy of white supremacy (Wilder, 2013) and the deficit ideologies (Nieto, 2003) that still persist in higher education (and society at large). The impact of deficit ideologies on women of color in higher education has been well documented, most recently in the works of Perlow, Bethea and Wheeler (2014) and Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, González and Harris (2012). Thus our continued presence in the academy serves to consistently contest white supremacy, simultaneously creating alternative spaces and approaches to teaching and learning that center humanity. By centering our humanity, we challenge the focus on product and profit in higher

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education and focus on the lives and work of our students, colleagues, as well as our own. We see our role as educators reflected in Ayers' (2004) essay *Between Heaven and Earth: What Is Teaching for?*

Education, no matter where or when it takes place, enables teachers and students alike to become more powerfully and self-consciously alive; it embraces as principle and overarching purpose the aspiration of people to become more fully human; it impels us toward further knowledge, enlightenment, and human community, toward liberation. (p.1)

As Afro-Boricua faculty in higher education, our presence is a purposeful and necessary act in resisting narrow understandings of who has the right to engage in knowledge construction, simultaneously exercising our agency to create and renegotiate knowledge. Coming from spaces of organic intellectualism (Darder & Torres, 2013) compels us to deconstruct the narratives pervasive in higher education rooted in White Supremacist Capital Heteropatriarchy (WSCH) (hooks, 2003). We utilize the WSCH descriptor in recognition that the spaces of higher education we must engage are saturated with ideologies of heteronormativity, and work in tandem with white supremacist capitalist norms to further disenfranchise LGBTQ communities of color. Our use of the term heteropatriarchy instead of patriarchy is a political one in which we recognize/name homophobic practices, and stand in solidarity with LGBTQ folks whose presence is consistently devalued, marginalized or ignored.

We have learned from our families and community members, that knowledge is created everywhere and by everyone. While none of our parents attended college, their *educación* (Valenzuela, 1999) was one created and constantly re-created in community spaces that value humanity, as they lived through the struggle and hope of the late 1950s and 1960s; a time when the nation was shook with movement building from the Civil Rights movement to Vietnam War Protests and many other movements unfolding within global and local contexts. In Chicago, there was a movement swelling from youth street organizations that were being politicized and fighting for social justice. During this time, our parents were young adults, witnessing the Puerto Rican street gang, The Young Lords Organization (YLO), transition from a gang to a human rights organization in 1968; working towards self-determination, and the liberation of all oppressed peoples through activism (Jimenez, 1972). The sociopolitical context of this era included the pretext for the assemblage of YLO. As Ogbar (2006) explains:

Several factors precipitated the development of popular grassroots Puerto Rican nationalism, included larger anti-imperialist struggles, Cold War politics, and the Black Freedom and Women's Liberation movements in the U.S. The new Puerto Rican nationalism of the 1960s developed simultaneously among baby boomers in two different cities, converging and giving rise to the most celebrated Puerto Rican organization of the era, YLO (p. 150)

As beneficiaries of YLO's efforts, we see it as our responsibility and duty to resist WSCH, simultaneously working to re-define and re-imagine educational spaces that

are rooted in humanity, solidarity and justice. Specifically, in this article we seek to: (1) claim and describe our own identity development as Afro-Boricua scholars, (2) amplify the need to develop Black and Brown solidarity/coalitions amongst scholars of color in the academy, building and maintaining liberatory spaces that resist WSCH, and (3) build upon said coalitions as a necessary form of healing and resistance in our efforts to counter the rampant institutional and societal microaggressions that people of color, specifically women of color, encounter daily.

In this article, we utilize counter-narratives to share stories that have and continue to shape our identities as critical scholars in the field of Education. Milner and Howard (2013) state:

In a sense, stories are autobiographical, historical, and grounded in multiple and varied ways of knowing and experiencing the world. Thus, we argue that narratives (and counter-narratives) have important places in the study of teachers, students, policies and related practices in teacher education. Researchers are charged with gathering the storied lives of people and with constructing those represented and lived stories for consumers of them. (p. 540)

Historically, our stories as Puerto Ricans/Boricuas have been silenced in the traditional curriculum, so in our work we resist invisibility by centering our narratives as both data and curricula. Reflecting on, and sharing our stories allows us to weave our collective lived experiences into autoethnographic narratives that offer the context of our development and sustainability as critical educators. We recognize that systems of oppression are pervasive in most institutions and their functions have been normalized in society. Our stories illuminate the agency we possess within larger structures and systems—including those functioning in institutions of higher education—that seek to undermine our institutional and personal work. Despite the daily microaggressions we endure—we choose to stay. In the following sections we illustrate some of the ways in which our presence and work has been encouraged and valued, affirming our efforts to assert our presence as a radical act of resistance to WSCH.

In the first counter-narrative, *Cracking Codes of Whiteness*, we share early experiences negotiating WSCH and the ways in which Puerto Rican identity has been affirmed in our family. In the second counter-narrative, *Tengo Puerto Rico en mi Corazón: A Pedagogy of Solidarity*, we describe and reflect upon our encounter with Puerto Rican history from our families and within the university curriculum and the responses to the systematic oppression of our people we were learning about, informing and shaping our own identity and pedagogy. Finally, in our closing counter narrative, *Cultivating Spaces of Healing*, we discuss our experiences in collaborating with other women of color on projects and educational events. These experiences speak to our recognition and affirmation of Puerto Rico's connections to the African Diaspora informing our need and desire to collectively build with others as a means of healing and our continued resistance to systems and structures built on WSCH. Our recognition of Afro-Puerto Rican identity is nuanced. While

we understand Puerto Ricans as synonymous to Black, societal constructions of who is, or isn't Black (or Latinx) is premised on a Black/White binary, despite the long-standing recognition and subsequent rise of Afro-Latinx scholars, artists, musicians, etc. (e.g. Antonia Pantoja, Celia Cruz, Edward Bonilla-Silva, Arturo Schomburg, Tego Calderon, The Afro-Latino festival in NYC, etc). As a result, when we discuss Black/Brown coalition building, this includes working within the Black/White binary, while also pushing against this narrow framing and understanding of race/ethnicity amongst various communities.

HERstory:

Resisting Whiteness, Cultivating Solidarity and Healing

Cracking Codes of Whiteness

Our youth are tired of being intimidated through tactics that are trying to force my assimilation, causing me to question my creation. You must have mistaken me for Hansel and Gretel, thinking I'd jump into the melting pot!

