Daring to Differ: A Culturally Responsive Research Study of Self

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Abstract

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Self-study is an inherent component of culturally responsive teaching, but most scholars and educators do not specifically highlight its process. This is an essential time for teachers to improve their practice and craft a culturally responsive pedagogy. As the number of students of color in schools continues to increase, the teaching force remains overwhelmingly White, and gaps between White students and students of color persist. In exploring a process of self-study, I sought to answer this question, Can purposeful engagement in self-study foster culturally responsiveness in culturally unresponsive educators and create resiliency in students of color? This question challenged me to interrogate personal experiences as a case example of the experiences of Black women and girls in the U.S. education system. This interplay between personal interpretation and broader social contexts is a tenet of autobiographical research. Data analysis revealed trauma induced by racism can have lasting effects on self-perception, health, and academic success and that it takes intentionality to recover. The findings suggested that self-study *can* foster a deeper culturally responsive practice for teachers already on a path to

transformational teaching, and that self-study can lead to resiliency for those who chose to acknowledge a deeply reflective process.

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I would have given up long ago if not for the love and prayers of my church family! Mama Lani, somehow you understood my process from a distance and were a consistent source of encouragement. You knew I was a doctor a long time ago! Dr., Minister Heather Clark, thank you for praying, reading early drafts, and keeping it real with me. To Dr. James Flowers, Dr. Brenda Akers, and my Pastor, Dr. Manaway, you were always my cheerleaders and I appreciate you asking me how things were going and letting me be honest in my response. Overseer Manway, thank you for always welcoming me to your home when I needed to be around love, feeding me, and allowing me to rest. The Preolas, Rodney and Vonda, I am grateful to be part of the family and for you loving on me. Rose, I will never forget your support during my exam defense. I am grateful to have you in my corner. To Anna Banana, my sister-friend who has witnessed my breakdowns and celebrated me along the way, I appreciate your spirit, energy, and friendship. To all of RL (Prec, Kan, Crys, Didi, Shakarla, Jamaal, Roderick, Malicia, Sheron, Krishna, and my buddy Chaune), thank you for keeping me encouraged and lifted during the most challenging period of my life. Thank you for taking on things when I needed to step away.

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Dedication

To my former students who are the reason I left Arizona and moved to a place I'd never been to get this degree. I have become a better teacher, just as I promised I would. I hope you are proud.

To children everywhere, who have been, who are, and who will come, this is for you and I hope the world and our schools become better places for and because of you.

To my nieces, Gabriela and Eva, who will soon be entering elementary school. I pray you receive all the love and care you need to feel free to be you, and that you, in turn, pour that love and care back into the world.

To myself, I'm proud of you. *Doctor*!

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Preface

When I started the journey to my PhD almost seven years ago, the intention was to learn how to become a well-developed culturally responsive educator and then return to the classroom a teaching genius! I thought, *if education is the "civil rights issue of this era"* as I heard often in the media and on social media, *then I need to be the best for children and families who have been intentionally and historically underserved by the U.S. education system. If the problem is so grave, why shouldn't a classroom teacher have a PhD,* I wondered. I did not necessarily need to write a dissertation to explore answers to these questions, but, in asking, I assumed there was more to uncover about why the "achievement gap" or education debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) persists despite growing awareness and years of challenge and resistance to the systems that perpetuate educational inequity. If the gap in performance between White/affluent students and students of color/poor students has remained basically unmoved in the last 60 years (i.e. since *Brown v. Board of Education*) then the questions must continue to be posed. If I, a Black woman have been a successful student and educator yet still have trauma from years of culturally unresponsive teaching, educators must keep asking these questions. Perhaps, exploring my own journey in detail—exploring how systemic oppression ensnares one student and educator of color—will have implications for other students of color and offer insight to the teachers who are entrusted with their development and care.

The question I asked was, can purposeful engagement in self-study cultivate cultural competency in culturally unresponsive educators and foster resiliency in students of color. My quest was to simultaneously "talk back" (hooks, 1989) to teachers in my life who have failed to address the needs of culturally diverse students and encourage the reclamation of hope and peace for the students who have been and are impacted by their unresponsive approach. As I journeyed,

I discovered two important things. First, even though many educators agree that an understanding of the role of power and inequity is important, the extent to which it is important (and therefore shows up in practice) is extremely varied. Related, the amount of effort teachers place in examining personal levels of cultural competence greatly varies. The second and important learning from this journey is that I cannot control other people's willingness to be more culturally competent. I can only do my best to live by example through my own work and beyond that, I have to let go. The challenge though, is a deep and personal passion to influence systemic and lasting change that is in competition with unproductive, progressive, colorblind ideologies. This has been (and still is) an extremely hard lesson to learn as I continue to work with teachers and administrators who touch the lives of children each day and are not willing to, or outright deny a need to, deeply examine the ways White supremacy culture shows up regularly in their actions—to the detriment of the students they believe they justly serve.

Really, my quest to better understand the education debt and develop my teaching practice turned out to be a journey of self-discovery and healing that has undoubtedly inspired me to be a more well-developed culturally responsive educator. My goal then is to offer transparency in my process to help others develop appreciation and pathways for engaging in self-study. To answer the research question, I employed a method called portraiture—a method that blends art and science. When she was 25, originator of the portraiture research method, Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, posed as the subject of painted portrait. For several hours at a time she stood swimming in her own thoughts and willingly allowed someone else's perception of her to take form on the canvas. She attributes this experience to her preoccupation with portraiture and the subsequent cultivation of the research method. Her intent was to blend the aesthetics of this

visual art form with more deliberately structured processes of scientific inquiry in order to responsively capture the dynamic process in which researchers engage with their participant(s). When viewing the completed portrait, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) observed,

> Although many of the details of the representation seemed wrong, the whole was deeply familiar. She was not quite me as I saw myself, but she told me about part of myself that I would have never noticed or admitted. More important, I had the eerie sensation that she anticipated my future and echoed my past. I could look at her and see my ancestors, and yes, see myself as my children would see me. In these troubling features there was an ageless quality. Time moved backward and forward through this still and silent woman (p. 4).

And so it goes with research portraits. There are layers of context to behold and intentional attempts to view the product both during and after the process from various perspectives. This creates a unique cycle of reflection and analysis that deepens the researcher's sense of the subject even as it is created. In some ways, the researcher, or portraitist, then becomes part of the subject as she interprets the object of her research through her positionality and cultural experiences and expresses it all in her writing. It is a personal and intimate process and if done well can foster the development of ongoing skills that encourage deep reflection that challenges bias and prejudice.

This is a self-study research portrait in which I attempted to understand my experiences as a student and educator as a case example. The finished product is composed of layers of memories that I analyzed and explored through reflection, truth-telling, and self-talk. Each layer of memory unfolded and each layer of analysis recovered revealed much about how I have experienced the world and learned about the importance and praxis of cultural responsiveness in

teaching. Like a painted portrait, each layer was essential in its own right, and when compiled as a collected portrait formed an aesthetic whole that tells another version of my story.

When an artist prepares a canvas for painting he or she might envision what is to come, seeing the end before they begin and planning their materials and process accordingly. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) relate this mental and literal outline an artist creates to a research template. The template is a research portraitist's flexible plan. She knows what she seeks to discover yet is open to the unknown process it will take to find it out. To prepare my template, I reflected on the research question and asked myself, how do I tell this story—what themes do I want pronounced, how do I convey my experience as important but in community with others? I wondered, who am I telling this to and why—who do I want to read it and who is going to read it? Asking these questions allowed me to focus the memories, stories, and analyses for an audience of White women I have long needed to confront as I have held them responsible for contributing to the trauma students of color face because they comprise the majority of the teaching profession.

As I began to fill in my template and engage in the inquiry process, I employed tools that may seem unconventional, but, it was essential that what I said matched how I said it. I used a variety of genres and tactics such as poetry, audio recordings, storytelling, letter writing, and an annotated bibliography, to convey. For example, I used poetry to share an abusive experience. In this literary form I had the freedom to use symbols, hyperboles, and non-standard English to convey the experience. I also engaged in generous amounts of self-talk throughout the process to explain and analyze the process. Finally, I relied on the stories of other Black women in pop culture, scholarship, art, and my own family and personal community to uplift themes and ideas that demonstrate relevance beyond my specific experience. I told stories that aided both my

personal development and professional practice. Much like Lawrence-Lightfoot, I have looked at my portrait in its various stages from various perspectives and have seen versions of myself that are strangely familiar. In some stories I saw and heard my mother. Other times, I saw and heard different versions of myself—my younger self, even a future hopeful me. Still other times I saw teachers, friends, my Pastor, scholars I admire, influences of pop culture, music, art, and even the strength of other Black women.

I found the distinct details, the chapters, stories, and memories more familiar than the whole. The whole often felt disjointed and incomplete—as if all of the pieces were there but not in the "right" places. I saw a version of myself and my story that was a bit too real, confused, rough, and jarring—things I was not prepared for others to see. But my purpose was greater than me so I persevered. More often than is discussed, Black women achieve academic success while quietly enduring emotional, physical, and psychological trauma due to oppression and abuse. And other times Black women are not academically successful while enduring the same kinds of oppression and abuse. As an educator, I felt driven to find a way to share my reality so that other educators might see the gravity of telling their stories and learning their students' stories as essential to developing their teaching practice in culturally responsive ways. Ultimately, I have found that an attempt to neatly package a research self-study that incorporates less traditional techniques in search of detailing the process was nearly impossible given the layers of turmoil I needed to extricate. Humans are complex and our experiences do not always end and begin neatly the way published stories are typically crafted. This is why self-studies (e.g. portraits) tend to be lengthy—because a lot of explanation is needed to provide coherence and finesse to our otherwise dynamic and awkward existences. I tried to smooth out the rough transitions and craft a witty metaphor to carry through the bigger storyline, but I was unsuccessful because along the

way I would notice another memory or another layer to explore. Eventually, I gave up trying to force the narrative into something it is not and allowed it to be what it currently is.

Finally, throughout the remainder of the text I shift into self-talk and narration, indicated by italicized text. This was a later layer added after most of the portrait was complete. In these moments I look back and offer introspection on the page as a way to bridge some rough transitions and build greater cohesion within the narrative. The insertion of self-talk takes the place of the traditional interpretation as I explore the role self-study can play in culturally responsive teaching practice for both students and teachers.

PART I: Being

In daring to differ I first explore my being, detailing the context of my current lived experience, which is influenced by what and where I have been and hope to be.

Prologue

I used to be an invisible woman. No, not a spook like those who haunt old buildings and taunt people. Nor was I one of your cartoon animated spooks like Casper. No, I was always a woman of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to have possessed a mind. I was invisible simply because people refused to see me. It was as though I was a mirror of hard distorting glass. When people approached me they saw only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me. For a long time without realizing it, I accepted and contributed to this invisible state. Today things are different. I can now see my invisibility. So whether others choose to see me or not, I know I am here. My visibility is not dependent on others' willingness to recognize my culture, my wholeness, or my story. My visibility depends on my persistence to exist despite attempts to erase and silence me. But that's getting too far ahead in the story, almost to the end, although the end is a beginning and lies far ahead. This is the very messy memoir-like research

journey story of a student and educator who knows, seeks, and sought understanding of the world, especially the world of education through her worldview as a Black woman. You are invited on this journey to laugh, stumble, persevere, empathize and learn with me as I try to figure out some things about teaching and learning, being Black and female, and commune with other present and formerly invisible ones.

Self-Talk: Giving Honor

I wanted to begin by giving honor and homage to my literary and cultural community. I wanted to extend my gifts as a literary writer to write with hidden subtext for the reader to infer and demonstrate that "my" and "I" don't start with me. *I greatly admire the way the Indigenous/Natives/Indians open gatherings and meetings with prayers and recognition of the lands and wonder why this is not a component of my facilitation practices considering how important my faith/cultural identity are to me. The Black church, not religion or faith per se, has been instrumental in the development of the Black community and Black culture in the U.S (Alexander, 2013). Cultural communication elements like call and response and giving honor to…have always been part of African American family traditions. But at the same time, that part of my identity and orientation to the world developed within U.S. culture, which dictates that I do not pray in public and be an individual—detached from personal and cultural history.*

This was also an attempt to signal less conventional methods and techniques as the text progressed, particularly the interplay between a single story that is representative of others' stories, the presence of a cultural voice, and layers of context.

Chapter I: Introduction

I have always been a reader. I learned to read prior to beginning any formal schooling. Once I started school, during holidays and school breaks I would stay up all night and spend all

day just reading books. I like to read all kinds of things, including Black literature like *Invisible Man* (Ellison, 1995) and fiction, but more recently I have been mesmerized by memoirs. There is something about reading people's self-interpretations of their relationship to the world that is fascinating! Many other people think so too because in a *New York Times* editorial, Genzlinger (2011) reported that his Amazon search for memoirs produced 160,000 results, indicating a large market and audience for this genre. Of course, not all memoirs are created equally and there is an abundance of opinion on what makes a strong memoir. Since this is my story, I will share mine.

I cut the authors of memoirs a lot of slack and by certain criteria my standards may be considered low. A good memoir basically needs two things—some adversity (something even the most well-off, well-to-do people have at least a little of) and a thread or theme that keeps me as the readers connected to the story and moves it along so that they want to know how it ends. In the past year, I have read ten memoirs. Some were written by celebrities—because who does not want a little peek into how the other half lives. Some were written by Black women—because who does not want a peek into how other people like them live. And some because they came to me as recommendations. No matter how annoyed I became with the style of writing, I kept reading. No matter how "boring" the ending felt, I still liked that I spent time reading the book.

What is the allure of a memoir? There is something about people telling their stories that touches me. I can see how sharing your story is simultaneously daring and mundane and I find that fascinating. We are socialized to be so private about our issues, even though in reality, we all have similar life challenges such as money, family dynamics, friendships, romantic relationships, insecurity, anxiety, history of abuse, and the list goes on. As I learn this more, it comforts me to know that other people are not ashamed of being broken, not wallowing in their brokenness,

living in spite of being broken, seeing their broken places as spaces in need of healing and attention rather than being ashamed and continuing to mask them. Recognizing brokenness is where healing begins. I know this from literal experience, too. In early 2018 I ruptured my Achilles tendon and had to have surgery to repair it. Before the operation, my surgeon explained that I didn't *have* to have surgery. But if I didn't, the tendon and muscle would have less of a chance to refuse on their own and I would run a much greater risk of not fully regaining strength in my foot and leg. What surgery would do is make a much stronger suggestion for how the tendon and muscle grow back together, offering the greatest chance of them growing properly and restoring my leg and foot to full strength. The healing process was long and tedious but attending to the broken place was worth it in the long run.

Healing often needs the guidance of an expert and takes time. Healing is also not pretty or smooth. My leg looked like a zipper for a while with the staples in it, but I was still healing with them in. Engaging in autobiographical work can mimic a guided healing process. It allows self-engagement such that the authors build understanding of their lives and relationships with others and the world, and allows others to connect with and learn from an author's experiences (Crews, 2014; Walls, 2005). It is encouraging to peer into authors' lives through their memoirs and ride the roller coaster of one minute feeling superior for how I have handled a similar situation and the next minute feeling insecure for how I handled something similar. In those moments I am allowed to win and fail and challenge myself to be better without pretense or judgement. This is the power of autobiography in research.

Even though people go through similar broken existences, these experiences can be felt quite differently based on environment and the many social and cultural factors that influence each person's relationship with the world around us. These include racial, religious, gender, and

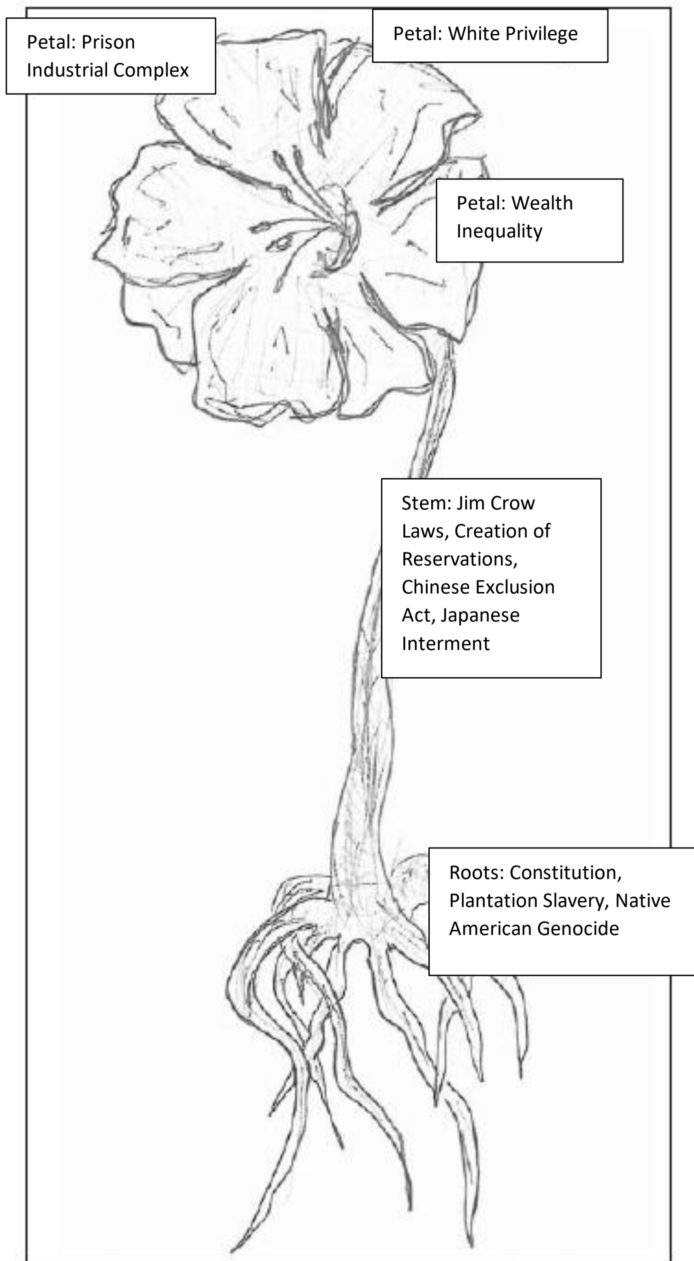
socioeconomic backgrounds. We live in places and times in which the macro culture and the status quo say our differences matter more than our similarities. They create a divide that prevents us from pursuing genuine community. They cultivate competition and braggadocios in which being "right" is more important than understanding; assumed public service agencies (such as schools) that appease investors before (and oftentimes instead of) attending to human hearts and suffering; and leaders who impose their own agendas rather than listen to opinions or suggestions that challenge their thinking and authority. In the macro culture these behaviors and mindsets are rooted in the U.S. is White supremacy culture. The Dismantling White Supremacy Workshop (2018) defines White supremacy culture as "an artificial, historically constructed culture" in which, the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of Whites are superior to those of People of Color.

Whites, often hear the words "White" and/or "supremacy" and stop listening, presumably because these words cause guilt and/or shame. And, having faults and challenges is not something U.S. society considers people should openly acknowledge. This attitude is a component of White supremacy that allows it to be perpetuated generation after generation. There are many research models for understanding, naming, and interrogating White supremacy. One of the more recent ones is the White supremacy flower (Figure 1). It builds upon Peggy McIntosh's frequently referenced invisible knapsack as *more than a knapsack;* it is a framework that contends that, "White supremacy…provides a clearer and more accurate conceptual understanding of how racism operates, evolves, and sustains itself" (Strmic-Pawl, 2015, p. 192).