—Descendency, Mayda Del Valle, 2010

Our parents instilled in us a strong sense of Boricua identity, constantly reminding us of their struggles emigrating from Puerto Rico and the strength/tenacity of Puerto Rican people and culture. We are first cousins, but were raised more like sisters in a large, close-knit Puerto Rican family in Chicago. Our parents' understanding of identity was much more complex than the dichotomous master narrative among Puerto Ricans of rich light-skinned and poor dark-skinned Puerto Ricans in which race is constructed based on an individual's phenotype (Duany, 2002). In our family, being Puerto Rican was much more nuanced given the myriad of complexions, hair textures, nose and lip shapes, eye color, etc. that comprised our familial households and Puerto Rican communities at large. They laid bare Puerto Rico's connections to Africa's middle passage and Spain's colonial conquest of the island's native Taino people. Our family's comprehensive understanding of being Puerto Rican parallels the powerful words of Puerto Rican poet Pedro Pietri, which was first read in 1969 at a rally in support of the New York Young Lords Organization (YLO):

Aqui Se Habla Español all the time
 Aqui you salute your flag first
 Aqui there are no dial soap commercials
 Aqui everybody smells good
 Aqui tv dinners do not have a future
 Aqui the men and women admire desire
 and never get tired of each other
 Aqui Que Paso Power is what's happening
 Aqui to be called negrito
 means to be called LOVE

—*Puerto Rican Obituary*, Pietri, 1973

As individuals born and raised in familial spaces that echo Pietri's poetry, we have constantly struggled to break from the codes of Whiteness that Pietri highlights in his poem—both personally and professionally. One of the codes of whiteness in "Puerto Rican Obituary" includes the significance of the word "negrito" as a term of endearment in Puerto Rican culture versus the term "negrito" in mainstream white culture which is used to demean and marginalize our people. This understanding does not negate the colorism¹ that exists within Puerto Rican and other Latinx communities (including our own families). For the purposes of this paper, we focus on the poem's message of unconditional love and centering of humanity. For example, when Pietri states that there are no soap commercials "aquí" yet we are all clean, for us that means that we do not need to assimilate (or consume said commercial) to be fully human and be loved. His words affirm, honor and promote our Afro-Boricua identity.

Familial affirmation of Puerto Rican culture was a constant feature of our childhood. Recalling an experience (Dávila) from 4th grade—the first year in an all-English Chicago Public School (CPS) classroom after transitioning from a bilingual program—where all the students were Latinx and native Spanish speakers and some native English and Spanish speakers, but not fluent enough in English for the school's standards. It was picture day and my mom insisted that I wear a yellow dress with ruffles, and matching yellow hair bows. I was devastated, as I was seeking approval from my new peers and teacher, who were primarily white. I wanted to dress and wear my hair like the "normal" (translation: white) girls in the class. I exclaimed to my mother in my 9-year old rage that the dress was, "too Puerto Rican!" to which my mom quickly responded, "Y que eres?" ("and what are you?")—an explicit reminder that I WAS/AM Puerto Rican! At the time I didn't understand, but reluctantly wore the dress and bows anyway. Thirty years later I treasure that photograph because I understand now that it was a much-needed lesson in cultural affirmation (Nieto, 2003). That day I received an important message: I was not white and more importantly, I did not need to conform to whiteness. My mother helped me see that being Puerto Rican meant taking pride in my culture while working to navigate my way through the WSCH in the schools that I attended.

Despite the white supremacist deficit narrative about Latinx parents not valuing formal education (Valencia and Black, 2002), our parents saw its critical importance, despite their own lack thereof, and their own struggles with the institutional racism in the school systems both in Puerto Rico and on the mainland. As Ramos-Zayas (2003) found, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) enforced policies and practices detrimental to Puerto Rican students and families, however she also found that the Puerto Rican community resisted these detrimental policies. The normalcy of white supremacy was embedded in the educational institutions we interacted with daily, poisoning our minds with self-doubt, our hearts with shame and pushing us towards assimilation. At this early age we did not have the language or analytical tools to make sense of our lived experiences, however we felt in our

spirits and hearts the negative treatment, low expectations and poor outcomes impacting our *gente* (people)—all of these dynamics embedded in hierarchical constructs of race/ethnicity, gender, language, and citizenship. In our experience, Puerto Rican history was, and is still omitted from the lessons, topics and events that we were exposed to in our respective schools. Instead, we were indoctrinated with the traditional “great” White men master narrative.

Although these oppressive structures encumbered our spirits daily, the unwitting consequence was that we were imbued with critical consciousness, power and resistance (Ramos-Zayas, 2003). Our adolescent resistance manifested itself in several ways such as participating in a police brutality march organized by black and brown high school youth (Dávila); joining and creating student clubs focused on social change and Latinx identity affirmation (Aviles). While we did not receive information/lessons in our formal schooling process, our early familial and educational experiences helped us understand that being Puerto Rican encompassed Indigenous, African and European ancestry. Embracing all aspects, in particular our African ancestral lineage, set the stage for coalition building amongst both Black and Brown communities, compelling us to be a part of organizations and events that further affirmed our Afro-Boricua identity; simultaneously laying the groundwork for practices that preserve our cultural pride and promote resistance to oppressive systems and practices.

Tengo Puerto Rico en mi corazón: A Pedagogy of Solidarity

The Chi-town, midwest windy city in me. The be bop, hip hop, non-stop salsa con sabor queen of soul in me...The Taina con dolor in me. The Marvin Gaye and sweetened lemonade on sunny days in me. The descendancy that doesn't deny the darker shades of skin in me...I see you're being blind, not seeing past the kinds of fabricated fictional fables, assaulted ancestral accounts.

—Descendancy, Mayda Del Valle, 2010

The tensions that exist between Latinx and Blacks has been well-documented (Dzidzienyo and Oboler, 2005; Vaca, 2004). However, focusing on differences amongst communities simply serves as a tactic for divisiveness and a perpetual “fight” for resources, access and political power. Recognizing that we all lose when we subscribe to a WSCH social system and structure, should serve as a critical point of collaboration and solidarity amongst Black and Brown communities, including candid and respectful conversations that call out and resist anti-Blackness and White supremacy within our respective communities. Our understanding of these community dynamics serves as a reminder of our need to resist the Black/Brown divide, simultaneously, we deliberately create welcoming spaces for collaboration amongst and within our communities.

Given the historical (and contemporary) connections to Africa amongst Puerto Ricans (and other Latinx populations), there is no denying our African lineage and

its influence on Puerto Rican culture and identity (Santiago, n.d.). Socio-historically, migration of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. coincided with the second wave of Southern blacks to the northern cities (Aponte, 1990), creating similar experiences for both populations in U.S. cities such as New York and Chicago. Our parents arrived on the mainland from Puerto Rico prior to the height of the civil rights movement, or the mobilization of YLO, but also at a time when activism was very much alive. Many Puerto Rican youth recognized their experiences with racism, housing/employment discrimination and poor living/educational conditions, paralleled that of Blacks, contributing to solidarity efforts with Black youth. Further, given the phenotypic variations amongst Puerto Ricans, many were (and are) seen as Black by law enforcement, teachers, and society writ large. It is of no surprise then, that YLO's mobilization efforts were a reflection and continuation of organizations such as the Black Panther Party (BPP), who took an anti-colonial and militant approach to resisting white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy. YLO's philosophy and praxis to addressing inequities resonates with our lived experiences as Afro-Boricuas in Chicago. We often found common ground with our Black classmates—occupying a similar space of “other” in our respective K-20 educational institutions. We have attempted to, and wish to continue to build on the solidarity efforts exemplified by YLO and BPP in our resistance to systems of oppression.

As Betancur (2005) notes “Commonalities associated with their [Latinx and Black] minority condition (*vis-à-vis* opportunity and access) provide the grounds and potential for cooperation” (p. 164). Given these intersections, historical and contemporary complexities of collaboration, and shared histories, our work seeks to put forth a call to recognize, respect, (re)connect and encourage collaboration as means to build solidarity and strength amongst scholars of color in the academy. Martinez (1998) recalls a conversation with Jim Forman (Executive Secretary of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]), in which he urges Latinxs to embrace their black identity. “We’re all Black don’t you see? African people and Mexican people and Puerto Rican people, we are all Black in the eyes of racism. So we must come together as Black” (p. 476). In response to this call, we understand the need to affirm our Afro-Boricua identities as resistance to institutional racism, stemming from White supremacy. Heeding Forman’s call to “come together as Black,” we assert our Afro-Boricua identities as a conscious, deliberate and necessary coalition-building strategy to further create and support anti-oppressive and liberatory spaces within schools and communities. In memoriam of, and in respect to those that have provided a framework in which to situate our lived experiences, pedagogies, and praxes, we briefly describe various individuals and organizations that have laid the foundation for our work. These events and movements serve as the context for our personal/professional development and as models for critical engagement with various social institutions rooted in principles of WSCH.

YLO was a critical and self-affirming act of resistance and organizing taken on by young Puerto Ricans in Chicago (as well as New York City and other cit-

ies) seeking to free themselves from a colonial existence. We were not formally introduced to YLO until college (a reflection of the Eurocentric K-12 curriculum). During our undergraduate and graduate studies we learned about the Young Lords Organization (YLO), a Revolutionary Political Party Fighting for the Liberation of All Oppressed People (Lazú 2013). While we were both engaging critical work in education, we discussed this new knowledge and wondered if our family had any role in the assemblage and/or activism of YLO. Little did we know (and perhaps why this work feels so personal), our kin was directly linked to YLO and various family members have shared stories with us from their upbringing within the rise and fall of YLO.

We were particularly drawn to the following YLO points:

We want independence and self-determination for the People of Aztlán and Puerto Rico;

We want an end to the inner-city removal of Latinos and other poor and oppressed people;

We want Latinos and all poor and oppressed people to control the housing to be built in their respective communities so that they can be sure it is fit for human beings and economically reasonable;

We want equality for the sexes;

We want the same good and efficient health care that is given to the rich to be given to Latinos and other poor and oppressed people. HEALTH CARE IS A HUMAN RIGHT;

We want an end to the brutalization and cold-blooded murder of Latinos and all poor and oppressed people. (Jimenez, 1972)

The work of YLO addressed overarching issues (e.g. police brutality, lack of access to health care, social services, etc.) across a myriad of populations, facilitating our understanding that the struggles of Puerto Ricans were intertwined with the struggles of many other marginalized and oppressed peoples. YLO's efforts were intersectional, global and cross generational. This perspective serves as a pillar in our approach to working with, and across Black and Latinx communities; pushing us to consistently work towards racial/ethnic collaborations, specifically amongst our respective communities. YLO's approach and promotion of solidarity also laid the groundwork for the broadening of our understanding of what constitutes "scholarship." As Lazú (2013) notes:

YLO members insisted that their purpose extended even beyond the [Nationalist] ideologies that they carefully studied and shared with the community in the same process. Ideologies were funneled into the objective of raising the consciousness of the people in those communities about the conditions they were living and the options they had for responding to seemingly insurmountable disparities (p. 33).

A key goal of YLO was to raise consciousness, particularly in language that was universal to the larger Puerto Rican community. As Latinas born and raised in a hypersegregated Chicago, we were directly impacted by gentrification, racism, sexism and linguicism, and understand all too well the material and social impact this has had on our lives, as well as the lives of others negatively impacted by capitalism, imperialism, heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. As young graduate students, we felt a direct connection to the angst and will to resist demonstrated by YLO and BPP. We were inspired and humbled by their actions, discipline and determination to resist racism and oppression.

YLO facilitated their goals, through their pedagogy and direct action. YLO had its own newspaper (modeled after *The Black Panther* newspaper). The YLO newspaper promoted an awareness of local and global justice and community empowerment. (Lazú, 2013). Through various community efforts and actions, YLO sought to inform Puerto Ricans of their history, creating opportunities for self-determination and urged them to fight the injustice and imperialism impacting their daily lives. The scholarship of YLO also included a *Women's Position Paper* that denounced machismo and supported the freedom and equality of all women (<http://palante.org/Women.htm>). While there was some resistance among the male leadership of YLO, the critical feminist lens and analysis in which the Lordettes (female Young Lord members) functioned serves as an example of their educational roles as organic intellectuals. Their study of nationalism was not undertaken simply for the consumption of knowledge; the impetus for studying various ideologies was to resist oppression in all its forms, including patriarchy.

We understood our higher education studies as necessary in our efforts to combat the many injustices we experienced and witnessed. Taking a class (Aviles) on Puerto Rican Culture and History exposed the discrimination and exploitation Puerto Ricans endured on the island as well as in the "States." One film, *La Operacion* (Krase, 2014) documented the forced sterilization of Puerto Rican women that benefitted U.S.-based factories and allowed U.S. drug companies to test early versions of birth control—all without the knowledge or consent of the women. This specific history of forced sterilization was one that really penetrated our hearts. In 2008 for the 40th Anniversary of YLO we (Aviles and Dávila) heard a Puerto Rican poet and YLO member, David Hernandez, (later we learned he was also our mothers' cousin) at a community event. "Florencia," a poem about one of our great aunts who was a casualty of *La Operacion* reads, "This was done to my aunt after my cousin Anita was born and after grieving for a while ... she [Florencia] eventually saved money moved to Chicago and got a better job [after losing her only daughter Anita at 16 from a coat hanger operation] she moved back to Puerto Rico and went to work for the same company who forcibly sterilized her" (www.poetrypoetry.com). David's poem provided us an even deeper connection to the history of forced sterilization given that our very kin suffered from this oppressive practice. This personal connection contributes inspiration and fuel for our work as critical scholars.