Conceptually, this model illustrates how racism and other forms of oppression are interrelated. It highlights how deeply rooted racism is in the institutional structures, cultural values, history, and economic development of the U.S. and the world. The model also is a

reminder that the persistence of racism today is not the fault of any one person. Therefore, it is not the responsibility of any one person to undo it. It is a collective responsibility. Thus, unity and community in resistance are the antithesis to many prominent elements of White supremacy.

Figure 1. The White Supremacy Flower



In this model, focus is given to events in U.S. history and how they connect to pervasive systemic oppression. This model also illuminates how understanding racial injustice can lead to understanding other types of injustice because they are all connected under the umbrella of White supremacy. For example, the legal end of plantation slavery lead to continued legal and de facto oppression through Jim Crow legislation when White folks still did not want to accept

Black folks as people and citizens deserving of the same rights. Segregation by race, even when class was accounted for, (Tatum, 2017) as a result of the Jim Crow laws lead to housing discrimination and redlining which ensured segregation in schools and other social spaces such as churches and community centers (Loewen, 2009).

These kinds of injustices and oppressions happened systematically in government, housing, and other policies, but also locally and through individuals who helped enforced them at banks, for example, and polling centers that denied people of color rights and access to the opportunities that Whites have almost always had access to. This is an example of how racism persists and how understanding racism is essential to understanding other interlocking forms of oppression (Collins, 2009) in order to combat it in living, teaching and learning.

While it is important to continually build *conceptual* understanding, the challenge of this research is to think about racism (and other –isms) in the *practice* of teaching through the lens of culturally responsive self-study. Building from the general premise of the model of the White supremacy flower, this dissertation focuses on understanding the experiences of one person from one oppressed group as illustrative of the importance of hearing the stories of so many others in an attempt to hinder and one day halt the interlocking oppressions that kept them silenced for so long.

Identifying as a Black cisgender woman means being a part of a culture and legacy of Black women who are woke, lit, on fleek, and fly, but also oppressed, tired, and fed up. I tell my story because it will connect to other Black women's stories. Together, our stories can counter what educators, students, and the rest of the world assumes about Black womanhood. If teachers are willing to listen, uphold their end of the unspoken reader-author agreement, this culturally

responsive self-study story and study will provide some insights into the daily experiences of children of color and challenge them to think deeply, consistently, and differently.

Now that I have introduced what I want to research and why, I will spend some time intentionally in my academic voice and intellectual space. This is a voice I am learning to appreciate because it has always felt forced when I used it, as if it replaces rather than complements my cultural voice. When I was in the middle and high grades I attended a boarding school. Each Sunday all of the students who lived on campus and the faculty members on weekend duty would hop on buses and go to various places of worship. I remember visiting a synagogue that was beautifully and ornately adorned, a Methodist church that was so used to us, they would put out our favorite snacks during the after church fellowship, and a Presbyterian church we dubbed the fish church because the pews had doors on each end and we usually ended up with one too many in the pew causing us to be stuffed and boxed in like sardines. It was the routines of the Episcopal and Catholic services that I want to talk about though. At these houses of worship, those of us who were not Catholic or Episcopalian especially looked forward to taking communion. But we also complained about the seemingly formulaic sitting, kneeling, and standing throughout the service.

This is a ritual I never really embraced or fully understood, but my peers who grew up going to a similar house of worship knew what to do instinctively. Why? Because they had years to observe and internalize spoken and unspoken rules and rituals of their church. This is what it is like being around Blacks for me. There are unspoken and spoken rules, traditions, language, behaviors, cues, and rituals that are part of Black culture. They are partially developed because of oppression and partially developed in celebration, in spite of oppression. Some of those traditions are placed in opposition to the traditions that have developed in White culture.

Because, as I described earlier, Whites have had more opportunities to be in positions of power and influence, White culture has become the norm in U.S. mainstream institutions and social spaces like schools and universities. Thus, the way I act, speak, and behave in these spaces differs from when I am in culturally Black spaces. (On the flip side, this concept/idea is so normal to me because I have lived it but it is very new to a lot of Whites who have not lived it and work hard not to see it). Who I am in academic spaces is more like me in a Catholic church. I have observed the behaviors, language, and traditions. I have participated in them but as an observer. It never feels quite like home in an academic space, whether I am the teacher or the student.

I have indicated above that there is a difference in me in Black spaces and academic spaces. Many other scholars feel this difference as well and pursue this as a necessary and responsible component of their research. For example, Glesne (2011) explained how and why more scholars of color use research methods that promote identity exploration and its impact on the research; and that allow them to critically question and take social action against injustice. When you see the world from a marginalized perspective, when you wonder how you came to be marginalized and how to live in the margins, examining the sociohistorical development of ideas and knowledge is a part of your normative being. Recognized theories that support this type of inquiry help ease the pain of trauma and make possible less conventional but incredibly important research inquiries. As such, I will use critical race theory and sociocultural theory that support this approach.

In the next chapter I will explain how these theories synchronize my work—they help support what I do and what I do contributes to the expansion and deepening of these theories. Before delving into my conceptual framework, I want to make one more point about my identity.

So far I have introduced myself as a reader, invisible, a Black woman, and an educator. We all carry many identities and different ones feel prominent at different times. My race and the intersection of my race and gender go with me wherever I go. For lots of reasons, those are aspects of my identity and lived experience that I see everything through. They are my lenses. Choosing to focus on my lenses is a political and intentional act and I hope that fact is not lost in this writing process.

Self-Talk: Boxed in by Academic Expectations

Writing in "academese" has often felt like a chore. There are these rules one is supposed to follow that I don't remember learning, but somehow should know how to follow, such as a thesis statement and the difference between a conclusion and a summary and when to use one or the other. And voice/tone. As a teacher it was challenging to score students on the six traits of writing around voice. Not only does it seem subjective, but teachers are expected to infer a student's intended audience and then make assumptions about the appropriateness of their voice. *A writing teacher's purpose, at least in part, is to prepare students to understand a type of cultural capital—to write with referents, implications, and social cues from which a certain audience or type of reader will be inferred. This negotiation between author and reader is what makes writing beautiful. But, if one never gains the expected or anticipated social/cultural capital to supply broad culturally recognizable inferences, the writing falls short.*

Within academic writing and in most academic spaces, I have not gained enough of the social/cultural capital to be confident in what I do and say. I just want to write and share my story and help someone and be a better teacher—why are those pieces of me not enough? I understand there have to be rules sometimes, but why do I always feel like I am learning the rules while so many around me know them inherently or learn them easily? *These are the*

wonderings I have when in predominantly White spaces. Upon encountering the work of Patricia Hill Collins (2009), I thought I had found an excuse *to speak from the depth of my soul as a Black woman. But even, then, I have had to cultivate and learn to use a particular voice or tone when producing academic writing. It's not that I don't value academia and academic language. I just don't understand why it is such a battle for me to exist in academic spheres even though I proclaim success as a student and journey to be an academic. In all my years of schooling, I still want to speak in my cultural voice and live with confidence in my cultural space.*

I started this section with a familiar tone speaking from my cultural voice. I think I had to. Knowing there would be personal things shared later on, I wanted to seem relatable to readers. In some ways, I think it was also a way of seeking approval—if I say things in a way that is uncontroversial and relatable, the reader will like *me and believe what I say. But eventually I had to explain what my research was about and demonstrate my grasp of scholarship to support the context of my research. This is where I start to transition into my academic voice and blend it with my personal voice. It felt strange writing it and it feels strange rereading it—telling stories while moving the research agenda forward. I think, in a way, that represents this whole process. The content of the next chapter is more traditionally academic and the use of academic voice presents more fluidly. At the end of the chapter I reflect some more on why that is.*

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framing

The frame of an artistic portrait literally bounds the artistic representation it holds. The frame also contributes to the visual aesthetic of the painting—changing the frame can change how the viewer interprets the portrait. The frame of a research portrait also, symbolically, holds authors' work and contributes to the meaning readers make. If I had chosen different theories, the process and outcomes of the research would be different. My research, or, conceptual frame

is comprised of two theories—critical race theory and sociocultural theory. I discuss the influence of both theories distinctly, but also consider how they inform each other in more recent iterations.

Critical Race Theory

In the 1960s, Black educators, lawyers, and social activists reactivated some ideas of a few earlier Black scholars and educators who had questioned overt and explicit racism (such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Mary McLeod Bethune, Walter White, and W.E.B. DuBois). This generation of scholars suggested new theories were needed to highlight and combat subtle forms of racism that persisted even after the advancement of race relations and the passing of equity policies during the civil rights era. These needs led to the formation of critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). There are many constructs and tenets of CRT, and although some consensus does exist, many scholars often apply and develop new iterations. The focus here is on four tenets most relevant to education and self-study research. These are the normalcy of racism, the use of counternarrative, intersectionality, and interest convergence.

Normalcy of Racism and Interest Convergence.

These tenets of CRT argue that the normalcy and prevalence of race keep those with privilege blind to it because it is engrained in the fabric of U.S. culture, systems, and society, while those victimized by racism have a sort of double sight (á la Du Bois's double consciousness). Therefore, individual racists need not exist in order for racism to be a current issue because it is persistent and pervasive across time and circumstances. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; McIntosh, 1989; UCLA School of Public Affairs, 2016). In other words, it always is! One example of this pervasiveness of racism is the "doll test" study first conducted by Mamie and Kenneth Clark in the 1940s (Legal Defense Fund, 2016). The Clarks studied the psychological effects of segregation on Black children and their racial perceptions by having them choose a Black doll or White doll in response to various prompts and questions. Most of the children preferred the White doll and assigned positive characteristics to it. The Clarks concluded that segregation and prejudice created feelings of inferiority and damaged the self-esteem of Black children (http://www.naacpldf.org/brown-at-60-the-doll-test). In 2010, Spencer conducted a study based on the Clarks' research and some of her research and findings were the focus of an Anderson Cooper special on CNN. Black and White children were included and asked questions about their preferences and associations of certain words like "good" and "bad". Again, a majority of the children associated White dolls with positive words and experiences, such as "nice" and "smart". But Spencer also found that Black children selected dark skin more often than White children when indicating positive attitudes or beliefs. These two studies show how racism and prejudice are endemic and impact in invisible ways (Billante & Hadad, 2010).

Another example of how pervasive racism and prejudice are at a more systemic level is voting laws and restrictions. An article from *Bloomberg News* (Niquette, 2016) explains it this way,

> In 1965, Congress passed the Voting Rights Act. The law banned states from passing laws that made it difficult or impossible for African Americans to vote. In 2013, the Supreme Court ended an important part of the law, which said that the federal government could block proposed new voting laws in certain states with a history of discrimination.
>
> Immediately, many states passed laws to make voting requirements stricter. All of these states had Republican governors. The states said the new laws were enacted to end voter fraud. Opponents said the real purpose of these laws was to make it harder for Blacks and Hispanics to vote. As the 2016 presidential election approaches, a growing number of courts agreed.

Whether these state leaders were unaware of how their supposed laws to control voter fraud had a direct impact on the voting rights of Black and Hispanic citizens is of little significance. If they were aware then they were overtly racist and if they were unaware, it shows how laws and law makers continue to do damage to Blacks and other marginalized people, even unintentionally.

Critical race theorists contend that the pervasiveness of racism must be continually analyzed. Blindness to it allows socially constructed categories, like race, to change based on the assumed value of the people assigned to each category. This often happens at the whims of those with political, economic, and social power and influence. Changes are made to meet their economic and labor needs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For example, at one point in history Mexican immigrants were welcomed into the U.S. for their

inexpensive labor. In 2016, the President-elect of the U.S. campaigned on a homophobic, sexist, racist, and xenophobic platform in which he argued for expelling "illegal immigrants" from the country because they are taking jobs from citizens. He also proposed writing laws and policies to limit the number of Mexican immigrants entering the U.S. and to make residing in the U.S. difficult for them.

When the value of racialized people can change at the whims of those with power, it is much more challenging to clearly identify and understand the traumatization of being a person of color in a White world, and that there is a White world period. In the U.S., Whiteness is *the* norm and its cultural values are often unspoken yet expected. Thus, students who have different cultural norms can find it challenging and traumatizing to function effectively in the U.S. education system. Yet they often have no choice, or the words and opportunities to express these dilemmas. A critical race methodology offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Counternarrative and Storytelling.

Narratives have long been part of the telling of history and perpetuation of White supremacy culture. Telling history, whether it is in simple conversation or in a history book, is telling stories. The compilation of the stories, which ones get repeated and recorded over time creates the grand narrative of history in the present. The narrative of U.S. society is changing but still often told from the perspective of White males, the Founding Fathers, presidents, and businessmen. The stories of women, queer people, and people of color are special additions or told in stereotypes and archetypes. Thankfully, with much fight and resistance, this is slowly changing. But generally, the master narrative is told through the experiences of White male heroes. Majoritarian narratives generate from a legacy of racial privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Derrick Bell (1995), who is often credited as a father of critical race theory (which he described as the heir of both critical legal studies and civil rights scholarship), describes critical race theory writing and lecturing as "characterized by frequent use of the first person, storytelling, narrative, allegory, interdisciplinary use of law, and unapologetic creativity" (p.

899). He said,

> I am not sure who coined the phrase 'critical race theory' to describe this form of writing, and I have received more credit than I deserve from the movement's origins. I rather think that this writing is the response to a need for expressing views that cannot be communicated effectively through existing techniques. In my case, I prefer using stories as a means of communicating views to those who hold very different views on the emotionally charged subject of race. People enjoy stories and will often suspend their beliefs, listen to the story, and then compare their views, not with mine, but with those expressed in the story (p. 902).

The counternarrative then, is about rejecting this narrow version of the story in form, purpose, and content to be more inclusive of the storytelling practices of marginalized communities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Institutional racism ensures a dominant culture and a resulting narrative based on White people's collective values. Likewise, people of color, people living in poverty, and people from other marginalized groups develop their own cultural values, practices, and narratives. They develop distinct and equally relevant cultures while being aware of denied opportunities afforded those who are members of (or those who choose to adopt or assimilate into elements of) the dominant culture. Counternarratives are both responses to the pressure of the dominant culture and expressions of other cultural heritages, customs, values, and traditions.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explained that people of color—as a consequence of systemic oppression—often use storytelling to resist and recover from internalized negative racial stereotypes. They said,

A factor contributing to the demoralization of marginalized groups is self-condemnation. Members of minority groups internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society have constructed of them in order to maintain their power. Historically, storytelling has been a kind of medicine to heal the wounds of pain caused by racial oppression. The story of one's condition leads to the realization of how one came to be oppressed and subjugated and allows one to stop inflicting mental violence on oneself (p. 57).

Counternarratives are more than just stories. They really refer to the use of storytelling to convey the experiences of marginalized persons, and therefore exists in a variety of forms and is a political stance, saying, here I am, hear me. Counternarratives appear in various forms as Blacks express themselves culturally: poetry, fantasy, dialogue/plays, academic scholarship, visual art, and more. This research project is a counternarrative story written by a Black woman for and about Black women—an illustration or case example of some of our experiences, in our own

voices. While I am the author, my experiences as a Black woman are not only my own. Collective experience is a marker of Black culture. However, individual experiences are important to consider as well. While I do not speak *for* all Black women and women of color, I can speak *to* our collective experience (Bell, 1995; Collins, 1986). This is the power of the voice of color, or the counternarrative.

Black feminists have made several connections between Whiteness theory and critical race theory that help to further understand the counternarratives that people of color live and tell. For instance, Patricia Hill Collins (2009) observed that, "Black women intellectuals have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society and, in doing so, created a multifaceted African American women's intellectual tradition" (p. 5). Because the oppression of Black women has encompassed economic, political, and personal struggle to resist the controlling constraints and images imposed upon them since before enslavement began, our voices have been suppressed in many ways. Thus, we have many stories to tell of, about, and to ourselves, and in our own voices that can illuminate the realities of racism (Angelou, 1994, 2009; Crenshaw, 2016; Delpit, 2006; Greenfield, 1997; Harris, 2015; hooks, 1992, 1997; Jacobs, 2014; Lorde, 2007; Morris, 2016)

A recurring theme of Black women's collective reality is the duality of self-love and challenging hate. Before Black feminist thought became a formal scholarly theory at the end of the 20th century, scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois (1969) and John Hope Franklin (1963/2000) wrote about the provocation of challenging damaging impositions of Whiteness while remaining confidently Black in a White world. DuBois codified it as double consciousness, or a "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" (p. 45). Franklin described how DuBois' voice and perspective as a Black scholar challenged the prevailing narrative of the Reconstruction Era that posited Whites as heroes and Blacks as ignorant and corrupt. DuBois (1998) wrote in *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880,*

We have studied Reconstruction in three states where the preponderance of Negro population, and the political part which it played during Reconstruction, makes it fair to say that the Negro during part of the time exercised a considerable dictatorship over the state governments of South Carolina, Mississippi, and Louisiana (p. 487).

The point here being, the prevailing narrative for Whites consists of heroes conquering others. The prevailing narrative of Blacks is a perpetual fight to be seen as human. This is one example of how Black artists, scholars, and other activists have tried to construct a different narrative for and about Blacks.

The voices and perspective of Black scholars can be powerful and influential. Among them is Aldridge (2003), an education historian, who wrote about the influence of both DuBois and Franklin and the challenge of a "dual agenda of [race] uplift and academic research" (p. 25). Dillard (2000, p. 662) elaborated this researcher duality further in the following statement:

It is not only an ethical imperative for researchers/leaders, but also a compelling possibility to engage a differing metaphor of research, one that profoundly disrupts the idea of neutral

relationships and structures in inquiry and points instead to the complex nature of research when it maintains allegiance and substantive connections to the very communities under study. Thus, alternative epistemological truths are required if educational researchers and leaders are to be truly responsible, asking for new ways of looking into the reality of others that opens our own lives to view – and that makes us accountable to the people whom we study, and their interests and needs.

In other words, it is more accountable and effective to conduct research in alternative ways that are responsive to different ethnic, racial, and cultural individuals, events, and communities being researched. One such alternative is insider perspectives conveyed through stories told by people of color about themselves and their own communities.

Black feminist theory connects these ideas specifically to Black women. Similarly to Collins claims of the importance of understanding Black women's positionalities, Obidah (2003, p. 43) called for research that addresses "the unique voices of Black social scientists" and "the perspectives of Black scholars writing about Black people." These proposals are not based on essentialist arguments for the Black perspective; rather, Obidah said, they are

forged through what I term as *living Blackness*, that is, negotiating one's humanity through a maze of socially constructed notions of what it means to be Black…Black scholars were once Black children, one of the subjects whose social, cultural, and cognitive styles were denied the complexity of their experience. We lived the complexity often missing from our theorized existence (p. 44).

Obidah's statement can be read as encouragement to consider Black counternarratives in researching Black individuals and communities, and to include the voices and experiences of children and other silenced groups. Too often Black children are theorized about in ways that tell them how to be in the world without truly consulting them or their familial, cultural, and epistemological communities. This is turn has created a metanarrative for how they are expected to be seen in society and in school. Obidah argued that in challenging these narratives, Black scholars need to be diligent in capturing these silenced voices and reconstructing distorted identities. This, of course, is not without its challenges as my research project revealed throughout this process.

Intersectionality.