Moreover, YLO “aligned itself with models of popular education and the political and educational ideals of the 1960s and 1970s Civil Rights Movement, YLO was committed to linking its pedagogical ideas to the students of the social and political environment and ultimately, civic engagement” (Lazú, 2013, p. 45). Inspired by YLO, our pedagogy/scholarship is predicated on our positionality as women of color in which we seek to uncover inequitable/oppressive systems and structures, while simultaneously working towards community empowerment and contributing to the larger movement towards justice. YLO enacted an unapologetic self-determinism and activism becoming part of the legacy of Puerto Rican resistance and consciousness (Lazú, 2013). We see our work as a continuation of Black/Brown coalition building for social justice and as affirmation of our connection to the African Diaspora.

Understanding the critical importance of the need to build community and relationships amongst Black and Brown students, we brought this perspective and approach into our interactions with Black students during our graduate studies. Recognizing there was no formal structure on campus to support graduate students of color, coupled with the support we received from established Black and Brown faculty, a small group of students of color (Aviles and Dávila included) created a space and eventually a more formal organization to support our well-being and completion of the doctoral program. Our group met monthly to discuss concerns about our work, as well as the micro-aggressions we endured in our respective Predominately White Institutions (PWI). What began as an informal space to “vent” about our challenges turned into a critical space in which we viewed each other’s work, provided feedback to one another and supported one another, both personally and professionally.

Our group, the Alliance of Latina/o and Black Graduate Students (ALBGS), set personal and academic goals, and provided each other with feedback, critique and pushed one another to strengthen our scholarship. As aspiring critical scholars of color, we understood that our scholarship would be viewed with increased scrutiny, simply due to our racial/ethnic background. Further, given that many of us engage in research that centers on and interrogates issue of race/class/gender, we wanted to ensure that our work was not only of “high” quality, but more importantly that it was reflective of our collective experiences as people of color, countering the master-narrative pervasive in institutions of higher education.

The collaborations developed in our graduate programs, and the subsequent benefits, strengthened our belief in Black/Brown solidarity, and continue to shape our approach to teaching and learning; specifically the ways in which we support students in PWIs. As students develop their own critical consciousness, they often identify the many inequities inherent in higher education. It is our responsibility as critical educators to create spaces that support student analysis, advocacy and action—on and off campus. To promote and facilitate this, we embed community events that address the many issues impacting their schools and communities (e.g. school-to-prison pipeline, police brutality, immigration, etc.) into our courses and

encourage students to become involved in various justice-based movements (e.g. Black Lives Matter, Ayotzinapa 43, Coalition to Revitalize Dyett, etc.). As Lilla Watson (n.d.) Aboriginal elder, activist and educator from Queensland, Australia states, “If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” Liberation of Black and Brown communities is intertwined; this understanding is integral to our coalition building work on and off campus.

Cultivating Spaces of Healing as Resistance

We must be courageous in our willingness to put out fires that we did not start. We are all inheritors of legacies and histories that we did not create; we are all unwitting participants in injustices that we don’t consciously support. Without forgiveness, there is no possibility of unity; without truth-telling, there is no possibility of forgiveness. I urge you all to find ways to be a part of whatever healing you can join in on, whether or not you were a part of the original damage. Let’s let truth and forgiveness bring us to new possibilities of collaboration, trust and unity. COINTELPRO’s stated mission was to disrupt, discredit and destroy. Let’s be part of a movement going in the other direction—to heal, respect, and build up a world we all want and deserve to live in. (Stiner, 2016)

Building on our previous work that focused on the more tangible aspects (e.g. curriculum, workshops, etc.) of our pedagogy (e.g. Peterson & Dávila 2011; Pulido, Cortez, Aviles de Bradley, Miglietta, & Stovall, 2013), in this section we argue for the necessity of creating and maintaining physical and emotional spaces of restoration and healing. The atrocities that have, and continue to be committed against women and people of color in the United States and across the globe take a toll on our minds, spirits and bodies.

Given our positionalities as Afro-Boricua faculty occupying (and seeking to dismantle) space in WSCH institutions of higher education, we posit that an integral component of this work must be self-reflexivity for growth and healing. We argue that a long-term commitment to justice-centered/liberatory work must include a dimension that focuses on transformational healing of self *with* and among others in struggle. In our work, we are learning from and with others, as this too shapes our pedagogy and praxis. Despite the lack of faculty of color in higher education, continuing to develop the mentorship and work we have been inducted into, we aim to build and collaborate with folks doing similar work in order to share our narratives and scaffold one another’s strengths. As Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) reminds us “You have been cast into a race in which the wind is always at your face and the hounds are always at your heels. And to varying degrees this is true of all life. The difference is that you do not have the privilege of living in ignorance of this essential fact” (para 42). Acknowledging racialized and gendered inequities serves as the impetus for collaborative efforts that seek to heal past and current damage occurring within spaces of higher education.

Our efforts to respect and heal come in many forms, one being through our engagement in collaborative projects with other women of color. A consideration of something such as authorship order is informed by our understanding of the WSCH functioning within academia. As an act of solidarity, resistance and healing/love to the mistreatment of women of color in the academy, we discuss and consider each other's positionality when making decisions regarding authorship order. Our approach to shared authorship is grounded in a pedagogy of collectivity and familial relationships. We do not view the project as something to be "completed"; instead we view it as an opportunity to learn, grow, and nurture each other's scholarship and humanity. We consider factors such as: where is our co-author(s) in their tenure process?: what is their teaching/workload?, etc. Further, as part of the writing process, we consciously and deliberately take time to check in with one another about personal situations (partnerships/marriage, divorce, children, familial responsibilities, etc.), centering and honoring our humanity—people over product; process over outcome. What we do in community with colleagues informs the ways in which we understand and interact with our larger social world, including personal relationships and struggles. While these actions may appear minor, it is these "small", but important acts of humanity that help us to nurture and heal. Our discourse guides our actions, and we are continually working to implement restorative and healing practices in spaces that too often dehumanize and objectify us and our work. Lastly, given the impact of injustice on the material and spiritual lives of poor Black and Brown communities, we acknowledge and understand that this work must be done in solidarity with our African-American scholar sisters.

An example in which we consciously created a space of healing in our work was during the planning of an annual student forum. One of our colleagues, Ananka Kesari Shony, an organic intellectual and community activist, introduced the concept of guidance cards to our meetings. Each of us would draw three cards that contained empowering concepts like "wisdom," "purpose," "communication," etc. This practice became routine in our meetings, facilitating a more meaningful and restorative experience within our academic work and spaces. We would end our meetings by drawing three cards, and would take time reflect on and discuss how the concepts/cards we drew applied to personal and professional experiences and/or conflicts occurring in our lives. Again, while this may seem like a minor or insignificant addition to our collective dynamics, taking the time out to "check-in" with one another on a personal and human level allowed for time to reflect, decompress and support one another in negotiating situations and spaces impacting our daily lives.

A Call to Action: ¡Ya basta!