My experience as a Black female has often been traumatic, but it did not have to be so. Dominant culture and institutional racism tell the story that way. It is often an active choice and a stance of resistance to be prideful of my African American heritage. My cultural heritage also stands on its own, not always in relation or resistance to White culture. Counternarratives provide pathways for expressing the complexity and beauty of that heritage and history. Essential to my counternarrative and to telling my story more comprehensively as a Black woman is the interlocking nature of oppression (Collins, 2009), or intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality conveys the idea that "no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 9). Crenshaw (1991, 2012) used the term to describe the experiences of people who carry more than one marginalized identity, such as Black and woman.

Dillard (2000) used endarkened epistemology similarly. She explained that it "embodies a distinguishably different cultural standpoint, located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed socializations of race, gender, and other identities and the historical and contemporary contexts of oppressions and resistance for African American women" (p. 661). Rarely do my experiential stories involve just my Blackness or just my positionality as a cisgender woman. Most often, these two are interconnected and sometimes confounded further by other aspects of my identity. Additionally, as Dillard noted, both historical and contemporary social contexts impact the ways in which attention, both explicitly and subtly, is placed on Blackness and femininity.

Interest Convergence and Whiteness as Property.

Another important aspect of critical race theory is the material benefits of Whiteness. Whiteness theory questions how Whites as a group have come to enjoy privileged access to material goods, such as well-paying jobs, environmentally safe neighborhoods, access to good education, and protection against unprovoked legal harassment (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Maher &Tetreault, 1997; McIntosh, 1991). Conversely, Blacks are often not the recipients of such material benefits and collectively experience a similar social existence even if daily they lead different economic, religious, and cultural existences.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) suggested that the material benefits of Whiteness result from the intersection of race and property, and can be used to understand social and educational inequity. Bell (1995) also studied the events leading up to the development of the U. S. Constitution and concluded there was a tension between property rights and human rights, and that the priority of the government was protection of property. They explained that

The slave status of most African Americans…resulted in them being objectified as property. And, a government constructed to protect the rights of property owners lacked the incentive to secure human rights for the African Americans…The grand narrative of U.S. history is replete with tensions and struggles over property—in its various forms. From the removal of Indians (and later Japanese Americans) from the land, to military conquest of the Mexicans, to the construction of Africans as property, the ability to define, possess, and own property has been a central feature of power in America. (p. 53).

In *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice*, Bell (1987) examines ideas of people, property, and race in the Constitution through a character named Geneva Crenshaw. Ms. Crenshaw, a Black woman, travels to the 1787 Constitutional Convention as a representative of the 20th century. In addressing the delegates she says,

'The real crisis you face should not be resolved by your recognition of slavery, an evil whose immorality will pollute the nation as it now stains your document. Despite your resort to euphemisms like *persons* to keep out of the Constitution such words as *slave* and *slavery*, you cannot evade the consequences of the ten different provisions you have placed in the Constitution for the purpose of protecting property in slaves.' (p. 34).

This point about property relates to the ideals of materialism and is significant because it explains how physically Black bodies have been literally and symbolically controlled throughout

U.S. history. Harriet Jacobs (2014), in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Memoirs of a Former Slave,* described these events and more, how Black bodies were paid for, beaten, raped, and traded. During the Jim Crow era of Reconstruction, laws and inhumane punishments dictated what Black bodies could and could not do as Ida B. Wells-Barnett (2014) recounted in *On Lynchings.* During the 1960s Civil Rights struggle, children were spat on, called horrendous names, and murdered for trying to go to school, or while simply attending church. The effects of this dehumanizing control of Blackness and Black bodies are manifested in contemporary representations of Black females as hypersexual yet presumably unattractive (Angelou, 1994, 2009; Harris, 2015). These images are contemporary replications of de jure and de facto segregation of earlier eras as they work to control perceptions of Black womanhood, and essentially dictate how society is to treat these individuals. For me, they play out in how afraid I am to sometimes present myself in groups comprised of predominantly White peers and audiences because I have internalized representations of Black womanhood that tell me I am ugly, unintelligent, and invisible. This is an example of how subtle racism results from systemic racist policies and leads to trauma. My body, as part of the Black womanhood collective, symbolically has been bought and sold, and used for economic gain against my will.

Critical race theorists help illuminate how the explicit categorization of people based on race leads to the creation of distinct cultural traditions and behaviors that appear because of/and in spite of forced racial group isolation. In line with critical race theory, The Dismantling Racism Workshop identified 15 characteristics of white supremacy culture. These include perfectionism, sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, only one right way, paternalism, either/or thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, I'm the only one, progress is bigger/more, objectivity, and right to comfort. While I do not explicitly explore each of these, they are helpful nomenclatures in specifying the prevalence of everyday racism as a result of the laws, systems, and narratives that have prevailed in U.S. history. In subsequent chapters I explore examples of how these have existed, influenced, and traumatized my life as a student, teacher, and scholar. In summary, critical race theory points to the subtleties and pervasiveness of racism that would otherwise remain hidden. It also "talks back" to sociocultural theory. It is somewhat of a counternarrative in and of itself in relation to sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory helps explain how and why prevailing societal norms and systems that marginalize some and privilege others have persisted over time. Together, these two frameworks provide ideological foundations that allow me to illuminate the processes and importance of critical self-study in culturally responsive teaching practice.

Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory considers learning as a social process; thus, social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development. Both Vygotsky (1978) and Moll (2013) argued that everything is learned on two levels; first through interaction with others and then integrated into an individual's mental structure. Sociocultural theory has gone through multiple iterations and extensions of Vygotsky's first conceptualization in the early 20th century. It notes that language

and social interaction influence knowledge and behavior—from a child's early utterance of a word to more complex and metacognitive thinking and behaviors.

The two elements of sociocultural theory most relevant to my framework are genetics, and sociohistorical development. Genetics (as in genesis and not biological development) is the process of becoming[1]. There are different levels of genetic development including ontogenesis—development and change over the span of one's lifetime; microgenesis—development over more brief periods of time; phylogenesis—evolutionary changes as in thousands and millions of years; and sociohistorical development—changes in one's cultural values and norms over time (this cannot be measured as distinctly as the others). I focus on sociohistorical development because those influences connect closely to cultural change and its effects.

Sociohistorical development refers to the changes that occur in one's cultural values, norms, and technologies throughout history. Vygotsky (1978) explained that "voluntary activity is a product of the historical-cultural development of behavior (Kindle Locations 718-719). For example, the pattern and rhythm of my speech, the words I use and their grammatical makeup, and even when I choose to speak or be silent are all influenced by the traditions and values of my cultural community over time. As individuals, we make choices but they are influenced by sociohistorical (cultural) development through social interaction. This is why African American vernacular English is not an inferior form of English but a structured language system with its own rules and organization (Smitherman, 2000). This is true for individuals and groups. Contemporary cultural norms and values are direct products of routine generational, social interaction. My lifetime behaviors develop through the everyday. This is why, even though legal

[1] In linguistics, genetic relationship refers to languages that belong to the same language family.

enslavement ended decades ago, the U.S. is still not a post-racial society. Black and Brown people are regularly subjected to social biases and racism, and this is highly visible in the U.S. education system (Au, 2009; Carter, 2005). The beliefs and values that drove a system of enslavement still exist and impact people and students today because they have been passed along through social interactions, activities, policies, and practices over the past century and a half.

During my last assignment as a classroom teacher, I taught a unit on voting rights with fourth and fifth grade students. We learned that in 1776 when the notion of a "right" to vote first gained legal status, only six percent of the population at the time was deemed eligible to vote and they were all White, male, Protestant, property owners. When an economic crisis, known as the Panic of 1819 occurred, many of that six percent were no longer property owners so the laws changed to allow other White men to vote as well. This is an example of how the activities we engage in (e.g. voting) are steeped in personal and cultural values that develop over time through social engagements and interactions. They also are intentional and guided by the ideals of those with the economic, social, and political power and privilege to enforce them.

Sociohistorical development also refers to how values and ideas change over time. Pfau-Effinger (2004) analyzed the evolution of familial household responsibilities in "Western" culture. Once upon a time the gender "norm" for this culture was a female housewife and male breadwinner. Today, with some variation, many females are not housewives and are the breadwinners, or both. What is it that has contributed to the change in values like this over time? Pfau-Effinger claimed that the transition into a modern industrial society greatly expedited that change. In that case, changes in technology and activity contributed to these changes in values

and vice versa. Critical race theory and other critical theories illuminate how certain institutionalized values persist and other values are ignored.

Vygotsky's ideas about socialization and culture are important to understanding how racism and other isms are perpetuated in societal and school cultures. However, it was not necessarily Vygotsky's purpose to think through the lens of racial oppression as this was not the context of his research (He was a raced and cultural being even though he may not have acknowledged it). But, by omitting any conversation about racial, and other types of oppression, his work is much less immediately applicable to the experiences of people of color. In this sense, he is not so different from other White scholars and researchers who perpetuated the status quo by not considering the experiences of people of color. Many scholars of color and others have applied sociocultural theory filtered through a critical racial lens to ensure the narrative of social acceleration does not inherently exclude marginalized groups. For example, some scholars have used elements of sociocultural theory to explain differences in achievement and teachers' effectiveness with privileged White students, students of color, and students from poverty-impacted communities (Giroux, 1988; Lee, 2001; McLaren, 1997). In doing so, these scholars explicitly name racism and oppression in settings where they are only implied or ignored entirely. Sociocultural theory on its own does not dictate a critical stance on culture, nor does it have to. But in doing so, the narratives that developed subsequently created a need and space for counternarratives.

Culturally responsive teaching in practice is about understanding, from students' deep-rooted cultural perspectives, how they make meaning of the world. If education theorists, researchers, and practitioners embraced the ideas behind genetics and sociohistorical development, then they must be willing to see the relationship between history and culture, and

cultural development and individual development over time. If culture changes over time as a result of individuals' interactions and interpretations of the world, then individuals in the present are not distinct from their cultural histories because they are who they are because of social interactions in various cultural groups. This is the case both individually and in aggregates. Thus, we cannot act like, de jure segregation and Jim Crow laws, redlining and housing covenants, hiring and job discrimination, enslavement and the slave trade, Native American genocide, Japanese interment, and so on, do not have influences on the lives of ALL people in the U.S. today. The difference in the legacy of White folks, and Black and Brown folks is that most Whites were the ones causing and ignoring the traumas around them and therefore have sociohistorically not dealt with their lasting negative impacts. Conversely, Black and Brown people have been knee deep in trauma for centuries, and still continue on in spite of. Thus, the sociocultural experiences of a Black child generally speaking will not mimic those of a White child because they have very different sociocultural histories and heritages.

DuBois' (1969) rendition of the "veil" is an oft used powerful example of how Black children's socialization is grounded or located existentially far from that of White children and thus why schooling is often counter to their culture and worth exploring beyond and in addition to what Vygotsky's (and others) proposed. If a child first learns through interactions with others, then the storied interactions of a Black child with the world cannot be ignored. DuBois described an important social and cultural moment in *The Souls of Black Folks* when he said,

> It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me…something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,--

> refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others… (p. 44).

Most Black children have this experience—the realization that some do not really see them—effectively being made invisible. In that moment, their world takes a lasting shift in which they are forced to face the reality that whoever they thought they were, the world sees them as aggressive, fearful, dangerous, unintelligent, conquerable, undesirable, a problem to be solved. And it sometimes is not until decades later that they begin to realize they bought into the invisibility, and sometimes begin a change process that involves taking on the world as their visible selves and by any means necessary. They have to make up for lost time; that they were not truly living because they were invisible. This is the kind of mental shift I am asking teachers to take to undo the ways they were socialized so they can temporarily "put on" the socialization process of the Black boy in class whom they constantly discipline and unknowingly perpetuate oppressive practices that their history, culture, and community have socialized them to think are ok. DuBois (1969) again said it powerfully,

> the Negro [African American] is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in the American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. 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 look on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, --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 (p. 45).

The more that symbolic Black boy is disciplined more severely or more often for things he sees

other children getting simple warnings for or no discipline at all, he becomes aware of how he is perceived, and increasingly susceptible to non-existence in culturally authentic, and humanly dignified ways. Many are able to overcome the impact of these perceptions and be "successful" but can still carry the internalized weight of these negative associations.

In *Racialized Identities: Race and Achievement Among African American Youth*, Nasir (2012) presented a "master-narrative" about Black students that appeared in both scholarly and popular publications on education and race. This narrative, she contends, consists of the stories told from perspectives of power about the achievement deficit of African American youth. Typically, how African American student learning and achievement is framed does not "[challenge] the ways that our society thinks about and defines blackness—including viewing blackness as oppositional to whiteness and viewing African American students as not intellectually capable and not culturally prepared for achievement" (p. 8). Thus, as cultural customs, language, behaviors, traditions, and so on are passed consciously, subconsciously, and unconsciously generationally, these master narratives and sometimes counternarratives are transferred as well. Perspectives about Black students by others (and sometimes themselves), become "universalized" and impact self-esteem and trajectory.

These conceptions motivated the work Lee (2001) did to deconstruct the historical dimensions of the cultural practices of some groups of Black high school students who were not meeting standards. Using a framework of cultural-historical activity theory, she examined the knowledge base of the teacher, "to coach and scaffold a radically different intellectual culture among students who were underachieving" (p. 97). In this analysis Lee was both the researcher and the teacher. In the process she engaged in action research, components of which are relevant to self-study. Lee also built upon sociocultural theory and the idea of psychological communal

toolkits (Wertsch 1991, Bruner, 1990), by taking into "account both the content and the perspective of previous dialogues." (p. 98) to better understand current behavior and being. It is the embodiment of an ongoing joke my mom and I have, *sometimes, when I open my mouth, my mother comes out*.

It is challenging for Blacks, invisible and double sighted, to talk about and explain their perspectives and experiences, but that is also why it must be done. hooks (1989) offered a cogent explanation of Black socialization that may contribute to why so many Whites just do not understand our experiences. In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, she explained that she has kept quiet about personal stuff in her writing for the fear of punishment (e.g. that others would think she should not say these things), and the fear of loss (e.g. that others would end relationships with her because of her truth). She elaborated as follows:

> So many Black folks have been raised to believe that there is just so much that you should not talk about, not in private and not in public. So many poor and working-class people of all races have had the same stuff pushed down deep in them…white people…just tell all their business, just put their stuff right out there. One point of blackness then became—like how you keep your stuff to yourself. (p. 2).

These warnings contribute to the process of invisibility and the sociohistorical narrative of Blackness that only those who experience it can truly understand. Again, this counternarrative is a political act and becomes a way to distinguish and demonstrate the experiences of Blacks and other people of color as they push beyond the veil, demand White double-sight, and find a path to visibility. hooks added,

> It has been a political struggle for me to hold to the belief that there is much which we—

> black people—must speak about, much that is private that must be openly shared, if we are to heal our wounds (hurts caused by domination and exploitation and oppression), if we are to recover and realize ourselves (p. 3).

The sociocultural experiences of people of color and other various marginalized groups are not like the narrative of the status quo. As teachers begin to realize this, they become more visible to their students and develop the double sight necessary to see what you don't know you cannot see.

Self-Talk: Counternarrative, Critical Race Theory, and Self-Study

Contrarily, from the self-talk following the first chapter, I am less critical of the academic voice here and also believe it presents as stronger and smoother. Story, coincidentally, this chapter took the most time and brain power to form. Large sections have not changed much in content, form, or organization since its early inceptions. This signifies the foundational importance of critical race and sociocultural theories to my conceptions of self-study. While I do not want to seem dismissive of what Vygotsky and others have contributed I also want to illustrate that the default to not consider implications of a theory along racial lines, given global history around racism, is in large part what allows racism to persist. Therefore, these two theories are often in conversation in my head as I engage in ongoing self-study beyond the present moment.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

A visual portrait, when publicly presented, is usually accompanied with a brief written explanation from the artist. These insights of context are usually posted adjacent to the portrait on a plastic-protected piece of paper. The preceding pages exhibit the context to this portrait,

displaying what and why this portrait was developed. What comes next is the exploration of how the portrait was created.

Biography

I have been in school most of my life. Twenty-eight of my almost 32 years of livin' have been spent as a student in formal learning spaces, and with some overlap, nine of those years as a teacher and teacher educator. The first three to four years of my life were the only time I was not formally schooled in some way. That is a significant amount of time to experience the U.S. educational system, and it is not difficult to imagine why schooling is at the forefront of my search to better understand me.

I often tell my life's journey through my educational experiences because changing schools has often meant a significant shift in my geographic, social, and cultural contexts, and they determine the role and importance of school in my life. I am currently a graduate student and live in Seattle, WA. I have lived here for six years. I moved here, without ever having visited or knowing anyone, for the sole purpose of graduate studies. In Seattle, I have taught at an independent school near the border of an historically Asian immigrant and Asian American neighborhood, an historically African American neighborhood that is being gentrified rapidly. During my years in Seattle I also have worked as a teacher educator through the university where I am earning my degree, supporting the development of preservice teachers in public schools around the city.

Before moving to Seattle, I lived in Phoenix, AZ for four years. I also had never been to Arizona, and did not know anyone there. I moved to Arizona shortly after graduating college as a Teach for America corps member, and to begin my journey as an educator. For four years, I taught mostly fifth grade in a heavily poverty-impacted neighborhood. The families in this

community were predominantly Mexican and Mexican American. Some were Black, and even fewer were Asian, Pacific Islander, Native, and White. While beginning my journey as an educator in Arizona, I also earned a M. Ed. degree in elementary education during my first two years of teaching. It is unlikely that I would have ever lived in Phoenix or Seattle if I were not driven by my educational pursuits.

College marked another geographical change, this time to the Midwest. I attended undergraduate in a mostly upper-class suburb, just outside of Chicago. I entered college through a two-week summer academic workshop for students of color and students from low socioeconomic communities. I went because I have always been relatively shy and wanted an opportunity to meet some folks before the year really started. I am glad I did because some people I met then continue to be my closest friends. I also now realize the significance of this workshop and the implications of a predominantly White university hosting this annual program for poor students and students of color.

In college, I majored in journalism and minored in African American studies. The minor in African American studies is significant because it marks the early stages of being woke (being aware, knowing what's going on in the community, particularly around racism and other social issues; urbandictionary.com). I remember in one class session discussing the American Dream and realizing how steeped in White ideals of success and progress it is. For another course, I read a book about Afro-German women and realized that I never considered such people existed. Since elementary school, in history classes I generally learned about Nazi Germany and the persecution of Jews but no mention was ever made of Black Germans. So, when the idea of Afro-German women was presented to me, it jarred my consciousness. This is the only class from my undergraduate studies, over ten years later, for which I still have the books. I also got

the opportunity to spend spring break of my junior year in Paris, where I met some Black Parisian women. This added to my growing understanding of the African diaspora and our varied but shared experiences as people with beautiful black skin.

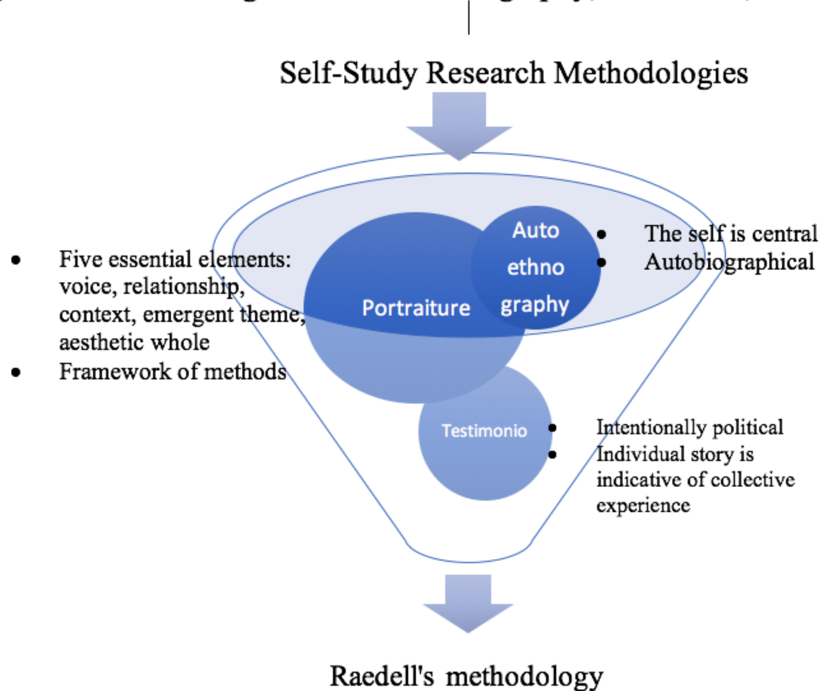
Before college, I did not have many Black friends or other friends of color. I grew up in New York state. I was born in Brooklyn and lived in Queens in my early years. I remember going to preschool and being picked up by my grandma. I just barely remember being three or four and going to school board meetings with my aunt, who was the superintendent of a school district on Long Island, and falling asleep on the table while administrators and other educators, many of whom were Black, deliberated and discussed what was best for students. By the time I started kindergarten, my mom, aunt, brothers, and I had moved to rural upstate New York to a small town where you could count the number of families of color on one hand. My aunt took on the superintendence of a school district there and that is where I attended kindergarten through fourth grade. My extended family helped to rear us, but my brothers and I did a lot of taking care of each other while my mom worked during the day and went to nursing school at night. From fifth grade on, I attended private schools. For one year, I attended a Christian day school in upstate New York and then, after skipping sixth grade, went on to spend my middle and high school years at a boarding school in Eastern Long Island. These experiences and memories peripherally and directly shape my relationships to education, my perceptions of the value of multiculturalism, and how I now view my purpose and perspective in facing and challenging educational inequity that often displaces and marginalize people of color.

Methodology

Three methodological frameworks were used to explore the research question and help tell this story. They are portraiture, autoethnography, and testimonio. Portraiture was the primary

method used to prepare the research template, collect and interpret data, and design the format of the study. Autoethongraphy and testimonio informed processes along the way. Collectively they are methodologies of self-study but emphasize distinct elements. Figure 2 illustrates my interpretation of the relationship among the three and how they informed my research. The funnel shape in this figure suggests that each methodology has distinct features but also some important similarities. The result is a methodological foundation that well-serves the intentions of culturally responsiveness and self-study in education.

Figure 2. The Convergence of Autoethnography, Portraiture, and Testimonio



Some of the ways in which these three research methods converge are:

- they are autobiographical
- they tell a story through research and insist that the process the researcher and researched undergo to create a narrative is just as essential as the "final" research product

- they require reflection and reflectivity and the intentional investigation of the positionality of the researcher throughout the research process
- they engage qualitative methods including conducting and coding interviews and performing observations (with others and with self)

Another important similarity of these three methodologies is the political approach they take. While testimonio is explicitly political, portraiture and autoethnography still imply a political stance from researchers because they explore self-study under the premise that personal story has purposes and perspectives that are worth sharing and investigating. In fact, several autoethnographers claim that every experience is worth writing about deeply and reflectively (Bochner, 2013; Chang, 2008; Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013). Why researchers make decisions and how they incorporate explanations of these decisions into telling the story make these methods implicitly or explicitly political and different from other types of narrative research (Merriam, 2009).

But, the differences among them are also important reasons why they are appropriate for this project. Briefly, autoethnography emphasizes one person's story as indicative of a larger cultural or social group or phenomenon (e.g. my story as a Black woman in education as a case example of the experiences of many Black women in education). Portraiture highlights the dialogic interplay of the researcher and the researched in the process that generates the product of the research, or the portrait. Testimonio is activism; an explicit political act. The author tells her story with the intention of igniting solidarity and social action. The aim is to "weave the author of the *testimonio* and the reader into a relationship that moves towards social change and social justice" (de Saxe, 2014, p. 108). Thus, my self-study is a challenge to the injustices I have

faced, speaking for me, but knowing systemic oppression has impacted others as well and sharing my story is an intentional act of exposing that system.

Portraiture. There are five essential features of portraiture. These are relationship, context, voice, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. While all of these are important, voice is paramount. Its functions are varied, including being the ideological context of the portraitist and participants; the positionality and epistemology of the participants; the "witness" for depicting things others may not see; interpreting or making sense of what is observed; and preoccupation or ways in which the researcher's observations are shaped by her epistemological community, disciplinary background, and theoretical perspectives. Voice also is the researcher's autobiography, how she uses the knowledge and wisdom gained from life experiences as resources for understanding. This is primarily how I use voice throughout. Finally, voice is dialogue between the researcher and the researched as the portrait is created (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot further described voices as the anticipatory framework of the research that is conveyed as the researcher's point of view.

A critical but perhaps dubious element of voice is silence. In a book about silence and speaking in classrooms, Reda (2009) declares that the stories teachers tell about classroom silence is one limited perspective and quiet students' voice offer powerful insight on classroom environment. These silences, the expressed and the sensed but unsaid, matter in making meaning of students' association to and relationship with school, classrooms, curriculum, peers, teachers, and so on.

Relationship, the second component of portraiture, involves reflective conversations with self as a social process as well as interactions between the researcher and the researched. It determines how participants will be accessed and what kinds of access they allow the researcher

to have. How relationships develop influence connections, reciprocity, intimacy, what and how data are collected, and how knowledge is co-constructed. It influences dialogue, and thus how the portrait is developed.

Personal, historical and internal contexts are the third element in developing a portrait. Context is essential to a self-study because it helps explain some of the ways sociohistorical culture influences one's daily life. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) identified different aspects of context including physical setting, the geography, demography, and ecological characteristics that evoke visual, auditory, and tactile senses. Additionally, the ideological and cultural journey that has shaped the present existence of the researcher and researched impacts the context. It is the institutional culture that has developed over time, and depicts an organization's (or person's) values, structures, and purposes. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis advised the portraitist to stay alert to relationships and dissonance between the physical environment and the institutional culture. Finally, personal context, or the researcher's perch and perspective, are essential. Here, "the portraitist is clear: from where I sit, this is what I see; these are the perspectives and biases I bring; this is the scene I select; this is how people seem to be responding to my presence" (p. 50). Contexts are like "secrets" a narrator presents in a story that give the reader deeper insight into the characters and the decisions they make (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983, 1994).

In this portrait creation process, the researcher and the researched co-create a deeply detailed piece shaped by the perspectives of their lived, cultural experiences. This deep exploration of the contexts of people and spaces provides what Harding (1993) called strong objectivity, which requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge. A major intent of portraiture, then, is to explicitly capture the

contexts of the researcher and the researched to create a deeply reflective and responsive portrait—because even though culturally competent researchers will probably be more reflective about their personal impact on the research than traditional researchers, they will not necessarily be explicit about the reflective process as a key feature of the research.

A fourth essential element of creating portraits in research is identifying emergent themes in the data collected. They derive from "an iterative and generative process; the themes emerge from the data and they give the data shape and form. The portraitist identifies patterns and creates a thematic framework for the construction of the narrative" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 185). There are several modes of "listening" and "looking" (not to be confused with the five elements of portraiture as a whole) that help identify these themes. These are, listening for repetitive refrains which indicate commonly held views; listening for resonant metaphors and symbolic expressions that reveal how participants experience their realities; and listening for themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals. This listening is happening *as* data are collected and began to shape the narrative in my head. Fourth, triangulation is used to weave together threads of knowledge from a variety of sources. This involved me looking to see connections among different periods of my life, different roles, and different encounters with oppression and marginalization. Fifth, themes and patterns are constructed or revealed that may have initially been invisible or seemed dissonant.

The essential elements of portraiture are interconnected. Context nuances the voice of the researcher and influences the relationships of the researcher and researched. Relationships are driven by the context of both entities, and their individual and collective experiences. Together these elements form an aesthetic whole, which is the fifth component of portraiture. Portraiture intentionally blends the controlled empiricism of traditional academic research with the more

flexible cadences and character of all kinds of artistic representations (Davis, 2003). The aesthetic whole that develops from incorporating these five elements is more than simply the sum of the parts.

Chapman (2007, p. 156) acclaimed, "The portraiture methodology is used when a researcher wishes to produce a full picture of an event or person that tells as much about the subject as it does about the researcher, or portraitist." This is reminiscent of sankofa, the Ashanti ideology of looking back to go forward. In my experience, Blacks often see time related to events as opposed to regimented and regulated by a clock. This is significant in debates surrounding the prevalence of racism and white supremacy. White supremacy often dictates time as frozen, racism was *then* or today's greatest civil rights battle is education. By isolating these eras, the history related to them is easily forgotten and each issue or marginalized community fights to be heard over others. Sankofa is adamant about the importance of history, such that it is not simply the past, but a component of the present and the future and vice versa.

Finally, portraiture is about goodness. The portraitist sees the participants positively, places them in positions of authority, and assures that their voices and perspectives will not be overshadowed by the researcher. Often, when marginalized communities are researched, unintentional and intentional harm can incur from the researchers' inattentiveness to their own personal biases (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). By intentionally viewing marginalized people and communities in their own contexts and shifting the research emphasis from focusing on weaknesses to strengths or assets, the researcher asks questions such as, What is happening? What is working and why? What is healthy and strong? What is not working and what is not healthy also are examined but not as the primary or exclusive emphasis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Voice and other voices. Given the importance of voice in portraiture, it is worth exploring it before discussing the other two research paradigms—autoethnography and testimonio. Again, the primary focus in this text is the researcher's autobiography how experience shapes the researcher's understanding. In a s *self*-study, the author may appear to be the only research participant. However, in order to offer sufficient analysis of the social and cultural phenomena explored, other voices, selves, and participants are necessary to give credence to the research process (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2010).. In this case, the experiences and voices of my epistemological, cultural, and sociohistorical communities are the voices that amplify my voice. They all participate in the telling of this story because I am not devoid of my experiences. Our stories, research, and experiences combined make our stories, research, and experiences legitimate in the realm of academic research (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000; Obidah, 2003). Additionally, some scholars argue that developing insight into Black women's experiences reveals more about the sociohistorical experiences of other cultural and gendered groups. Black women have a shared experience because of the impact of institutionalized oppression. Their daily encounters with psyche-damaging macro and microaggressions and battles in blatantly racist and sexist environments create a call for collectively challenging these barriers while also celebrating their heritages and successes. Many Black women have always used their common experience to teach, support, organize, and uplift one another, thus forging community in direct response to the oppressor's attempt to denigrate and divide (Collins, 2009; Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Foster, 1997; Hull, Scott & Smith, 1982; Lorde, 2007). This community is a part of the process of creating my self-study story.

These voices, then and now, are participants in my research because they have influenced what and how I see the world. They help reveal who I am, what I know, and how I know. I also

include the voices of aspiring allies (a term used to emphasize the fact that there is ongoing work to be done), such as, Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Christine Sleeter, who are White scholars who write about injustice in education. Other voices and perspectives are provided by a group of people I affectionately refer to as my White lady friends. These are peers and colleagues who are dismantling racism in education alongside me, and who all happen to be White cisgender women. They are the voices of privilege that do not know first-hand what it is to experience life as a Black woman but who empathize, are diligent about developing their own consciousness, and constantly challenge the marginalization and oppression we face. There is less community with Black women at this level and at predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) so White women become my confidants.

Autoethnography

Glesne (2011) described ethnography as a research method that uses culture as a framework to describe people. It is often used by people from marginalized communities and colonized lands to capture and convey their experiences. Past research in communities of color and colonized communities often consisted of an “outsider” studying on, about, or of a community. More and more contemporary researchers who use ethnography are from those communities, or are people interested in better understanding their own communities from the inside. Ethnographers primarily engage in long-term immersion in the community that they are studying and collect data as participant observers, and through various types of interviews and observations (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Geertz, 1973). The goal is to create what Geertz called “thick description.” The written product that results from ethnographic methods can take different forms such as an autoethnography. Autoethnographic research then, is ethnography with some combination of creative use of narrative and storytelling; autobiographical focus of the narrative; and the reflective consideration of self in relation to broader societal concerns (Chang 2008; Ellis, 2004). In the preface to a methodological novel about autoethnography, Ellis (2004) described its creation process as follows:

> I start with my personal life and pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call ‘systematic sociological introspection’ and ‘emotional recall’ to try to understand an experience I’ve lived through. Then I write my experience as a

story…The goal is to use your life experience to generalize to a larger group or culture" (p. xvii).

Berry (2013), described how and why this process of cultural inquiry makes autoethnography a process of "reflexivity and identity negotiation" (p. 210). Through the process of storytelling and reliving important experiences the researcher uncovers cultural practices and their meanings. As Berry said, "Cultural inquiry begins having already begun, with a confluence of past, present, and anticipated future influences informing any given moment" (p. 211). Thus, in autoethnography the researcher is the researched and the focus is exploring the impact of cultural and social experiences on the self, and the impact of the self on these cultural and social experiences. Like portraiture, social and cultural contexts are important but the depth and complexity are not necessarily the primary focus. Describing how and why the self is interpreted as such, in reflective cycles is the greater focus.

Testimonio

Testimonio is both a process and product. Reyes and Rodríguez (2012) describe it as "an unfinished product that comes out of a process of realizing, making space for, naming, sharing, and theorizing personal experiences collectively as a way to disrupt hegemony and empower its participants" (p. 527). It results from preparing to tell one's story and the process one encounters in producing the story. Thus, my study is an artifact that speaks to the impact of hegemony on my life and calls attention to its systemic imposition on marginalized people and groups generally.

Through the process of crafting this project, I am able to name and confront the intangible monsters that plagued me, and begin to free myself from their hold. How my present reflects my past is a powerful lens for understanding hegemony. These memories, how I recall

them, how I write them, in what order, how I connect them, and what I leave out constitute the process dimension of my testimonio. While many testimonios are coauthored (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001), this is a single authored venture. However, I stress the importance of necessity of other voices in its construction.

Testimonio is purposeful. In one of the earliest and most well-known testimonios, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala,* Menchú (1984), a Quiche Indian woman tells her story to a translator, who introduced Rigoberta as a "privileged witness" who "learned the language of her oppressors in order to use it against them," (p. xii). Wright (Menchú, 1984) implied that her story is a voice for Rigoberta herself, her community, and "all the Indians on the American continent" (p. xi). I think of academic rhetoric as the language of my oppressor because it is something I have had to actively learn in order to be "successful." Because language is a cultural tool (Vygotsky, 1978), it changes over time and between contexts (e.g. elementary school, higher education) I must continually learn it. Even when I become frustrated when trying to develop an explanation of testimonio, I know that I have to employ tools for making sense of my second language, the jargon of academia. This is very intentional. Beverly (1991) described testimonio as intentionally political, and explicit about promoting solidarity and justice.

Testimonio is a practice and a pedagogy. Similarly to my thoughts about academia as a second language, Pérez Huber (2009) asserted that academic knowledge and language are based on racist, sexist, and Eurocentric epistemologies. She called for the development of methodologies that can be used in anti-racist research and practice, and specifically looks to *testimonio* as one such methodology. Testimonio is a kind of self-study that education practitioners and researchers at all levels can employ to intentionally interrogate the role of racism in their personal and professional lives. In explaining its validity, Huber and Cueva

(2012) stated, "*Testimonio* as a methodological approach was employed to provide the participants with a space to reveal and reflect on their educational experiences as mediated by race, immigration status, class, and gender" (p. 396).

It is through these reflections and revelations that healing can happen. By purposefully recalling memories to reinterpret them as tools for anti-oppression, those who engage with testimonio deepen their understanding of the isms that shade the world of education. Chávez (2012) explained her testimonio as a means to

> reinterpret the events we choose to depict regarding our lived experiences. Thus, while stories are many times fragmented bits and pieces of our own collective memory, these instances serve to deepen our understanding of the ways in which social relations are embedded within existing hegemonic structures—in this case, educational institutions" (p.345).

Sometimes this process can be indirect and nonlinear, and seem haphazard to the untrained reader. As Wright (Menchú, 1984), Rigoberta Menchú's translator, explained, "Sometimes, however, the wealth of memories and associations which come tumbling out in this spontaneous narrative leave the reader a little confused as to chronology and details of events" (p. iv). Healing happens on purpose but not always according to a pre-plan. Testimonio offers healing. It is not necessarily the intent of the author to make it easy for the readers, but to actually push them beyond their normal, and invite them to experience, momentarily, another world.

Where portraiture emphasizes the contexts of the researcher and researched, autoethnography emphasizes reflective analysis of the researcher's personal and social

positionality. The center of attention in testimonio is the collective, collaborative, and social importance of building meaning in a self-study. A conceptual understanding of these three methodologies is essential because they guide the choices I made. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997),

> portraiture blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of a portrait is placed in social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image (p. xv).

Data Collection and Analysis

To go into research completely blind would be irresponsible, even when the research topic is personal so the portraitist creates a template that acts as a guide. The template is the "intellectual and experiential structure that is her point of reference and guides her angle of vision and her data collection" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 186). The researcher has a clear intellectual framework that is intentionally flexible, as opposed to specific questions and a well-defined pre-determined plan (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 1994). Throughout the data collection and writing processes, the elements of the template may not be explicit. Each of the methodologies described earlier involves processes of collecting memories, selecting which ones to probe further, analyzing them, and creating a narrative that will eventually be the testimonio, autobiography, or portrait. The template then, becomes how the portraitist's plan. In a self-study all of these processes occur continuously and simultaneously. It becomes less obvious when the

data collection is complete and the interpretation begins because each memory elicits a desire to interpret and solicit other related memories. A portraitist then intentionally remembers, writes, and interprets all at once, then must try to articulate the distinctions between the elements of traditional research in the written text (Glesne, 2011; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005; Merriam, 2009).

I journaled and free wrote and doodled to capture memories and pause my thoughts long enough to make them comprehensible. These seemingly rambled thoughts shifted, twisted, and reworked themselves over the last four years to what is currently in front of you. I developed research questions and started a few new journals at once. I also explored how others journal: bullet journals, lists, short-hand notes, doodles that represented more detailed thoughts, adding stickers, using lined pages, using gridded pages, responding to prompts, and telling short stories. I reread and reflected on old journals and through written annotation and analysis, new journal entries formed. Then I used my current lens as a tool for analysis of my former self and the earlier stages and pages of writing. I identified and continued to picture a reader and an audience. I was honest, and I talked to myself; a lot more than usual, asked a lot of questions. I talked with my friends about what I was doing and read a lot. I read about writing. I read countless stories and narratives and a lot of memoirs. I read a lot of Black women and intentionally took periods away from writing. I tried to be still and listen, prayed, and waited to be light, transformed, confident, and free. I celebrated my growth and I allowed myself to feel my feelings. Then I wrote and reflected some more and eventually chapters and sections began to form.

In this process I identified four components of self-study that were thematic in my process and consistent with existing research on testimonio, portraiture, and autoethnography. A chapter is devoted to each of the components below. If educators continuously challenge

themselves as culturally responsive educators to engage with these elements, the education system could be transformed. The four components are reflection (chapter 6), storytelling (chapter 7), truth telling (chapter 8), and acknowledging community (Chapter 9). In these four chapters I wrote and described what I was doing while doing it—and attempt at praxis, or, theory in action (Freire, 1993).