As justice-centered educators, we believe that learning is not confined to a classroom. We also believe that all students, particularly students of color living in

disinvested communities, can and will excel in the area of education, particularly with culturally relevant, justice centered approaches to teaching and learning. Further, given our positionalities as Afro-Boricuas, we work to bridge divides amongst Latinx and Black communities and spaces, recognizing our shared histories, struggles and marginalization within schools and society due to systems and structures of white supremacy. As part of our pedagogy and praxis, we consistently ask ourselves--in what ways can our education be harnessed as a tool to dismantle the system and structure of white supremacy beyond the classroom and in the daily lives of our students, communities and families? As critical scholars, we see this as the crux of our work within and beyond the academy.

Small practices of humanity not only benefit us—this work positively impacts and affirms our college students as well. Our process of engagement was reflected in the final program generated for an annual student forum in which community members, teachers and students experiences and voices were centered. During a Student Panel session (student forum discussed above), a group of young folks from an alternative high school in Chicago shared the ways in which their schools discriminated against, dehumanized and ultimately forced them out. They keenly and explicitly articulated the manner in which their new school space served as a direct interruption to these degrading practices leading to a re-centering of their humanity--and having a direct impact on their understanding of themselves and systems/structures of oppression. After the event, a Latinx student in one of my (Aviles) educational foundations courses wrote the following:

I can relate to the student panelists about outside influences that prevented them from continuing their education. I was almost pushed out of high school by the staff. I grew up in a single parent home. I used to work after school to help my mom out. My mother had two jobs to provide for us. We were five siblings and a parent living in a small apartment. The majority of my siblings did not graduate high school. They decided to work instead of continuing their education. Like the panelists at the forum, we also had to make hard decisions that affected us for the rest of our lives. The support in the schools was unheard of...The schools at that time did not offer alternative education. The counselors were biased; one of my counselors in high school told me to drop out and go to mechanics school. When I was a high school student I did not understand why I was upset at the world. I had a hard time expressing my emotions just like the panelists. The negative influences surrounded me just like the forum panelists. Sometimes I made irresponsible decisions just like the panelists. I now wonder how my life would have turned out if I were exposed to Social Emotional Learning. I'm sure it would have been different and with less suffering...The more attention we give to the student's emotional state the fewer problems we will have. As a future teacher I will help students use Social Emotional Learning to become productive members of our society.

This future educator has not only internalized the critical importance of healing into his own pedagogical approach with students, he is also able to connect their stories to his own, further developing his understanding and analysis of their shared

schooling experiences and the structures that create unjust conditions. Our pedagogical approaches seek to counter harmful practices with humanity, restoration and love. These efforts are especially needed in the current context of education in which the larger national agenda of privatization is more concerned with test scores, discipline and order, than facilitating the development of young people in reaching their fullest humanity.

Continuing to build upon the mentorship and work we have been inducted into, we seek to continue to create opportunities that build solidarity amongst Black and Brown faculty as an act of resistance and self-determination within institutions of higher education. Often these collaborations lead to networks and professional organizations that provide literal and figurative space(s) to collaborate and grow through shared community. Other times these networks provide support when we are resisting the oppressive symptoms of white supremacy and its subsequent microaggressions. One of those instances occurred several years ago as one of the authors struggled to keep teaching courses that unpacked concepts of institutional racism and white privilege primarily to middle class suburban students at a PWI. The process of co-writing an article based on this teaching challenge side by side with a sister scholar, (Peterson and Dávila, 2011) became an act of love and a process of healing. Peterson and Dávila (2011) reflect:

Both instructors enter into the course with the bold expectation that critical examination of the forces that influence the hegemonic practice so many of us engage in is the catalyst for change in school systems and higher educational institutions. Not only would that process be liberatory for the students and for the instructor but it would contribute to liberatory practice in schooling. (p. 39)

Despite student (administrative and structural) resistance, we must persist. As Darder (2011) reminds us “Freire deeply believed that the rebuilding of solidarity among educators was a vital and necessary radical objective because solidarity moved against the grain of ‘capitalisms’ intrinsic perversity” (p. 186). We urge educators to create and sustain safe spaces that facilitate student, faculty and community learning that suspends damage (Tuck, 2009), serving to center and highlight counter narratives that affirm multiple identities in our effort to resist, transform and heal.

Note

¹ See Dzidzienyo and Oboler, 2005; Vaca, 2004; and Duany, 2002 for discussion on racism/colorism that exists in Puerto Rico and other Caribbean/Latin@ communities.

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Deprogramming Deficit

A Narrative of a Developing Black Critical STEM Education Researcher

Monica L. Ridgeway

Abstract

This essay shares a personal narrative from a Black woman STEM education researcher whose experiences living in poverty positively impacted her childhood and provided her with skills and strategies to navigate academia. The author's lived experiences have influenced her social justice research agenda aimed at combating social inequities. Her use of narrative is intended to provide insight for other researchers of color who may share similar experiences with their participants. Ultimately, her goal is to disrupt deficit narratives about communities of color living in poverty, which typically fail to address their systematic disenfranchisement, by providing a counter-narrative and descriptions of her lived experiences with STEM.

Keywords: STEM education, counter narrative, Black students, positionality

Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to encourage scholars of color in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education research to leverage their positionality and lived experiences within communities of color to challenge mainstream education's deficit portrayal of them. Mainstream education has limited understandings and devalues the assets, including sources of support and cultural richness, within communities of color (Yosso, 2005). It is my hope that institutional spaces would be transformed to embrace people of color for who they are and what

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they contribute, influencing people of color to have more positive interactions with institutional spaces that have historically been hostile and unwelcoming (Dumas, 2014; McGee, 2016; McGee & Martin, 2011).

As a critical researcher, I have noticed an extreme contrast between how mainstream education depicts students of color, their families, and communities and how these students would describe themselves (Ridgeway & Yerrick, 2016). These conflicting narratives are problematic because mainstream education research, which is heavily influenced by White, middle class ideologies, forcibly measures communities of color against those White middle class ideologies. Thereby, non-mainstream groups' cultural norms are devalued (Mutegi, 2011, 2013; Seriki, 2018, Walls, 2011; Yosso, 2005).

In addition, the historical and contemporary disenfranchisement of communities of color is often excluded in mainstream understandings and narratives about communities of color (Fránquiz, Salazar, & DeNicolo, 2011). Without contextualization, communities of color can be blamed for their circumstances when there are external factors, including systems of oppression, that create the daily reality in which marginalized groups live (Farmer-Hinton, Lewis, Patton, & Rivers, 2013; Ridgeway & Yerrick, 2016; Ridgeway & McGee, 2018). Scholars of color who have experiences living in poverty can position themselves to tease out the external and internal factors that impact communities of color (Martin & Gholson, 2012). Furthermore, scholars of color may bring forth the joys and cultural riches of their experiences, which can go ignored, unnoticed or uninvestigated by their mainstream counterparts, which in turn would generate more nuanced, anti-deficit narratives about participation in STEM (Fránquiz, Salazar, & DeNicolo, 2011; Walls, 2011; Yosso, 2005).

Marginalization in Higher Education

As I entered college, I had difficulties connecting with the science of the classroom. However, as a young mother who wanted to provide for my daughter, I was encouraged to pursue STEM by a college counselor as a way to do so despite my discomfort. As I pursued my Bachelor's and Master's degree in Geology at a large northeastern research university, I was the only Black person in my predominantly White institution. The few non-Whites who gain access to STEM spaces often experience tokenism (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014). Tokenism is the celebration of the few Black people who have been permitted to operate in the mainstream environments; it is a visible and surface level effort to demonstrate the perceived openness to embrace Black people by recruiting a small number and encouraging them to assimilate, if they have not already been acculturated (Robinson, 2013; McGee, 2016; Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014).

People who are tokenized can be sought out to participate in many additional activities their peers might not be asked (Wingfield & Wingfield, 2014). For example, on multiple occasions, I was requested for photo opportunities for marketing the

department. I was their most advertised student. The college had a well-circulated paper where my experience was featured. I was even interviewed for the university admissions office's recruitment video. To demonstrate how my image was used for recruitment, consider an image of me holding my twenty-month-old daughter in a mineral and rock laboratory (see image 1).

It is pictures like these that are used to attract and recruit other students of color (Castro, 2014). Today my daughter is twelve years old, and this picture is still circulating. It conveys the message, "If this Black single mother can do it, you can too!" Being showcased in this way caused me to question whether there were other Black people in the program before or after me. Castro (2014) referred to these widely-used marketing practices as operating from a deficit ideology, which assumes that underrepresented minoritized people just do not know about the STEM majors and professions, and they will join once they are aware. Castro warns that these recruitment practices can reinforce beliefs that Black and Brown people do not know as much as their White counterparts. She found that university faculty, who implemented diversity initiatives were often unaware of the historical oppression and marginalization of Black and Brown people. It is unlikely the individuals charged with the task of diversity can even begin to welcome Black and Brown people in White-dominated fields if they do not understand the environment they are recruiting them into (Castro, 2014). If institutions do not move beyond tokenizing the few in the field, we will continue to avoid the real barriers and maintain the status quo by not transforming the space to be inclusive.

In addition to the department celebrating their only student of color, I received a full scholarship as a part of the college's diversity efforts. One of the scholarships was titled "Smart Grant," and it was for underrepresented students in "hard" science majors who maintained at least a 3.5 grade point average (on a 4.0 scale). My peers were aware of my scholarship. Some had even made comments that I received support because I was "a minority," which indicated to me they did not feel I earned financial support. While I did not share my private life with them, I needed the support: although I was working while in school, I was still living in

Image 1

Image of my daughter (Toni) and me



poverty with a small child. Even with support, it was difficult. I worked extremely hard to maintain my academic standing despite the oppressive context. I feared failure since I would lose my funding if I did not perform well.

Because I was underprepared by my high school, I did not have the same academic foundation as some of my peers. Scholars Reid and Moore (2008) found that students from urban schools were more likely to experience underpreparedness compared to their suburban counterparts. Reid and Moore (2008) concluded that students from urban schools need to have access to curricula that aligns with higher education to increase their preparedness. Such as Advanced Placement courses where students in their study felt more comfortable making such a transition. When reading the participant narratives in Reid and Moore's (2008) study, I found their experiences resituated with me and helped me make sense of my experience of being academically unprepared. I did not have the opportunity to take Advanced Placement courses nor were all sciences and mathematics courses offered. For example, I did not take physics and calculus in high school, which were courses required in my college program. This under-preparedness of youth living in poverty is a prime example of the opportunity gap (Milner, 2013). My urban schooling did not prepare me for the rigors of higher education because it was not envisioned that many of us would take such a path. This form of marginalization is embedded within the structure of schooling, and replicates a cycle of social inequality.

Re-shaping My Narrative

Within and across marginalized groups, there are unique qualities and complexities that have yet to be fully investigated in education research (e.g., Walls, 2011). Inter- and intra-group complexities would go uninvestigated which would disrupt the homogeneity they have experienced by mainstream education research. Which can lead to incorrect assumptions about communities with distinct histories and circumstances (Nusbaum & SantaMaria, 2018). The narrative used in the academy, whether in education research or self-narration, should represent communities of color in ways that honor their lived experiences and no use White mainstream norms as the measure. There is cultural wealth and richness within communities of color that academia can learn from to transform to be an inclusive and welcoming environment (Yosso, 2005).

After completing my doctoral program, I re-read the personal statement that I had written while on the job market. I described myself as a product of a teen pregnancy raised in the projects, a high school dropout, and a young single mother. I used these factors to highlight "how far I have come," demonstrating my ability to preserve through the academy. While these descriptions are all true, there are several issues with this self-narrative: they are limited in their explanation and deficit based. However, this is a narrative I have been conditioned to give the academy. It reinforces the illusion that the academy is an equitable environment; that it is fair

and accepting of diverse people. However, this narrative is harmful to myself and other marginalized people. It places the onus of success and navigation on minoritized people while not accounting for how racist policies and practices construct barriers to limit access and participation of non-mainstream people. In addition, the assumptions that underlie the narrative suggest that people of color who do not want to remain in the academy or in their disciplines are somehow inadequate or are quitters. Which problematically uses perseverance as the measure since highly functioning underrepresented people in STEM can leave due to the STEM climate and not their performance.

Research is Subjective

Research is subjective and driven by the researchers' lived experiences (Walls, 2011). These experiences influence the types of questions researchers ask, how they approach inquiries and the interpretation of the results (Walls, 2011, 2017). When the education researchers themselves come from primarily from one racial group (mainly White people) it can impose their views and measures on others while privileging their own culture and racial group. Research has oppressive historical roots in education (Guthrie, 2004). Therefore, research can be a source of tension for researchers who a part of a marginalized group since how they might approach their research and choose questions can be outside of and/or in conflict with mainstream education research practices. As a researcher from a marginalized population, my research interests and agenda can be a strategic act of resistance against mainstream education (Huber, 2016; Ridgeway & McGee, 2018). I can find myself reading mainstream education STEM research about minoritized people and find some of the research to be limited in explanation and focusing on academic outcomes and at the same time neglect factors that lead to the outcomes.