In chapter 5 I celebrated the variety of Black voices that commune with my lived experiences. In the prologue I explained how giving reverence to community and ancestors was a prominent idea as I began this process. Some attempts were made throughout the text to exemplify this, from the sources referenced throughout to the specific space dedicated in chapter 5 to kindred spirits who serve as the epistemological foundation for this particular study. In this chapter, I speak to and through the Black community (mostly) in an annotated bibliography and references from a variety of cultural spaces. In chapter 4 I describe the social and personal context in which my ideas developed. This was done to provide further context for why a personal experience can be indicative of broader social phenomena.

While I do offer a reflection on implications through my voice and lens as a teacher in the final chapter, most of the analysis for significance, implications, discussion, and findings are embedded as self-talk within the text. According to Norris and Sawyer (2012), *duo*ethnography "embraces the belief that meanings can be and often are transformed through the research act" (p. 9). Even though this project was *auto*ethnographic, self-talk allowed me to "check" myself in the process. Given (2011) referred to self-talk as a sort of replacement for the role of multiple researchers in duoethnography. Following these practices allows the author to engage in more comprehensive sense-making of both the distinct elements of the portrait and the aesthetic whole.

A researcher's interests and biases are always embedded in research (Merriam, 2009; Wolcott 2005). In this case, these interests and biases are an important part of the data gathering process. The methods described here were used to produce a portrait that responded to the personal intent to grow and the professional intent to foster the development of self-study research in education.

Self-Talk: The Research Template

Reviewing this section, it is clear that my intentions to create a template did not fully manifest. There are a plethora of reasons why and if this was a more extensive portrait I would explain in detail to provide relevant researcher context. On paper it seems simple to craft a template, but in reality, for a self-study particularly, it is complicated because the moment a researcher decides to engage in portraiture, everything becomes a possible data point for the research. One time I was in a staff meeting and a coworker spoke over me when a question was directed at me. Should I journal about it? What, if anything, do I do, both in regards to addressing the situation and in relation to my research? Or what about the memoir I just finished reading for pleasure and respite from school and work? There are many potential connections to the story and couldn't I borrow some of the author's storytelling techniques? But how do I do that and maintain an expected level of academic rigor? *It is as if each new experience occurs doubly, processed as it pertains to life ongoing and as a potential circumstance of the research. I did not anticipate these types of wonderings but they occupied a considerable amount of my time, mental, and emotional energy.*

In my initial attempt to craft a template, I began at the end, with the aesthetic whole in mind and envisioned what I wanted to be true at the end of the process. I hoped personally for a sense of freedom and lightness, greater confidence, and transformation into a more evolved self.

And I imagined that I could become those things, that I could write my yokes away. I envisioned engaging in conversations with other educators and saying things that provoked a growing consciousness. I considered why I wasn't there yet and what I would need to do to develop the wisdom and confidence to live up to my hopes and visions. Then basically, I started writing. Because I am introverted and introspective. I wrote to clear my thoughts but it created more thoughts. What I intended to be a journal entry sometimes became sections of the dissertation, and vice versa. The lines between reflection, self-discovery, and academic writing blurred easily.

Self-Talk: Self-Study, Conflict, and Goodness

Self-study *refers to a research process based on the collective methodologies of which this study is based (portraiture, autoethnography, and testimonio). It also refers to the internal reflective acts one engages in when conducting said research. Alexander (2013) contends that "autoethnography provides the opportunity for students to critically articulate conflicting culture experiences" (p. 544). I argue that for students who are marginalized, processing conflict often happens within the self because these students are often in environments (in schools) that ignore, are unaware of, or unequipped to assist. Thus, it is important to consider what could be happening internally as a researcher engages in self-study.*

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983, 1994, 1997) is explicit about the search for goodness in the portraiture process. She describes goodness as the resolve to address conflicting culture experiences—believing goodness *can come from centering cultural mismatch and articulating "conflicting culture experiences," even within the self. When I think about the places and spaces where I am free to be myself, it's not about being perfect, but about being. In certain spaces, like school and the work place, where I have never been in the majority in terms of my prominent identities, I often leave those spaces feeling physically, mentally, and emotionally drained. I have*

gotten to a point where I am tired of feeling bad for who I am after being in those spaces. In my church choir, we sing a song called Change Your Situation. *The essence of the song is that most times you do not have control over situations you are in, but you can control how you approach and respond. "You have the power and the authority to change your situation" the song says. Instead of being constantly frustrated by the microaggressions and overt racism I experience at work, I aim to be cognizant of my feelings, process them, and then choose how I want to act and respond. I can choose* not *to internalize negative perceptions. I can ignore/let go. I can share a resource. I can pray. I can talk it over with a friend or write in my journal. I can assume ignorance and good intentions from others and engage in conversation from that place of understanding. I can choose to see myself as I want to and not let someone else's perceptions thwart what I know to be true about me. This sounds both simple to do and easier said than done all at once. That is why attention to goodness is necessary.*

Lawrence-Lightfoot (1987) also presents goodness in conversation with excellence,

> *If one is looking for 'goodness,' rather than 'excellence,' in schools, one sees a different reality. 'Goodness' refers to the complex culture of schools — to academic achievement, of course, but also to the craft and aesthetics of pedagogy; to the moral tone of the institution; to the quality of human encounter; and to the nature of organizational authority. Using this more complicated definition of school success allows for the cohabitation of excellence and equality; because equality as a critical dimension of the human encounter becomes part of the pursuit of goodness; and because goodness permits excellence to shine in its myriad forms (p. 204).*

With this perspective of goodness, cultural experiences and conflicts along lines of race, gender, are harder to brush aside because educational equity becomes, in part, about

collectively crafting pathways to goodness. Then, each person must take individual responsibility to engage in self-study for the sake of collective growth and understanding. I was not able to articulate this throughout the narrative, but it was a central idea that influenced data collection, analysis, and presentation.

In preparing a template in my head, I knew I wanted to explore context a bit further and began gathering ideas and memories for which to shape a chapter on context. I go into more detail later on, but I see how early on, I unintentionally recognized the role of context and environment to students' experiences and knew the chapter needed to be included. The chapter had to come before a review of literature but after an explanation of methods so that its own context and purpose were perceptible in the order of explanation of big ideas. However, the connections between these various pieces have not yet fully crystalized on the page and is something I look forward to resolving in a future version.

Chapter 4: Research Context

The research questions, conceptual framework, and methods for engaging in this self-study are the result of years of reading, writing, learning, and revising thinking in formal and informal learning spaces. Sometimes, I think I get my cultural wires crossed and it causes stress. Sometimes, my Blackness comes out when I haven't asked it to. I might react quickly with a clapback, or other snappy retort, in a meeting, at school, or some other predominantly White setting. I immediately feel very aware of my surroundings. I feel exposed. Embarrassed. I am immediately reminded that there are times and places where my cultural self and the self I present to White folks are not the same. I am also reminded of the trauma this has caused from years of experiencing shame for being who I am. Oddly, my parents and aunties and grandmother never sat me down and taught me this. They said things in passing, about White folks, White women—and I had to learn first-hand what they meant. Here are some important

truths I have come to *know* about Black womanhood and what that means for Black girls in schools:

- there is a damaging narrative about Black womanhood that is internalized by many
- White supremacy is normal in schools
- Black students and teachers do not "perform" as well as White and other students largely because of racism
- There is a lot of talk about being culturally responsive, but it often does not truly happen in practice

I also had four purposes in this study to practically challenge those prevailing narratives:

- to counter negative narratives about Black womanhood
- to reveal how White patriarchy has been normalized in U.S. schools
- to recognize resiliency of African American students
- to demonstrate how self-study contributes to culturally responsive research and teaching

Countering Negative Narratives about Black Womanhood

There is a long-standing prejudice promulgated in some segments of U.S. society that Black women are inferior, ugly, hypersexual, domineering, doormats, unhealthy, and welfare queens. These claims distort the diversity of Black womanhood and persist over time and circumstance. Full figured or plus size Black women of large stature are seen as nurturing and asexual/mammies, and emasculating females (Harris, 2015; hooks, 1992). If we are thin or thick (appropriately curvy) we are considered and expected to be hypersexual. If we have dark skin and kinky hair we are ugly, but those with straighter hair or/and lighter skin, or more education, are bougie, uppity, and/or saditty. If we are silent something must be wrong, but when we speak we are angry, hostile, and over-sensitive. Until recently with the influence of women such as

Queen Latifah, Michelle Obama, and Lupita N'yong'o (who still get criticized for some of the reasons above) being Black and female was not *the business*—literally and figuratively. So I grew up believing, in many ways, that being a Black girl was problematic. No one had to tell me this. I sensed it from what I saw and heard around me. Like the time I rejected a dude who hit on me and his response was, "You too dark anyway." Yes, the reason we would never work was because of the shade of my skin. Even though I didn't exactly believe it, the negativity seeps in.

Even though the late 1980s and 1990s (the years of my adolescence) saw a slew of TV programs with majority Black casts, I lived in White suburbia. While my mom, aunts, and grandma represented positive and powerful images of Black femininity, they also implicitly warned me about the woes of Whiteness. And, while what I saw on TV presented some images that supported my cultural identity, my social reality was very different. This conflict has been extremely challenging to reconcile. Hence, the first purpose of this research project is to counter narratives that cause me to question and undermine my Blackness and femininity, and to create ones in which my Black womanhood is beautiful.

The stories I explored illustrate a few ways in which I have experienced my Black femininity as inferior. Most of the memories are painful, but this research project is not a pity party and will include positive stories, too. Nor is it about bashing Whiteness. It is about taking a proactive stance for Black womanhood. It is about seeking out goodness through exploring some pain (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). While these experiences are part of who I am, they are not all that I am. The purpose in using them is to show how I have experienced and am overcoming the intangible effects of racial and gender oppression. But this is a journey. More hope, healing, and prosperity can and will come from this process. This research, in both form and content, counters prevailing perceived assumptions that it is problematic to be a Black

woman. Now that I have realized this is what I have been taught and have come to believe; now that I realize it is untrue; now that I have begun to realize why this lie persists, I can begin to name it, describe it, analyze it, and dismantle its hold on me.

Revealing How White Patriarchy has been Normalized in U.S. Schools

When I say schools, I mean it very broadly. I am not necessarily trying to generalize my experiences to *all* schools but at the same time, I have a wide schooling experience. I have taught in public schools, independent schools, and public universities. I have been a student in public schools, private schools, public universities, and private universities. I coached teachers in public schools and I served as a mentor teacher in a private school. Schooling, refers to all of these formal learning spaces and more.

When I first started teaching, as I introduced lessons and talked I expected my students to join in every once in a while, with a "yes," or an "ok," or even a head nod. That never happened. I imagine that one of the reasons why I expected it, even after all my years of schooling, is because of the African American call and response communication style that I experienced in the predominantly Black Southern Baptist churches I attended growing up (Crawford, 1995). Church was not a quiet place. There was shouting, crying, dancing. I love going to church and many of its traditions are embedded in my being. During a sermon, when the minister pauses, someone pipes up with an "Amen!" or "Preach preacher!" or "Mmm hmm" or a head nod. Communicating in this way is familiar and fun to me. But it did not dawn on me that this was the source of my communicative expectations for my students. And, it was unclear to me why I was bothered when they did not respond accordingly. Recognizing this, I would now, share some of that with my students and offer space for them to share themselves. Whiteness tends to impose unspoken expectations that may be culturally foreign to students of color, and can be deeply

rooted in racist laws and practices.

Both Whiteness theorists and critical race theorists argue there are tangible and intangible benefits of Whiteness. Some of the intangible benefits are discursive and relational. An example is how language and communication styles that are familiar and "normal" to White students are used in schools while students of color and poverty are most often expected to alter how they speak and communicate or suffer punitive consequences (Heath, 1982, 2012). This is an example of how Whiteness is normalized, taken for granted, and rendered invisible to those with privilege. Coates (2015) describes this in *Between the World and Me* with these words:

> But all our phrasing—race relations, racial chasm, racial justice, racial profiling, White privilege, even White supremacy—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscles, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks breath (p. 10).

Coates' point is that even when the world directly confronts racism, the intensity and magnitude of its impact on people of color is still not thoroughly examined, understood, and discussed. Consequently, racism prevails largely unchanged. Phrases such as these, and the intention with which they are used, emphasize important aspects of racism, but also mask its physical and psycho-emotional toll on people. So it is both the language used and the impact it has in keeping the privileged in the dark and exacerbating the trauma of the marginalized. Coates writes from the perspective of a Black male growing up in Baltimore in the 1970s. I do not mean to oversimplify the reality of his words in comparing the violence of that reality to mine. Instead, I want to evoke his ideas to demonstrate that even privilege through education is not an escape from the emotional and physical consequences of racism. In various school settings I have had to justify and defend my body, my voice, and my experiences, and it is emotionally and physically

taxing. This research project demonstrates how students of color like me must constantly navigate unspoken and unofficial cultural borders between the world and themselves because of the inherent patriarchal Whiteness of schooling.

Recognizing the Resiliency of African American Students

Education is traumatizing for many Blacks and other students of color because it forces us to deny our culture and perform according to standards of Whiteness. Navigating cultural borders is something that most people have to do, but arguably students of color are forced to do so more often and more intensely than others. An illustrative activity called The Privilege Walk is often done to bring privilege and equity to consciousness. All participants stand in a line on one side of the room shoulder to shoulder. The facilitator reads a statement like "I grew up in a household with two parents," or "I have been treated badly as a direct reaction to my racial appearance." If the statement applies, participants take a step forward. If it does not, the participants stay where they are, or take a step backward. The statements are meant to indicate what U.S. society at large deems normal and is therefore privileged. They can be about race, gender, nationality, religion, and so on. I have participated in this activity once and have engaged in many conversations about it. People of color generally take fewer steps forward than other participants, viscerally indicating the disadvantages they face, and how they are coerced into altering or concealing parts of their identity when they enter oppressive and racialized systems and institutions.

Everyone navigates cultural borders but doing so is more challenging for individuals who are viewed as problematic in specific contexts (e.g. school) and not in others (e.g. home). Being White and middle or upper class presents completely different challenges than being a person of color, a person whose primary language is not English, or a person who is poor. And, it is not a

competition about which form of oppression is worse. I focus on race and gender because these are most salient for me and because they are salient in U.S. society. Others, including Whites, must navigate cultural borders too, albeit different ones. Black students and other students of color encounter cultural differences and sometimes silently and unknowingly make these crossings daily. In doing so they exhibit resilience.

Demonstrating How Self-Study Contributes to Culturally Responsive Research and Teaching

This study is an example for Black girls (and others, too) of how they can be their complete racial, cultural, and gendered selves and still be academic. It expands the boundaries of research because self-study and personal narratives are not common or easily accepted in the realm of academic research. Even as I write this very sentence I struggle to find tangible support, scholarship, and examples to help amplify my voice, ideas, and experiences. This scholarship is either buried or nonexistent—neither of which is acceptable and it makes the process of academic writing that is representative of my cultural voice much more challenging. I am not just looking for epistemological and methodological support for my research. I am also seeking support for me and my way of being. There are many scholars who write about their personal challenges with race, gender, and intersectionality. However, few of these are routinely included in education and graduate level courses, and, few of these scholars actually focus on their identity *as* their research. Rather, they use their identity and examples from their lives to help explain their research. Some examples are Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009a, 2009b), Geneva Gay (2010), and Jeannine Dingus and Adrienne Dixson (2008). There are some scholars beyond the field of education who rely on self-study as well, such as Carolyn Ellis (2003, 2013), Keith Gilyard (1991), Jennifer Obidah (1998), Lubna Nazir Chaudhry (1997), and Ruth Behar (1997). Applying self-study techniques to research and practice in education is pertinent to

expanding research and practice in culturally responsive teaching.

What I have come to believe about schooling in my experience as a Black woman is not exactly positive, but, my experiences have also shown me enough good, resilience, and resistance that I believe some things can be done. Among them are

- More counternarratives need to be developed, understood, and used to disrupt the negative narratives around Black womanhood
- Reveal how White supremacy has been normalized in schools and use antidotes to free ourselves from its grip
- Acknowledge and build upon the resiliency that Blacks and other marginalized students have as they encounter oppression regularly
- Help teachers bridge the gap between culturally responsive teaching as a theory and engaging it meaningfully in practice

Self-study through storytelling can help do all of these things. Dyson and Genishi (1994) suggest that “we all have a basic need for story.” They define story as a process of “organizing our experiences into tales of important happenings” (p. 2). Stories, according to Denman (1991), are “lenses through which we view and review all of human experience…. They have a power to reach deep inside us and command our ardent attention.” (as cited in Gay, 2010, p.2). The storytelling efficacies of self-study research are important for making sense of the world.

This dissertation can be considered a compilation of challenges or “talkbacks” to White supremacy. Because White supremacy tries to dictate what I say and how I say it, each entry is an attempt “to be” in spite of White supremacy. Not all White cultural norms are inherently bad. They are just positioned in such a way to make everyone else’s cultural norms look bad. I have

seen how true human connection can overcomes difference. For example, most of my six years of teaching were in south Phoenix, AZ—a community of mostly Mexican and Mexican American families. There were many things I had in common with the families I worked with, and, there were some big differences, including language. Many of my students' parents did not speak English fluently and I did not speak Spanish fluently. But that did not stop us from connecting. One of my best first year of teaching memories is having dinner with one of my student's, Maria (pseudonym), and her family. Her mom and I were not fluent in each other's first language but she was insistent that I come. And I am so glad I did because we had a great time. Gesturing and laughing and teaching each other pieces of our language and culture. She invited me to watch her cook and pointed out things in Spanish and English when she could. And I repeated and pointed and asked with what I could. Maria would sometimes offer translations. We ate and laughed and talked about Mexico where they are from and New York where I am from. I made a concerted effort to express myself viscerally so what I was trying to say got across in other ways since a shared spoken language was not a collective strength.

Another reason why I want to explore and share personal experiences is because many progressive, liberal, White folks are excited to talk about social justice but are not willing to confront their own unearned privilege. They have good intentions, but they also don't have to experience racism regularly and, in my experience, often avoid the discomfort of interrogating their identities. Thus, the intent is to connect through storytelling with the hope that folks might better understand the inhumanity of subtle racism and how often it shows up in classrooms. The next chapter introduces the epistemological community in which my storytelling is grounded.

Chapter 5: Kindred Spirits

Though the risk of misinterpretation is high, storytelling can be a powerful conduit for fostering cross cultural understanding and communication (Behar, 1997; Gilyard, 1991; King

1991). An important component of storytelling is context. Understanding someone's story requires knowing their personal and cultural context—laying the foundation for which to more responsively interpret their behaviors. As such, this section will feature some voices and influences from my general epistemological community. This will include contemporary and past pop culture icons, scholars, artists, and others who have contributed to how I perceive the world, and whose lives and work reflect their personal conceptions of social and racial issues while also speaking to the collective experience of Blacks and other marginalized groups. Their stories offer a contextual foundation to understanding my individual story and research project.

Socio-historically, I have been socialized into several communities, including my family, my church, women, Black, African American, U.S. Each of these communities consists of my more immediate connections and those who are contemporary and historical members. These communities have influenced how I see the world. I am also an individual and how I respond to my socialization is unique even though I have shared experiences with others who are oppressed. These influences all contribute to my epistemological context. As I have experienced the world and interacted with others (people, places, media, etc.) my boundaries of knowledge have expanded. Therefore, my epistemological contexts are deeply shaped by my personal and sociohistorical community and my cultural groups' histories. Based on sociocultural theory, these communities and the boundaries among them are temporal, interconnected, and shift over time.