As a Black STEM education researcher, I find challenging mainstream STEM education to be difficult at times because: (1) Black students are depicted as low performing and disengaged science learners (Mutegi, 2011, 2013); (2) Black students' families and communities are devalued and dehumanized (Duncan, 2005; Gholson & Wilkes, 2017; Ridgeway & Yerrick, 2016); and (3) STEM is narrowly defined by and limited to the Western European version, which is constructed by and for White people and negates the historic participation of Black people as creators of STEM knowledge (Bullock, 2017; Le & Matias, 2018; Mensah & Jackson, 2018; Mutegi, 2011). One result of this is people of color are absent as STEM producers in K-12 and higher education curriculum leaving the illusion for both mainstream and non-mainstream students' that people of color are not contributors nor are worthy of discussing (Walls, 2011; Mutegi, 2011). This inaccurate teaching of STEM topics negatively impacts the STEM identities of students of color for a few reasons. It can lead students of color to internalize that negative messaging and question their belonging. In addition, it can negatively reinforce to their mainstream peers

and teachers/faculty to interact with them in ways that create exclusive learning environments. Since the STEM environments they have experienced have not been inclusive of people of color.

Researchers Positioned Within Marginalized Communities

As a Black woman, challenging mainstream education research by conducting research in Black communities can be strongly critiqued (Ladson-Billings, 1995). I can be considered biased as a “native anthropologist” (Narayan, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Narayan (1993) described traditional anthropologist as one who interoperates a cultural group, but who is typically positioned outside of the culture they are investigating, advocating this unique positioning allows for a deep and “intimate” (Narayan, 1993, p.672) description. However, scholars of color have critiqued this rationale typically used by mainstream researchers to exotify and distort understandings about communities of color and make sense of those cultures using mainstream cultural norms as the standard (e.g., Farmer-Hinton, Lewis, Patton, & Rivers, 2013). Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that, as a Black woman education researcher interested in success stories of Black students, her research would be considered biased or skewed (typically, by mainstream education researchers) since the literature about Black students was inundated with deficit literature. To challenge this literature and the perception of bias, she utilized rigorous research methods to co-construct meaning with her participants so that her interpretation included the voice of the participants. This co-construction is imperative: there should not be one author or a single voice that narrates the “Black” experience as this would add to the homogenizing of Black people.

STEM Is Omnipresent

Mainstream science education literature (like other STEM disciplines) uses deficit language to describe Black students’ academic engagement and outcomes (Battey & Leyva, 2016). This line of literature has led scholars who want to challenge mainstream education research with the additional task to prove that Black students are brilliant (Gholson & Wilkes, 2017; Leonard & Martin, 2013; Mutegi, 2011, 2013; Ridgeway & McGee, 2018) since Black students are most likely to have their brilliance go unrecognized (Berry, 2008; Martin, 2009; Walls, 2011). Scholars have argued that deficit-oriented stereotypes have harmful impacts on Black students, which, in turn, are used as rationales to determine who will gain access to quality STEM experiences and how students’ participation is interpreted (Bullock, 2017; Gholson & Wilkes, 2017). The project of establishing the brilliance for Black students is fraught with danger because that brilliance can be a measure by which to establish humanity and, therefore, identify those thought deserving of opportunities (Gholson, Bullock, & Alexander, 2012). However, other research has

shown that even when Black students are “labeled” as brilliant or gifted (according to mainstream standards) they still face racist policies and practices that limited their participation and create uncomfortable learning environments (Berry, 2008; McGee & Martin, 2011). Gholson, Bullock, and Alexander (2012) cited Martin (2011) call for scholars to not prove that Black students are brilliant, but rather view Black students’ brilliance as axiomatic—it is proven.

Martin’s stance that Black students are brilliant can be applied to science education. Many science education research scholars of color and other equity researchers are left to show Black students can do science. However, I contend they are already doing science and solving problems daily. My concern is that not accepting the fact that Black students are brilliant and operating as such is problematic in science education research. It dangerously overlooks how STEM is already embedded into non-mainstream cultures and that knowledge is omnipresent despite it not being recognizable to mainstream counterparts. I wonder how would STEM education would look in the United States for Black students if they were appreciated for the brilliance they bring to academic spaces and how might those spaces transform to be inclusive of their presence without them having to assimilate.

When I think about those aforementioned possibilities, I reflect back on my childhood experiences living in a government housing project and my science learning in K-12. I wrote a journal entry during my dissertation study about my earlier experiences with science at home, experiences that did not readily connect to my in-school learning (Ridgeway, 2016). Within the entry (August 2015), I focused on the connections that could have been made between home and school.

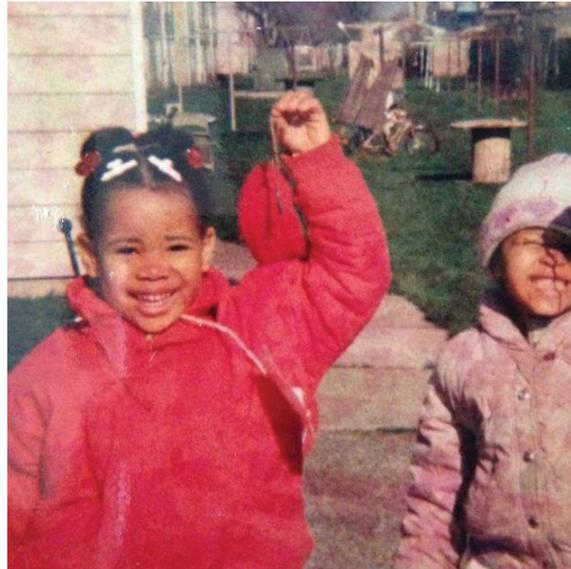
I remember right outside of our apartment door, there was a hole in the concrete sidewalk that was about 5 inches across and 4 inches deep. The hole was the source of much entertainment for me and my younger brother. I would pretend that it was a kitchen pot where I would cook the best mud pies and rock soup (I was creative and innovative). For my brother it was a hiding place for his figurines (my brother was creative and innovative and creative). While I would try to cook, *he would fill the hole with as many pebbles* (geometry experiences with shapes and volume) as he could just to annoy me. *I would then have to use a thin twig as a lever* (real life experience with physics) to remove all the rocks; *it was very tricky* (I was problem solving). Near the sidewalk with the hole there was a bush right outside of our apartment door. *It was always covered in spider webs and had the biggest spiders* (early experiences with making science observations). My brother and I would *become spider hunters* (engaging with nature). Well, we weren’t *really* hunters because my mom said we weren’t allowed to hurt them (parental involvement with science). She said *we were actually in their home* (parent involvement with teaching science). I remember when it would rain my brother, the other neighborhood children, and I would *become rescuers* for the earthworms (engaging with nature). *We knew that when it rained heavily, earthworms would come out onto the sidewalk* (science observation). *We would pick up the worms and put them on the driest grass we could find so they wouldn’t get stepped on* (problem solving in collaboration).

As you can see in Image 2, my god sister (Catrice Huff) and I proudly rescued earthworms (I am pictured on the right).