My epistemological context is also colored by the prevalence of pop culture. Music, visual art, poetry, performance art, television, and film, speak about and often resist how society perceive and present the experiences of people of color, and most specifically, Black women. hooks (1989) uses the term *talking back* to refer to Black women's reactions to these

presentations. Lorde (2007) claims that poetry can be one of the ways Black women express our lived experiences. Pop culture as an art form of expression has influenced how my communities makes sense of the world and have therefore shaped how I exist in the world, and are key elements of my epistemological context.

Academia and schooling have often represented a distinct voice from my sociohistorical experiences although there is connection and overlap. It represents a third and final component of my epistemological context. As can be seen in the stories shared thus far, school is the place where I began to learn for myself that other people saw me as different. My skin, my hair, my facial features. As people pointed them out to me I began to see what they see. Teachers subtly questioned my intelligence by where they placed me in the classroom and in small groups. The curriculum rarely spoke to me and my experiences. I soon accepted these things as both *normal* for school and the world. Overtime, as I saw less of my sociohistorical context in public, shame and trauma ensued and became a part of how I navigate and know in the world. What I did not see, learn, and experience was also a curriculum of its own, as was the official curriculum.

Not all of schooling was traumatic, though. I was a strong student and developed skills to be where I am today. I made friends with people from backgrounds other than mine, which has helped me appreciate diversity and understand Whiteness deeply. I am not angry that I know so much about Whiteness. I am angry that, until recently and through my own efforts, I knew so little about Blackness, other people of color, ableism, poverty, and the LGBTQ community. Through all of the learning I have done in all my years of schooling, most of what I have learned has been through the lens of White supremacy. I cannot deny this influence in my epistemological context.

My epistemological contexts are a compilation of the ways I have come to know the world and of the world as influenced by schooling and academia, pop culture, and my sociohistorical community. As such, many of the scholarly and pop culture references included below reflect those voices and influences. Embedded in the research questions and purposes underlying this research project are assumptions and truths I hold that stem from my sociohistorical and academic experiences. They are:

- school is White, even when the population is not
- (White) schooling is traumatizing for Black women
- Black women can resist Whiteness and recover from trauma

I elaborate on these assumptions in the form of an annotated bibliography that includes some examples of the artists and scholars who have helped shape my epistemological terrain. Underlying each assumption is the notion that my encounters with dominance in educational institutions are both individually unique and collectively indicative. It is necessary to give attention to this idea because it motivates my research questions and purposes (Chang, 2008; Chávez, 2012; Ellis, 2004; Leyva, 2003). Without it, there is no need for a self-study. Instead I could write an autobiography, cleverly summarizing key events in my life. Or, I could do academic commentary on the confluence of social, racial, and educational issues and include tidbits from my personal experience along the way. These are both great genres of writing but they do not capture the full intent of my research.

School is White Even When the Population is Not

While I write from the perspective of a student of color whose schooling occurred in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), most of my life, I also have experienced schooling, as a teacher educator and a teacher, where the very large majority of students were not White. In

education, we often argue that wealthier and Whiter communities receive more and better resources and employ higher quality teachers, which gives those students even more access to a variety of facilitative life opportunities. While this is often the case, looking beyond the surface reveals some characteristics of schooling that are the same across culturally and socioeconomically diverse settings. These characteristics more often work for White and/or wealthy students because they are culturally synchronous with their lives outside of school (Banks, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Students of color and of poverty are often implicitly and explicitly signaled, through negative reinforcement, to change to match these unspoken cultural characteristics. In short, even in educational spaces where the student population is not predominantly middle class and White, the cultural influences of Whiteness in U.S. institutions still prevail.

Being specific about the ways that schooling is White is essential to my research because part of what has made school traumatizing for me, and what makes racism today difficult to challenge in the U.S., is the invisibility of the traumatizing triggers and their impact. Consider the argument that the U.S. has come so far as a country that we have had a Black president. Yes, that is exciting and worthy of celebration. But no matter how many Black presidents there may be in the U.S., the education system is still failing too many Black and brown children. As an educationally successful Black woman I know this is not the fault of the children because my success has cost a lot. I have learned firsthand academic success can sometimes be dubious due to the high psycho-emotional and identity costs that it elicits. This, at the heart, is what this research showcases. The following four examples (two academic articles, a 1990s sitcom, and an academic book) illustrate some of these triggering and traumatizing characteristics of

mainstream schooling that remain largely disguised, unchanged, and White. They are indicative of the types of resources that are used elsewhere in this research project.

This first article speaks to how engrained Whiteness is in the discourse of students and teachers, and about the merits, benefits, and conventions of schooling. It explains that even those who believe they are teaching anti-oppressive ideals can be blinded by the Whiteness of schooling.

Maher, F. and Tetreault, M. T. (1997). Learning in the dark: How assumptions of Whiteness shape classroom knowledge. *Harvard Educational Review,* ***67*** **(2), 321-349.**

In this study, Maher and Tetreault (1997) examined how assumptions of Whiteness shaped the construction of knowledge in their college level feminism course. They contended that members of the dominant group must critically examine their positionality within systems of racism and other forms of oppression. Otherwise, even with the best of intentions, they will perpetuate inequities because knowledge about them does not necessarily lead to challenging and transformative actions.

Maher and Tetreault are self-proclaimed feminists who described themselves as sharing a common perspective with the women of color about whom they read and taught. However, they soon came to realize their own shortcomings through an examination of their research and teaching practices. Even though they included perspectives of women of color and discussed racism, classism, and sexism, they had these discussions based on privileged constructions of class, race, and gender that were not deeply interrogated. They declared,

> Among the most powerful mechanisms maintaining the superiority of dominant voices is the failure to acknowledge and understand how assumptions of Whiteness shape and even dictate the limits of discourse, in the classroom as assumptions of Whiteness gain much

> of their power by passing as 'normal,' 'an invisible package of unearned assets' that Whites 'can count on cashing in on each day, but about which they were meant to remain oblivious.' (p. 324).

They also created a list of some of the unacknowledged assumptions of Whiteness that included

- Whiteness as a feature of intellectual dominance
- Whiteness as ideological so that anything different is other
- Whiteness as individual identity so that race can interrupt the theoretical unity of the oppressed and race is assigned to *them* and not *us*
- White stereotypes (of others)

These authors realized that privileged members in their classes (students and themselves) were interrogating oppression but not their own Whiteness and how it framed the conversation and set expectations and parameters for discussable topics. As an example, an upper class White male in their class explained that his father owned an art gallery that specialized in African art, he had Black acquaintances, and had taken several courses on African American history. This student also declared,

> Never in my life have I ever been ashamed of being an upper-class White male. I don't have anything to gain by having Black and White equal. I feel like if it happens, I'll still have a good life, a profitable life (Maher & Tetreault, 1997, p. 323).

This is an example of how exposure to information and interaction with members of oppressed groups do not automatically lead to the interrogation of Whiteness. Thus, as the authors pointed out, Whiteness must be explicitly interrogated. An explicit interrogation of the impact of Whiteness is an essential component of my critical self-study project.

This article is relevant to my research because it offers specific examples and language for naming Whiteness in schooling. Educators sometimes refer to the hidden curriculum and this article illuminates some of those hidden, White characteristics of schooling. It also is somewhat of a self-study as the authors critically examined their own teaching practices and positionalities. However, it is not as deeply reflexive as I hope for my study to be since no details about the self–study process are provided. They named the ways in which they missed deep examination of Whiteness and said things like “upon further reflection” but did not really explain or show what this reflection looked like. Their work helps lay the foundation for how and why deep reflexive analysis is important in the work of a culturally responsive teacher.

The Fresh Prince in Association with A Touch of Jazz, Inc. (1990). Fresh Prince of Bel-Air Theme Song. (Recorded by The Fresh Prince).

Now, this is a story all about how
My life got flipped-turned upside down
And I'd like to take a minute
Just sit right there
I'll tell you how I became the prince of a town called Bel-Air

In west Philadelphia born and raised

On the playground was where I spent most of my days

Chillin' out maxin' relaxin' all cool

And all shooting some b-ball outside of the school

When a couple of guys who were up to no good

Started making trouble in my neighborhood

I got in one little fight and my mom got scared

She said 'You're movin' with your auntie and uncle in Bel-Air'

I begged and pleaded with her day after day

But she packed my suitcase and sent me on my way

She gave me a kiss and then she gave me my ticket.

I put my Walkman on and said, 'I might as well kick it'

First class, yo this is bad

Drinking orange juice out of a champagne glass

Is this what the people of Bel-Air living like?

Hmm this might be alright

But wait I hear they're prissy, bourgeois, all that

Is this the type of place that they just sent this cool cat?

I don't think so

I'll see when I get there

I hope they're prepared for the prince of Bel-Air

Well, the plane landed and when I came out

There was a dude who looked like a cop standing there with my name out

I ain't trying to get arrested yet

I just got here

I sprang with the quickness like lightning, disappeared

I whistled for a cab and when it came near

The license plate said fresh and it had dice in the mirror

If anything I could say that this cab was rare

But I thought 'Nah, forget it' - 'Yo, home to Bel-Air'

I pulled up to the house about 7 or 8

And I yelled to the cabbie 'Yo home smell ya later'

I looked at my kingdom

I was finally there

To sit on my throne as the Prince of Bel-Air

These are the lyrics to a very popular 1990s television sitcom called *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* and they synthesize the general synopsis of the show. Will Smith's (the lead actor) character (also named Will) is a street-smart teen who moves from poverty-impacted, predominantly African American West Philadelphia, PA to upper class, White Bel-Air in California. Each episode humorizes cultural clashes that ensue as Will navigates life in this new community. In one of my favorite episodes, representatives from Princeton come to Bel-Air Academy to interview potential college students. When it is Will's turn to interview, he nonchalantly explains how he is not interested in going to Princeton and asks what does Princeton have to offer him. The interviewer, an older White man, is astonished that someone— especially a Black someone— could not be interested in Princeton. He looks judgmentally at Will , and scoffs at his attire. (Will has turned his private school's navy blue uniform blazer inside out and sports the inner patterned lining on the outside with a baseball cap turned backwards). The interviewer is not impressed, until, on his way out the door, Will solves a rubix cube on the desk in a matter of seconds. The interviewer is viscerally amazed. A humorous scene follows in which Will ends up teaching the interviewer how to be "cool" and the interviewer begs him to come to Princeton.

I use this as an example of how the unacknowledged assumptions of Whiteness manifest in everyday life, even pop culture. The assumptions of Whiteness as a feature of intellectual dominance and White stereotypes (of others) are visible in this exchange. Will did not immediately display what the man from Princeton expected as intelligence so he dismissed him as Princeton material. The interviewer could not see beyond his own expectations of what a Princeton student should be. He saw the way Will was dressed, heard the way he talked, and judged him as not intelligent, and therefore not good enough for Princeton. He saw Will as a

reflection of his own ideas and stereotypes about young Black males as unkempt, inarticulate, and not serious about formal education. It was not until Will proved his intelligence in a way that fit into the man's frame of reference that he gave him positive consideration. Will had to do the work rather than the man working to look beyond and interrogate his own Whiteness.

A lot of Black youth connected with the show for how it discussed real issues in a light and funny but significant manner. It is reflective of the experiences of youth of color. In an autoethnography, one type of self-study, the researcher analyzes of her experiences in ways that others can connect with and reveals some social phenomena (Chang, 2008). Pop culture examples are important and useful in one's journey of self-study. Additionally, Will attended a predominantly White, private school, yet this scene and this show depicted the influence of White cultural norms. I use this as an example that school is White even when the population is not for two reasons. First, it is very unlikely that a Princeton recruiter would have visited a school in West Philly because the recruiter did not see strengths in the skills and talents that Will, and students like him, possessed. Again, it was not until Will did something that connected to his racist frames of reference that the recruiter gave him a second look. Second, if the recruiter had visited a school in West Philly, his culturally unresponsive expectations for Princeton material and for the students in the school likely would not have changed. Meaning, he still would have carried his culturally White expectations about dress, speech, body language, and academic success with him to West Philly. The key idea here is that Whiteness says expectations should always be the same but cultural responsiveness says context matters and seeks to illuminate and use the strengths of marginalized cultures that are often seen as deficits. As a culturally responsive educator, one must be willing to look at the assumptions she makes about all schools,

communities, and students, and interrogate how her biases can lead to actions that miseducate and harm students (King, 1991).

Delpit, L. (*2006*) Skills and other dilemmas of a progressive Black educator. *Harvard Educational Review,* ***56*** **(4), 379-386.**

In this article, Delpit describes the challenge of navigating educational injustice simultaneously on multiple levels. She critiqued schooling for poor children and children of color while interrogating her role as an instructor in an alienating environment where she was one of very few people of color. She questioned her colleagues about the cultural relevance of their teacher education program and she analyzed her own positionality as an educator. This article established the essentiality of understanding the complexity of injustices and one's own mindsets and perspectives.

Delpit initially wrote this essay as a letter to a colleague to express her concerns about the then current movement in teaching writing as process which focused on the larger cognitive processes of writing such as audience, context, or purpose (Flower & Hayes, 1981). She described both the frustrations many teachers of color feel at being excluded from this dialogue and her own journey through processing what is best for students of color. Delpit described how initially she was excited about this approach but, through a conversation with a friend and teacher, came to realize the deficit framing of students of color this approach took:

> She [Cathy] was particularly adamant about the notion that Black children had to learn to be 'fluent' in writing–had to feel comfortable about putting pen to paper–before they could be expected to conform to any conventional standards. 'These people keep pushing this fluency thing,' said Cathy. 'What do they think? Our children have no fluency? If they think that, they ought to read some of the rap songs my students write all the time.

> They might not be writing their school assignments but they sure are writing. Our kids are fluent. What they need are the skills that will get them into college.' (pp 15-16).

Even when a school's student and teacher population is predominantly Black the influence of culturally White forms of communication can still be communicated through curriculum and routine programs, policies, and practices. As Delpit unearthed these understandings about inequity in schools, she saw parallels in her teaching experiences in higher education as she navigated being the only Black female professor at the University of Alaska, where, at times she felt spoken for and not thoroughly listened to. There is a strong connection between her personal identity journey, professional experiences, and the work she produced at that time. An important part of self-study is thinking about how one's cultural identity affects all aspects of life. She set out to think about the state of education for students of color, but ended up engaging in a process of self-study. The fact that she focused on the big problem of education recognizes by many and then found personal connections underscores the importance of self-study for educators.

Fleming, J. (1984). ***Blacks in college.*** **New York, NY: Jossey-Bass.**

Written in the 1980s, the first part of this book, "Role of Black and White Colleges in Educating Black Students" is posed as a question and offers some answers. The book opens by explaining the historical importance of historically Black colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as institutions that made it possible for Blacks to pursue higher education. Despite their success, these institutions are forced to prove their worth by meeting accreditation standards in the same way as predominantly White institutions (PWIs). In many ways, this process forces HBCUs to forego their culturally relevant notions of success in order to *compete* with PWIs.

Cultural responsiveness is at the center of the missions and practices of HBCUs. But in order to compete politically and economically, many Black students still choose to attend PWIs even though less support is typically given to them in navigating cultural borders. Fleming reported that most Black students in Black colleges achieve better than Black students at White colleges, but most HBCUs are considered to offer lower quality education. Many do not have the same markers of success including money, prestige, and assessment scores. The fact that Black students are psychologically and emotionally healthier seems to matter little. Success is determined by competition, grades, tests, and how visible and vocal one is. Thus, even a successful Black school must adopt and teach this mainstream status quo.

Maher and Tetreault (1997) illustrate how White cultural dominance infiltrates the classroom, indicating a strong cultural influence of Whiteness in several facets of schooling including discourse, pedagogy, content, and sources. Fleming noted that the success of Black students in college is determined according to White cultural values. Whether Black students attend PWIs or HBCUs, the dominance of Whiteness and expectation to conform and perform based on White cultural values is an ever-present pressure. Delpit (1986, 2006), provides an example of how Whiteness is embedded in school curricula at various levels. Will Smith demonstrated through music, humor, and performance that White expectations in schooling are quite blatant and have to do with a lot more than courses and academics. Collectively, these works show the systemization of Whiteness. They are indications that my encounters with cultural dominance in educational institutions are both individually unique and collectively indicative.

(White) Schooling Has Been Traumatizing For Me As A Black Woman

Open your computer. Power it on. Wait for it to start up. Access your favorite web browser. Go to Google and do an "images" search. Type in the word beauty, or pretty. Try woman. Even man. Or smart person. What do the results of these searches have in common? Nearly all of the images on the first pages are of White people. Even in a search for "man" or "woman" where you can specify, such as French or Italian, nearly every image is of a Caucasian person. These are examples of how Whiteness and White cultural norms have been normalized. There is nothing inherently wrong with these images. The problem is that they convey a particular standard of physical beauty and human worth, and dictate that there should be a standard at all. These images reflect and guide the choices of advertising executives and consumers who spend and make money based on what is popular and in demand, including curricular materials used in U.S. schools. These ideas and images send normative messages about White cultural forms of communication, White ideals of work styles, White influenced work ethic, and culturally White styles of leadership. These are some of the material benefits of Whiteness. Because Whiteness is profitable, its cultural impressions are pervasive in institutions, from ad agencies to schools.

The rhetoric of Whiteness as normal extends well beyond a Google image search and into the walls of schools and classrooms, where children and teachers who do not conform to the cultural norms of competition, teacher as authority, and individualism, are labeled outsider and other. Due to this, Black women and girls are often punished, formally and informally, when their actions, body language, tone of voice, style of dress, and communication patterns do not conform to these "normal" expectations. But this is rarely explicitly explained to Black girls, their teachers, peers, or administrators. Instead, Black girls and Black women are suspended,

feared, controlled, failed, and incarcerated. Black girls are expected to navigate the politics of their identity from a very early age as they resist, fall victim to, and live out the stereotypical images and expectations that society has written for them since before enslavement (Harris, 2015; Morris, 2016). Collectively, girls of color in the U.S., and Black girls especially, experience trauma both inside and outside of school. The imposition of these narrow images and negative expectations can cause and exacerbate trauma in school. The resources in this section help name and confront the traumatization of Blacks that has resulted from overexposure to White cultural norms in school.

Simien , J., Waithe, L., Brown, E. T., Lebedeva, J., Le, A., & Lopez, A. (Producers), & Simien, J. (Director). (2014, October 17, 2014). *Dear White people*. **[Motion Picture] Los Angeles, CA: Lionsgate.**

Several pictures and news clippings flash on the screen in between the closing credits.

At Dartmouth in 2013 White sorority and fraternity co-host a Bloods and Crips party, described as "ghetto" with "racialized language, speech, and dress."

In 2012, White students at the University of Florida show up to a "rockstars and rappers" themed party in Black face.

Six sorority sisters dressed as the Huxtables for a 1980s themed Halloween party, including Blackface.

A sorority at Penn State hosts a Mexican themed party in which attendees wore outfits that "looked Mexican" while holding signs saying "will mow lawn for weed and beer" and I don't cut grass I smoke it" in 2012.

At the University of California, San Diego students don black face and host a "Compton Cookout Party" in 2010.

This is how the film *Dear White People* ends. The film is a satirical depiction of the lives of several students and staff members on a fictional ivy league college campus and their various experiences with race, blackness, and education. Sam, the main character, is a bi-racial film major with her own radio show and self-published book titled after the movie. She uses these platforms to emphasize racial tensions on campus and highlight the challenges Black students continue to face. Some of the other featured characters include Black students with a variety of individual experiences. There's Coco, who Sam refers to as a nosejob. A nosejob will "smooth their black edges and try to blend in. A nose job's worst fear is that their blackness might cause a fuss or draw undue attention so they use it to self deprecate." Coco, who is fairly dark-skinned and lets fans on her vlog know she isn't "that dark," is from the South Side of Chicago and says things like, "there is nothing hood about me," and that members of the talented tenth such as her have always had to work hard for what they achieve so they need to stop blaming White people for their challenges. Lionel sports a big afro, listens to popular White bands such as the English rock band Mumford and Sons, and watches Robert Alton movies. In one dining hall scene, he asks some of the other Black students if they really think he's "black enough for the [Black Student] Union". He also says, "the worst thing about high school were the Black kids. He is a budding journalist and gets geeked when he's tapped by the school's largest and most popular paper to write a story about Sam—clearly he's asked because he is Black, although, as the newspaper's White editor says, "he's only technically Black".

From these clips one can see the complexity of Blackness—key to understanding the importance of individuality within a collective (and oppressive) experience. People have

different experiences and different reactions and ways of being in their Blackness. The Black experience is varied yet because of systemic racism, all are affected by it, even those who try to eschew it. Blue collar, wealthy, nerd, pro-Black, talented tenth, bi-racial, nosering, or legacy, the Whiteness of academia has or will eventually have an impact. Marginally touched on in the film was the idea that one is not any one of these all the time. Toward the end, Sam has a moment with her White "boyfriend" where he calls her out for playing the tragic mulatto, trying to amp up her Black side, ignoring much of her Whiteness, and struggling to exist with all that she is. She is trying to manage the trauma of living in a culturally White world with a marginalized identity. I feel similarly, trying to navigate social systems and situations, always aware that someone is watching and will have an opinion about how I live out my Blackness. Navigating our identity is a challenge we all go through in life. When education denies parts of our lived experiences, it makes it all the more challenging and for many, traumatic.

Whitaker, F., & Bongiovi, N. Y. (Producers) and Famuyiwa, R. (Director). (2015, June 19, 2015). *Dope.* **[Motion Picture] Open Road Films.**

[Malcolm, a Black male teenager, is speaking] Let me tell you about two students.

Student A is a straight A student who lives in the suburbs of Los Angeles. He plays in a punk band with his best friends. He loves to skateboard and riding his BMX bike. His favorite TV show is Game of Thrones and his favorite band is The Thermals. He's a 90s hip hop geek.

Student B goes to a underfunded school where teachers who'd rather not be there teach kids who realty don't care. He lives with his single mother, doesn't know his father and has sold dope.

Now close your eyes. [Screen goes blank] Picture each of these kids and tell me what you see. Be honest. No one's gonna judge you.

Now open your eyes. [Malcolm is standing in the middle of the street]

So Am I student A or am I student B? Am I geek or a menace? For most of my life I've been caught in between who I really am and how I'm perceived. In between categories and definition. I don't fit in. And I used to think that that was a curse, but, now I'm slowly starting to see. Maybe it's a blessing. See when you don't fit in you're forced to see the world from many different angles and points of view. You gain knowledge, life lessons from disparate people and places. And those lessons for better or worse have shaped me. So who am I? Allow me to reintroduce myself. My name is Malcom Adikande. I'm a straight A student with nearly perfect SAT score. I taught myself how to play guitar and read music. I have stellar recommendations and diverse extracurricular activities. I'm a Google Science Fair participant and in three weeks I helped make over $100,000 for an online business. So why do I wanna attend Harvard? If I was White would you even have to ask me that question?

Malcom says the above out loud but he is also typing it on a computer. It is his college essay. This scene comes toward the end of an hour and a half of Malcom and his best buds'

adventures in navigating their senior year of high school and a chance encounter with a good amount of drugs as they try to evade being caught by the wrong people before returning them to the "rightful" owner.

There are two critical points in Malcolm's monologue. First, is when he states that he has never really fit in, felt caught between who he is and how he is perceived. Cross (1971) developed the Nigrescence theory to help explain the developmental process of becoming Black. He described it as a "resocializing" (p. 101) experience in which one comes to know, understand, and perceive her/himself as Black rather than subconsciously accepting the oppressor's ideas of Blackness. In the movie Malcolm depicts this challenge. Student B represents oppressive and negative impressions of what it is to be Black. Malcom is a young, Black male living in a neighborhood with some of the challenges associated with the inner city and who does well in school. He is aware of the dynamic of his perceived identity and his actual life experiences and how outsiders, such as college admissions committees, will make certain assumptions about him.

The second point is Malcolm's statement about living in the suburbs. Malcolm is student B, but with the exception of living in the suburbs, he is also student A. His test to have admissions counselors guess which one he is really challenges the assumptions U.S. society holds about race. And begs the question of, if he did live in the suburbs, would he have a different outcome. Since he is all of those things but lives in urban Los Angeles, where many Black communities have long been established, what assumptions will they hold about him then.

Malcolm became more and more aware of the assumptions society holds about him because of where he lives and what he looks like. He also became more aware of how those perceptions caused him to perceive himself and made him feel stuck trying to fit *in.* He also realized he did not have to be either, or. He can be both, and, if that is what *he* decides to do.

Malcom's story also challenges the stereotypical societal perceptions of blackness, and makes the point that there is a variety of Black experiences even though society tries to define Blackness in certain, negative ways and make us, internally and imperceptibly, choose one way to be or go crazy trying to defy that boxed-in mentality. This is where the trauma comes from. And it is in recognizing and naming it that trauma can be overcome.

Crenshaw, K.W. (2014). *Black girls matter: Pushed out, overpoliced, and underprotected*. **New York, NY: African American Policy Forum and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies.**

In this report, Crenshaw explains that because much of the existing literature analyzes the experience of Black boys and other boys of color the realities of Black girls and other girls of color are often excluded and imply that girls of color are not at risk. The report emphasizes the heightened detention rates, suspension rates, and expulsion rates for Black youth. For Black girls specifically it underlines the higher risks of suspension and expulsions for subjective behavior infractions.

The report also underscores the broad impact of a narrow scope of responses to Black girls' existences and behavior. Crenshaw explains that disproportionate suspensions and expulsions impact Black girls' life chances and their family, community, and even society's well-being. The report also provides examples of what educators, researchers, and policy makers can do to better understand why Black girls matter. Crenshaw emphasizes the importance of documenting Black girls' stories (individual experiences) and assessing collected data (collective experiences) to better understand gender disparities in the pipeline and academic achievement gap. Finally, the report explains what can be done for these girls instead of punishing and penalizing them. Zero-tolerance and other punitive policies see the behavior as negative and seek

to control or stop it without considering social and historical influences and the racialized ways in which Black girls' behaviors are often interpreted. Thus, multicultural competence and awareness of personal biases are essential for all educators. This knowledge and skills should prompt interventions that are responsive to the challenges girls of color face and help to reduce the trauma schooling causes.

Morris, M. (2016). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. **New York, NY: The New Press.**

Throughout this book, Morris details the trauma that Black girls face both in and out of school based on insights gained from working with them in detention centers and schools. She illuminates their reflections on their school experiences, and, like Crenshaw, exposes their disproportionate representation in the data on school discipline and U.S. society's overreliance on punishment as a response to unacceptable and unmanageable behavior. Morris also dissects the nuanced experiences of Black girls' sexual and gender identity in conjunction with punitive responses to their behavior. Finally, she ends with a forward gaze by suggesting how "Black girls can be supported in repairing their relationships with school and how institutions can better support their educational career objectives" (p. 14).

Morris makes strong connections between identity politics and respectability politics (Harris, 2015; Truth, 1851). She writes about some of the images and stereotypes that have been created and used to police the actions of Black woman against the more "respectable" behaviors of White women and men across time. Morris declares,

> Paramount to shifting our lens is understanding the convergence of actions with a prevailing consciousness that accepts an inferior quality of Black femininity. That is what underlies the exploitation and criminalization of Black girls. Historic representation of

> Black femininity, coupled with contemporary memes—about 'loud Black girls who talk back to teachers, 'ghetto' Black girls who fight in school hallways, and 'ratchet' Black girls who chew dental dams like bubble gum in classrooms—have rendered Black girls subject to a public scrutiny that affects their ability to be properly situated in the racial justice and school-to-confinement [Morris uses this term to broaden the scope of carceral experiences that Black girls face beyond prison] narrative (p. 12).

These images were intentionally constructed and suggest confined spaces of existence for Black girls to live in that have them screaming for relief. For if they exhibit the ascribed behaviors, society says "I told you so" and if they assimilate or emulate more *respectable* behaviors they are considered uppity, saditty, bougie, wannabes, and race traitors. These images are socially constructed and they impact girls in a variety of contexts including school. However, Morris contends that, from Black girls' perspectives, their behavior can be a form of resistance to these oppressive and confining images. But in trying to resist, trauma ensues. As she explained,

> Through stories we find that Black girls are greatly affected by the stigma of having to participate in identity politics that marginalize them or place them into polarizing categories: they are either 'good' girls or 'ghetto' girls who behave in ways that exacerbate stereotypes about Black femininity, particularly those relating to socioeconomic status, crime, and punishment (Morris, 2016, p. 10).

A claim that I make in this research project is that Black girls often succeed academically at the expense of experiencing ongoing psycho-emotional trauma caused by oppression. Morris describes this dilemma when she said, "While Black girls have been able to achieve a certain degree of academic success, they have also been subjected to powerful narratives about their

collective identity that impact what they think about school, what they think about themselves as scholars, and how they perform as students" (p. 13).

Public characterizations of Black femininity in the U.S. have created a collective challenging existence for Black girls in spite of their individual experiences. Morris mostly writes about the stories of girls who experience trauma in their lives away from school, and girls from low socio-economic backgrounds. Even though I focus primarily on my experiences in school as a middle-class student and educator, I still see my experiences throughout the book because I have felt secluded and been penalized and traumatized in and out of school, albeit differently. Although Morris' book does not include the experiences of girls of color in the middle- and upper-class and predominantly White school environments, they still matter and are part of the collective experience of Black girls. My challenge is sometimes being boxed in as ratchet or ghetto just because of the associations others make about Black women in general. My challenge also involves being pejoratively boxed in as educated, "White," and quiet—terms that both describe my reaction and resistance to learning in White spaces and people's perceived understanding of me in those spaces. This is emblematic of the importance of individual stories and creating portraiture-like contexts for making sense of why schooling as white is traumatizing.

Black Women Can Resist Whiteness and Recover from Trauma: Black Women's Voices

Harris, T. W. (2015). *The sisters are alright: Changing the broken narrative of Black women in America.* **Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.**

While the last section chronicled some of the controlling and negative images of Black femininity on Black girls, the entries in this section tell stories of how Black women overcome,

embrace, and live in spite of all the restrictions imposed on them. Harris explains how through history society has sold and bought into negative stereotypes of Black women and Black womanhood. She uses the tropes of mammy, matriarch, sapphire, and jezebel to exemplify points about economic opportunity, class, racism, sexism, health and obesity, and love and relationships. She pairs the voices of historical women, Black *mothers,* such as Zora Neale Hurston, with the voices of contemporary Black women who share some of their journeys toward loving their Blackness. In the epilogue, Harris quotes several of these women as they proclaim why they are *Alright.* "I'm alright," one woman declares,

> because I understand human nature. [For so many people] to have spent so much time, effort, and expense to denigrate, defile, and destroy us, I know that my black femaleness must be 'fearfully and wonderfully made' as the old church folks say. It cannot be bought. It cannot be imitated. And it cannot be destroyed (p. 121).

This book indicates that Black women are not perfect, but this is not completely their fault and no one else is perfect either! Yet, society continues to place blame and responsibility for so many things on the shoulders of Black women. At the same time, surveys show that Black women generally have greater self-esteem than other women (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2012; Thompson, 2012), and do better in school when curriculum practices and content are reflective of their history and culture (Banks, 1996; Bondy & Ross, 2008; Gay 2002; Howard, 2010; McAllister & Irvine, 2000; Villegas, 1991).

Harris's book relates to my research in many ways, but there are three I wish to highlight here. First, it accentuates the notion that I can resist whiteness. The trauma is real but I can still live fully with it. One of the women interviewed puts it like this; "Systemic racism and sexism

need to be acknowledged and fought, but…Black women also need to be living as we are fighting…If I spend all my time reacting, I can't act. I can't initiate and steer the course of my life." (p. 120). Second, it reminds me that I can recover from the trauma oppression has imposed on me. Throughout the book, Harris addresses themes and cultural expectations of strong Black women. At one point she refers to these cross-generational expectations as well-intentioned, but perhaps misguided. She notes the beauty and pride in being strong, but also depicts the assumed invulnerability and impenetrability that come with strength. Rather than indicate never needing support, and to sustain their strength Black women also need care from others, compassion, someone to stand for and with them. Strength, resistance, and care are intentional in the process of overcoming. Harris' book is a counternarrative of hope about Black womanhood. The individual stories she uses to present her arguments are indicative of the collective experience Black women share in the path to resistance and overcoming.

Collins, P. H. (2009). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment* **(Revised ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.**

Four important ideas presented in this text are relevant to my research. The first is, the suppression of Black women's voices economically (e.g. through labor) and politically through denial of citizen rights and through controlling images. The second is the premise that Black women have a particular set of experiences as educators, leaders, activists, mothers, scholars, and so on, that offer insight into the intellectual work that has often been a suppressed part of U.S. communities and culture. Because of the intersectional oppressions of race and gender, Black women's positionality, standpoint, and perspectives are necessary to understanding and challenging oppression. Third is Collins' discussion of the dialectical relationship of oppression

and activism; that *activism* is necessary because *oppression* exists and the two will always be at odds with each another.

Collins also explains six characteristics of Black feminist thought. These are the concept of intersectionality or intermingled oppressions, especially of race, class, and gender. Black women's standpoint is "created" because of oppressive experiences forced on them, and a variety of responses to oppression that demonstrates individuality in the midst of a common experiences; there is a dialogical relationship between Black feminist thought and Black feminist practice, they are mutually dependent on each other, one doesn't exist without the other; Black women intellectuals are vital to the development of Black feminist thought and it entails less conspicuous ways of engaging in intellectualism throughout the U.S.'s racist history; Black feminist theory is dynamic— "as social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them" (p. 43); and Black feminism is best understood in conjunction with other social justice movements, and the standpoint of Black women opens doors to better understanding the experiences of others who are or have been oppressed.

Collins claims that the positionality, history, and experiences of Black women provide unique and important perspectives on the impact of systemized oppression and inequity. It is imperative that the voices and stories of Black women be included in analyzing the reality and impact of racism and sexism. Collins also pays homage to Black women's scholarship throughout U.S. history and expands dominant cultural expectations of scholarship to include the work of Black women that has not always been considered scholarly (Hull, Scott & Smith, 1982). Her analyses provide footprints for fortitude, and academically legitimize Black women's experiences and scholarship. As a self-study that uses methods that exemplify Black women's experiences, I hope it contributes to this style and body of scholarship.

hooks, b. (1992). The oppositional gaze: Black female spectators. *Black looks: Race and Representation* (pp. 115-131). **Boston, MA: South End Press**.

Collins' explanation of what Black women *see* is indicative of the power of looking, even metaphorically. In this article, hooks examines the meaning of looking more literally, and discusses the figurative significance of looking. Power relations involved in looking are examined. Beginning with her own childhood, hooks describes how she was punished for staring because certain looks were seen as confrontational or challenges to authority. She also offers examples from enslavement. "I knew that the slaves had looked," she penned. "That all attempts to repress our/Black people's right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze" (p. 116).

This political aspect of looking is depicted in the opening scene of *The Butler* (2013) in which an overseer forces an enslaved woman into a shed and rapes her while other slaves, including her husband and son are nearby, hearing everything that happens. The older slaves look with that oppositional gaze by actually not looking. They also appeared to be subtly offering a lesson to the son that not looking literally did not mean complete ignorance of what was occurring. The father may have been literally telling his son not to look, that nothing can be done in the moment to change what is happening, but one should be on the *look*out for other opportunities to make this or another situation better. Or that by seemingly ignoring this situation and not bringing attention to it, the other ways in which the enslaved subtly rebelled would be counted as a win. The exchange between father and son during this scene also implies that there is power in looking and wisdom in knowing when to look and not look. Other times, enslaved people looked intentionally as a way of saying, "I see and I will remember." Just as the domination of White culture has persisted through time (in U.S. history), so has Black culture

persisted in and from the margins of mainstream society. The claim hooks makes for the oppositional gaze is demonstrative of how intentionally looking and not looking can be a political act for Blacks.

For hooks, looking also can be transformative. She refers frequently to how watching movies involves much more than simply watching the screen and listening. For Black women, movie going has been a racialized experience. For some, seeing how Black actresses were basically presented as White (only the lightest Black actresses, with unkinked hair), and White actresses were made to look even more White (e.g. natural brunettes like Marilyn Monroe turned blonde). Hooks ponders why Black women would even want to go to the movies, and how could they derive pleasure from basically seeing themselves erased from the screen? They either forgot racism and had a hard time going home afterwards, she says, or they consciously resisted. This reminds me of W.E.B. DuBois's (1969) notion of double consciousness in that Black folks both see their existence and a different one for White folks. hooks also found other ways to enjoy movies. She began watching independent films that, to the chagrin of her sister, had subtitles that were too much work. What hooks is saying, is when Black women go to the movies they either have to work hard to ignore or not ingest the racism and sexism, or watch films that are less inherently racist and sexist but may be more intellectually challenging to view. Making these intentional choices are acts of resistance and renewal!

Lorde, A. (2007). ***Sister outsider*****. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.**

In *Sister Outsider* (2007)*,* Audrey Lorde wrote an essay titled, "Poetry is Not a Luxury." In it, she tells women that they have deep, rich, ancient sources of power where "unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling" (p. 37) reside. She obligates Black women to get in "touch

with our own ancient, non-European consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with" rather than a problem to be solved. She considers poetry "the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be taught" (Lorde, 2007, p. 37).

Lorde's perceptions of poetry create a pathway to use artistic language and words in characterizing my experiences in school, to connect with others who may have had similar experiences; as a voice for the collective of those who do not have the opportunity to share their experiences in this way; and a means for teaching by example the importance of continuous self discovery, and confronting the challenges of traversing the educational terrain of the U.S. while Black and female. Lorde considers dark places inside of us as waiting to be surfaced by our consciousness and recognition that they exist, and poetry may facilitate these accomplishments. She says,

> We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream and vision; it is the skeleton architecture of our lives. It lays the foundation for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before (Lorde, 2007, pp. 38-39).

Angelou, M. (1994). Still I rise. *Phenomenal woman: Four poems celebrating women* (pp. 7-9). New York, NY: Random House.