I share this account to remind the reader that growing up in living in poverty was not a devastating experience: I was a happy child surrounded by family and friends. I always had a playmate. In addition, I had science in my life, and an appreciation for nature. However, as I thought about my in-school science experience, I cannot recall any meaningful and/or memorable connections that were made from my home to school. It was as if they were two worlds that never connected. Also noted in the journal entry above there were many entry points to science that were present within my life that were never intentionally connected in school. The disconnected and disjointed nature of in-school science presents difficulty for students making connections. They can be treated as if they have never made observations or solved problems at home which is inaccurate. They engage in these skills all of the time. It can also leave the impression that science is an elite topic preserved for others, since many times in science teaching instruction starts with the jargon and not actually engaging or enacting in science which can be discouraging and unpleasant for students to continue in STEM fields and majors. As a STEM education researcher, this disjunction between home and school has been influential in how I view science and Black people. When researching and providing support for marginalized groups, it is important that researchers move away from comparing marginalized groups to mainstream standards or seek data that confirms firmly entrenched deficit ideas of

Image 2

Rescuing worms with my god sister



marginalized communities (Gholson, Bullock, & Alexander, 2012). Placing mainstream values and solutions on marginalized communities is an act of oppression that devalues the cultures and ignores the actual barriers to accessing STEM.

My Experiences Influence My Research

At this point, I have shared a few lived experiences that have influenced me as a Black woman STEM education researcher. When I share my personal story in the academy, I have found that it may come across as a story of perseverance; however, such a misrepresentation of my experiences reinforces a negative assumption that only some of us work hard enough to complete degree programs. It is a narrative I am learning to re-tell in an honoring way. Like highlighting the supports I had in my community growing up that influence me as an adult. I believe that the skills I have learned growing up in the projects are attributes that should be adopted in higher education, like true teamwork and a sense of community the idea of working together in solidarity, believing if one of us is “winning” we all are, and there is enough to go around, helping your peers be successful by sharing valuable knowledge, and being concerned with others holistically are just a few. I have been celebrated in many academic spaces for my ability to create spaces where people will come and work together for the purpose of having nurturing academic environments. At first, I found this attention odd because it would be the same things I would do at home. However, this is a skill that I have learned in my early days of bring the neighborhood children together so we can play games for us to all enjoy. Or by my parents not allowing me to leave my younger brother behind so I had to create activities we both enjoyed.

My experiences with living in poverty contribute to my interpretation, approach, and sensitivity to marginalization. I am unapologetic about my love and advocacy for marginalized groups and how it is essential for me to maintain an action-oriented social justice research agenda (Ridgeway, in press). As I am continuing to develop as a critical Black STEM researcher (Martin & Gholson, 2012), I am re-programming myself to push back against deficit ideologies that have been conditioned as normal. It will be an ongoing process for which I do not think there is an end-point since racism is so embedded within the United States and I find it in many areas of my life. This process has influenced me to be reflective and interdisciplinary so my response to racism is complex and evolving.

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Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education
Volume 18, Number 1, Spring 2019

Vision and Scope

Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education is an academic forum for the transdisciplinary study of the dynamic and complex relationship between the various competing and complementary aspects of education broadly defined. *Taboo* is grounded on the notion of radical contextualization. To investigate the notion of radical contextualization, we encourage scholars to draw from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives to contest current taken-for-granted approaches in education and in the academy. Some of these approaches include, Post-Structuralism, Feminist Studies, Actor-Network Theory, Queer Theory, New Materialism, Historical/Genealogical, Affect Theory, and Critical approaches to race, class, and gender studies. Beyond simply articulating critical perspectives we seek contributions willing to stake the unsaid and the previous and current unconsiderable and/or irreconcilable. We encourage work that seeks to wrap its lips around the complex, chaotic, and cutting edges of the sayable and knowable. We want to push readers and contributors to perform complex questioning of the very ideas that have become all too common-place within traditional academic journals. We specifically foster discussions across and through different disciplines including explorations into how intertextualities and intersectionalities operate throughout and within different educational times/spaces/places. The journal encourages papers from a wide range of contributors who work within these general areas. We also encourage research that pushes the methodological boundaries. *Taboo* seeks a dialogic series of interactions that push place, space, and time boundaries as well as invites a leaning in and pushing back approach. Not only do we seek content that engages these values, but we also favor unique, controversial, and continually complicated forms and modes of presentations. As its title suggests, *Taboo* seeks provocative and controversial submissions.

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When submitting a piece for consideration, please know that reviewers will be asked the following questions about your manuscript:

How does the manuscript take up a transdisciplinary study of the dynamic and complex relationship between the various competing and complementary aspects of education broadly defined?

How and to what extent does the manuscript address the notion of radical contextualization?

How does the manuscript investigate the notion of radical contextualization?

How do scholars draw from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives to contest current taken-for-granted approaches in education and in the academy? (Some of these approaches include, Post-Structuralism, Feminist Studies, Actor-Network Theory, Queer Theory, New Materialism, Historical/Genealogical, Affect Theory, and Critical approaches to race, class, and gender studies).

Beyond simply articulating critical perspectives how does the manuscript stake the unsaid and the previous and current unconsiderable and/or irreconcilable?

How and to what extent does the work seek to wrap its lips around the complex, chaotic, and cutting edges of the sayable and knowable?

How does the manuscript push readers and contributors to perform complex questioning of the very ideas that have become all too common-place within traditional academic journals?

How does the manuscript foster discussions across and through different disciplines including explorations into how intertextualities and intersectionalities operate throughout and within different educational times/spaces/places?

How does the manuscript foster research that pushes the methodological boundaries?

How and to what extent does the manuscript foster a dialogic series of interactions that push place, space, and time boundaries as well as invites a leaning in and pushing back approach?

To what extent is the content of the manuscript provocative and controversial?

Types of Manuscripts

Articles: *Taboo* accepts what might be called traditional academic articles. We also encourage scholars to write and produce research that exposes the limits of this form as well as compose research in modes that would not be considered in mainstream academic journals. We expect thoughtful, provocative, and well-researched articles, but we also encourage authors to play with form and content. There is no word limit. Articles will go through a double-blind peer-review process. Authors can expect to receive a decision in 3-4 months.

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Submitting a Manuscript

Please adhere to the following criteria prior to submitting your manuscript:

1. Send a cover-letter with your manuscript and address the following items:
 - a. Author(s) Names, addresses, and Institution(s),
 - b. Title of your manuscript.

- c. Manuscript Type (Article, Rant, Book Review, Guest Edited Special Issue).
 - d. Please address how your manuscript fits the scope of the journal.
 - e. Please indicate that the research complies with the rules and regulations of the Institutional Review Board of your particular institutions (if applicable)
 - f. Please indicate that the article is not under-review for another peer-review journal and will not be submitted for review during the peer-review process with *Taboo*.
 - g. Please submit the names of three potential reviewers for your manuscript.
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Taboo

The Journal of Culture and Education

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