From this collection, a poignant poem that resonates with my motivation for an expected outcome of this self-study. It is "Still I Rise":

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hope springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own backyard.
You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with you hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Still I Rise is, in many ways, an example of Lorde's type of poetry. Angelou recalls those deep, dark, and ancient places as she opens the poem with a recognition of a *written* history that records Black womanhood pejoratively. "Does my sassiness upset you?" She asks. "Does my haughtiness offend you?" But, like Lorde says, rather than affirm the idea that Black women are a problem to be solved, Angelou uses poetry to express the richness of Black womanhood. Throughout the poem, the narrator compares herself to nature and natural earthly elements for which humans have killed each other and the earth to profit from. Her use of the earth as metaphor signals an interrogation of the intangible and unspecified protagonists, the oppressors, and their treatment of the earth and Black women who, like dust of the earth, continue to persevere and overcome. "You trod me in the very dirt; But still, like dust, I'll rise," she says. This is a powerful statement in that it talks back to oppression and points to its irony. Oppression tries to destroy Black women but generates resilient uprising in a new form. In another example, Angelou uses movement and physicality in comparison to rich natural resources that must be physically removed to be used by humans. "That I dance like I've got diamonds; At the meeting of my thighs?" Along with diamonds, the narrator refers to oil and gold mines. Both Black women and these earthly resources have been abused, annihilated, and colonized by White supremacy. Angelou speaks of things oppressors would understand but she equates them to the richness and wealth of Black womanhood.

As the poem concludes, "Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave", Angelou appears to respond to the opening and how White Western culture constructs history through, omits, devalues, and distorts other forms of keeping history, including poetry, (which is often performed), other art forms, and storytelling, a particularly important component of African and Black cultures. Goals and challenges for me in this research project are finding a balance

between telling my story in way that honors my sociohistorical community and building bridges with members of my emerging academic community.

PART II: Being and Becoming

In Part I, I dared to *be* and introduced myself, my research process, and my personal and epistemological contexts and community. In Part II, I select four memories to exemplify the implementation of four elements of self-study. By actively engaging in the act of self-study on the page, I transition from what was into what will be as I interpret, analyze, and evolve. My lenses, perch, and perspective shift even as I write, and I become what I want in that process—a practitioner of self-study and a more evolved being. The process then, becomes the product of self-study, and the product becomes a new beginning to experience and explore.

Chapter 6: Reflect

Communing with kindred spirits provides a support system for what comes next—a reflection on a more recent traumatic occurrence. January 16, 2017 was a major life turning point. This was the day I turned 31. In my late 20s and when I was 30, I became really physically, emotionally, and psychologically unhealthy. I have been overweight most of my life but in the words of my mother *I carry my weight well*—meaning even though I'm fat, I'm solid and muscular and really curvy and I mostly dress in ways that complement my shape. But I suddenly gained 30 pounds, like really quickly and it became increasingly harder to lose weight. My body had changed it seemed and none of my efforts to change it back worked. Something wasn't right! After several conversations and tests with more than one doctor, no diagnosis was made except stress.

In the winter term of 2014 I wrote for my qualifying exams and had the oral defense, after which I cried and spent several weeks depressed and often in bed. I passed but it was a grueling and deeply emotional process. I was also dating someone at this time who was emotionally dependent on me and it was draining. He was and is such a nice and good-hearted person, but we were not a good match and I didn't know how to walk away. About a month later I got an ear infection and had to call my advisor to take me to the emergency room in the middle of the night. About a month after that, I had experimental laser eye surgery for a condition called keratoconus that I had to pay several thousand dollars for out of pocket. This was on top of ongoing costs for specialized contacts and care. I became further depressed. I would cancel meetings and things last minute saying I was sick (which I was; I was mentally and emotionally very ill). I would get up and go visit schools and support teacher candidates then come home immediately and climb back into bed. I didn't eat much but when I did I ate things that comforted me like French fries and pizza. After some months, I decided I had enough of being a student for a minute and needed to be around children. Being in a classroom full of elementary children is my happy place. I found a job teaching 2/3 grades at an independent (private) school—the same school I mentioned earlier that is in a quickly gentrifying historically Black neighborhood. I thought this would be best. To be doing the thing I love. To be able to practice culturally responsive teaching after having learned so much about it in my first four years of grad school. It seemed like a smart move at the time. I would have a real paycheck again that would hypothetically alleviate some financial stress. With a few bumps in the road, I survived my first year back in the classroom. I should have recognized those bumps for what they were—WARNING signs to turn back the other way. ONE WAY signs pointing in the opposite direction that I was going.

In my second year at the school, one of my best buds, Suzie, joined the staff and we were the 4/5 teaching team. For the first few months of school things were awesome. I also had a student teacher who had spent three weeks in my classroom the year before. The three of us were a good team and we enjoyed working together. Well, it appeared things were going well, to us. But really, there was a lot going on behind the scenes that eventually lead us to leave in the middle of the year. Initially, we resigned and were going to leave February 20th, the day before mid-winter break. Instead, we wrote a letter and sent it out the night of my 31st birthday. It was a scary but liberating, roaring, exciting, powerful start to my 31st year.

Ultimately, I think Suzie and I tried to put students first and we think, the school is a toxic wasteland for students. Since we are too cute for jail, we could not blow the place up, so we had to be the "bigger people" and hope they would make some changes. So we wrote a letter to ensure we had a voice in the narrative of our exit from the Good School (pseudonym). I am revisiting this letter for the first time about ten months after our departure, hoping that intentional reflection will help the healing process of a deeply emotional and career altering experience. I use this story and memory as points of focus for both this chapter and the next because in processing my traumatic experiences generally, this experience was indicative of my battle with White supremacy culture, particularly its intangibility and ability to twist and change such that those experiencing the trauma can seem paranoid. Before sharing the letter and the self-talk (included as footnotes in the letter below) I engaged in as I reread it, I share my reflective process and speak on the role of reflection in a culturally responsive teaching practice.

First, I identified a "moment" to reflect on. I chose one that was weighing on me and challenged my philosophy as a teacher and human to push myself into deeper reflection. Avoidance is key to maintaining White supremacy culture so it was helpful to have an artifact—

the letter and my journal entries around this time—to temporarily freeze my thoughts and challenge me to face the experience. I reread the letter[2] and annotated it. I did this mentally as I read, but again, I find it helpful to freeze my thoughts by writing them down. Then I asked Suzie to reflect. We actually had some stark differences in how we remembered and talked about the experience even though we both still feel an intangible heaviness when revisiting the situation. With Suzie's reflection, I was not alone and had community. Also, having someone else's thoughts helped extend and clarify my own thinking. As a result of this reflective process I was able to analyze more thoroughly what happened rather than avoid the intensity and anger I continue to feel.

January 16, 2017 [3]

Families, Staff, and The Good School Board:

As social justice educators[4], the 4/5 teaching team has spent long hours reflecting on our practice and our experience at The Good School and we would like to share some thoughts with you. We

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[2] The letter is included in its original form, with no edits or revisions to maintain the authenticity of our intent.

[3] This was my 31st birthday. I appreciate my birthday and make sure to spend time celebrating myself each year. Year 30 was rough so I had a strange kind of energy thinking of doing something so bold at the start of year 31.

[4] We wanted to make the connection that as social justice educators, reflection is always part of our process. So the instructional decisions we made were intentional and thoughtful and we hoped folks would pick up on that.

hope you will read and engage in reflection about the role of social justice in your lives and at The Good School.

About a month ago, interactional challenges with staff[5], and, instructional problems affecting students' experiences were brought to our attention. It seemed to us[6], leadership immediately defined the problem and causes, and seemingly dictated the process for change unilaterally, using dog-whistle politics [7]aimed at changing *us*[8] and our practice. This is especially problematic considering the changes we were told to make were things we were already implementing, in the process of implementing, or had already asked for support in implementing.[9] When we did share ideas on ways to improve (e.g., strategies and processes to improve communication with families, support for talking to students about their experiences, and structures for examining our teaching practice)[10] we felt they were shot down or twisted into language that was not ours. This

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[5] We tried to show humility, that we can admit when we are wrong.

[6] A friend who proofread the letter suggested softer language so our audience would keep reading, but in earlier versions of the letter more of our rage showed. Part of me is upset that we didn't include more authentic emotions, but I know why we didn't.

[7] We spent a lot of time trying to find the right terminology here.

[8] This still feels so true.

[9] I have evidence of this too.

[10] We were blocked from our emails early that morning. But an email the head of school sent to the entire school community (or maybe it was just 4/5 families) was shared with us. When I go to the line "they were not teaching" I could not read anymore. We worked hard in this process to humble ourselves and be communicative and collaborative in doing what was best for kids. For her to say that was spiteful and hurtful for so many reasons.

is a form of cultural dominance in which our voices and experiences, particularly with one of us being a woman of color, were ignored.[11]

For reasons that seem hard to pinpoint, the challenges students appear to be facing were told to us by administration with little to no direct communication between us and families.[12] Additionally, during the past several weeks, 5th graders were finalizing their applications to middle school, and, the school adopted a new curricular approach with SPARK units, which required all to take on a different intellectual and emotional capability. This process particularly impacts 4th and 5th graders who have been used to a different approach to teaching and learning for several years. In the practice of teaching for social justice, challenges like these are not totally

Unexpected. Key scholars in multicultural education, including James Banks, Geneva Gay, and Gloria Ladson-Billings, have written extensively about how social justice content is often challenged by schools and parents, but that it is still necessary[13] to teach and challenge status quo

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[11] We were also given a transition plan that told us when and what the school would tell families, staff, and students. Another staff member said to me as I packed my four boxes, “It wasn’t supposed to happen like this. We had a plan to tell kids you were going on the finish grad school and start a nonprofit.” What the hell? That’s not a story I ever told them and they never asked!

[12] Maybe two families came to us, but we were given a list of 13 families that had concerns. Also, after we left, several of those families reached out and we talked and got together and they said, “we didn’t complain about anything,” or “I haven’t even talked to [school leadership] except in passing.” So, someone was lying. Or stretching the truth. Or avoiding their own truth. Or lying.

[13] I would not necessarily change what we taught or how we taught it. I would rethink parent communication though.

knowledge and systems. We regret that a true collaboration between leadership, instructional staff, teachers, students, and families[14] has not developed in order for a true justice curriculum to unfold.

I, Raedell,[15] learned that certain staff members and parents have a problem with me[16, 17] through a conversation with school leadership about a month ago. In this meeting, I was told the complainants, all white women, were afraid of me. When I asked why, the response was, "we can't quite put our finger on it."[18] No examples of me threatening people, slamming doors in anyone's face, being violent, etc. could be shared. I could only conclude…because of who I am racially and culturally that certain of you have problems with me. This is racism. And it is from this perspective that I perceived the growing list of challenges that were suddenly brought to my

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[14] Yes, all of these players matter.

[15] Because I am Black and Suzie is White, we thought it necessary to speak from our own perspectives.

[16] One of my students with an IEP chose to leave right after Thanksgiving break because I wasn't a good fit for her according to her parents. I think they coddled her and I pushed her own expectations of what she could do. I did what I would have done for any student, met them where they are and push them to go further. There were also identity issues at play. This student was a Black girl, adopted by a White couple and I believe my whole existence was problematic to them—not that they would have described it this way.

[17] Interestingly, some parents had issues with me last year with how I communicated and even when I made some adjustments they still complained. I was more shielded from this because there were some really great parents who stood up for me and told me not to worry about it. They were taking up for me and I hadn't known it.

[18] I still get a kick out of this response. It's literally what she said! And it is ridiculous.

attention over the past few weeks. I know this is the world we live in, but I expected more from a school community that claims a vision of social justice and cultural competence.[19]

Ultimately, I take responsibility for not being a perfect teacher. I accept that students are being pushed to do things differently and this may make them and their parents uncomfortable. It even makes me uncomfortable, and, I accept that I have learning to do in being a better educator of social justice. But, I am also experienced enough to know that these challenges and the lack of clear communication around them are the responsibility of many involved. The implicit and explicit racial bias involved in how these challenges[20] have been approached have been traumatizing. When I expressed to school leadership how targeted I felt, the response I got was, "If it helps you to understand yourself as the problem inside of that, that's entirely up to you."[21]

I implore[22] you to consider even more deeply examining your personal and professional biases for the sake of interacting with any and all students and adults that are racially/culturally different than yourselves. Whiteness and unrecognized prejudices affect those of us you see as

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[19] They used to shout about this. But when Suzie and I tried to push others and live this out, we were highly criticized with, "everybody's idea of social justice is not the same as yours."

[20] We really tried not to make the letter about airing the dirty laundry of these challenges but about the racist ways in which things were handled and calling out how White supremacy shows up.

[21] The school leader actually wrote that to me in an email. I started to fear checking my email for what I would find next in this growing stockpile of grievances.

[22] Ugh, was asking too hard? Being too emotional?

different more than you know and it is not our responsibility to teach you that.[23] Each person must take the responsibility to continually examine and understand personal biases.

I, Suzie, am a veteran teacher. This is my 19th year in the classroom and I am dedicated to lifelong learning in my practice. Through earning my Masters and Phd,[24] I have spent the better part of a decade learning about critical race theory and how Whiteness in education contributes to perpetuating the status quo. Whiteness is contributing to a poor experience for me as well. For example, I approached leadership after a racist comment was made to my black colleague, Raedell, to explain why the comment was racist and to see what the plan was to mend the relationship. Not only did they not see how Whiteness contributed to the statement,[25] they did not accept the personal impact and trauma it put on one of the kindest, most loving people I know.[26] Another example of Whiteness dominating the school is in preparing for the march. While we have a very diverse population of children at the school, many of the students are White. We taught students Black anthems, some from the civil rights movement and some from enslavement. The history of these songs and their meanings and origins were not taught. The songs were given to white students as their own when they should understand them as tools of

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[23] I don't think they get it or care.

[24] Gotta get those credentials in there so people believe you.

[25] We wanted to point out how White supremacy culture is bad for all.

[26] ☺

solidarity belonging to oppressed and marginalized peoples. They were also given to students of color, including Black students, without celebrating their history and contributions to the world.

During the march,[27] White leaders who, without caution mistakenly told a Black woman that White people fear her, were leading children in chants of justice, equality, and freedom. Meanwhile, as we have attempted to craft learning experiences that help students continue to build their understanding and appreciation for why people march and why The Good School marches, we have been demonized.[28][29] When it comes to learning any new topic or skill there is a learning curve. Some will know more than others and mistakes will be made because that is how we learn. However, a contradiction has occurred when, in the former, it is ok to be racist, but in the latter, it is not ok to take risks when teaching a social justice pedagogy.

While we see contradictions in practice, we also see ways in which school leadership is trying to help us all become culturally competent.[30] Through book clubs, highlighting teachers' strengths, and inviting facilitators to engage staff in social justice workshops we are taking steps to grow individually and collectively. While these steps can be helpful in one's journey, in order to

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[27] I really hoped folks would see the juxtaposition here.

[28] True!

[29] I appreciate Suzie's voice because even though we co-authored this, She is able to give examples in a way that my emotions wouldn't let me then.

[30] Again, remember our audience and that we were rying to demonstrate humility.

improve one's practice, we must be intentionally, intellectually, and personally involved in the growth process and continually reexamine how our actions align with the school's mission and vision of social justice education.[31] From our perspective there was a missed opportunity to collectively address a problem of practice.

The manner in which we have been targeted is unacceptable. We do not consider ourselves perfect people or perfect teachers but we take seriously our vocations as educators to continually hone our skills to bring our very best to the classroom and to students. But because of all this, a strong family-student-teacher-leadership centered partnership has not developed and we are unable to do what we need to do for our students.[32]

We feel The Good School focuses on acts of philanthropy, altruism, and charity. While these acts are admirable, these are not acts of justice. They are examples of tokenism--those with privilege making benevolent gestures to marginalized and oppressed groups.

A key piece of social justice education is reflection. In addition to taking personal responsibility, our frustration is in not having the opportunity to collaboratively reflect and share these ideas as

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[31] Again, reminding them of what they say the schools is about. I've heard from friends who still work there that they are trying to change the mission and vision. That seems terrible to me, to use a moment of adversity to change the foundation instead of being introspective and make interpersonal, staff, and instructional changes.

[32] They truly got lost in all of this.

potential problems of practice. We hope you will reflect on these things and more in your professional and personal lives.[33]

Sincerely,

Raedell Cannie

Suzie Hodges

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.” ~Dr. Angela Davis

#goodtrouble

Ok, two PhDs (almost), in education, with collectively almost 30 years of teaching experience, both who have taught, coached, and mentored pre-service and early in-service teachers, were pushed out of teaching. I would *never* have imagined that I would quit anything, let alone a teaching job. But I had to come to terms with the realization that I was unhealthy, the environment was unhealthy, so I was no good for anybody, especially my students. Saying no to this job meant saying yes to my health and well-being. But the scariest thing of all was that I did

[33] We knew this would open a can of worms and it did. Parents of color and staff of color, and some White families, thanked us for naming things, apologized for what happened and helped us pack up our classrooms. An emergency board meeting and staff meeting were called. Our students were taken out of our classrooms and kept away from us for the remainder of the day. It was really ugly. But it was impactful and I’d do it all over again.

not realize I was stressed and worn out. I just thought, *I'm in grad school, I'm a full time teacher with a student teacher, and I'm a leader in my church. This is what life is supposed to be like. I should be tired and figuring out how to find more hours in the day*. So when I quit, I went through a slight withdrawal. All of a sudden I did not have sixteen 4th and 5th graders and assignments and homework and parent emails and morning meetings and conferences and staff meetings and grade level meetings to think about. The very things I thought I was destined to do, be a beacon of what strong social justice teaching in action could look like—to teach to transgress and to transgress (hooks, 1994)—were ripped from me. I was pushed out for teaching a social justice curriculum (at a social justice missioned school) that made parents uncomfortable and my Blackness and personality were deemed the cause of the problems. I was fighting White supremacy, and White supremacy was winning. I got mad at God. I couldn't understand how He could allow all of this to happen.

At first, I just rested and it was liberating—a process that I am learning is just that, a process that involves allowing yourself to feel what you need to feel and begin to heal. But soon, I began to feel strange not being *busy*; not feeling stressed. I had time to work out. Time to go grocery shopping and cook instead of ordering items from Amazon prime and take out restaurants. Time to see friends and do laundry regularly. Time to read and write, both academically and for pleasure. As I got used to how present I was able to be in my own life, I was so glad to have quit. Aside from the practical health related issues, there was some emotional baggage I sifted through in this process as well. Leaving was a life-turning moment. Leaving that job meant beginning an amazing journey of healing and growth that has opened my life up to so many great opportunities in so many areas of my life. It also catapulted my progress in my graduate school studies. I spent three years working on my dissertation proposal off and

on. In the year that I left the classroom I completed my proposal, and wrote and revised at least two drafts of my "complete" dissertation. That experience gave me both the motivation and central story for creating my self-study. I knew I needed to tell my story because I had heard my story before in the experiences of other Black women and I wanted other Black women and Black girls to hear their story through me. I also need White women, like the women who lead that school and the many other White women who teach to an audience of Black and Brown students every day to hear me.

Self-Talk

The resiliency of students of color. *My one liner description of this research is "I am exploring my experiences in racially insensitive learning spaces as a case example of how students of color experience racism-induced trauma in schools." That was definitely the intention, but most of what I have written thus far is not about my experience as a student. In previous chapters I have written about schools and the context of education in the U.S. and in this chapter I wrote about an experience as a teacher. Two chapters from now I write about being abused as a child but that did not take place in school. Why have most of my examples and foundation for context not been about my experiences in school? Is that ok considering my research question?*

From one vantage point, asking if self-study can foster resiliency in students of color implies exploring the experiences of students of color. And, exploring the context of schools, education, and teachers is arguably paramount to understand more deeply the context in which students of color endure racialized trauma. Further, context in portraiture, the physical environment and organizational culture, matter greatly. So it is acceptable that broader concepts of schooling are attended to. However, there is still something to be desired in not eventually

giving more attention to events that occurred in school. In making sense of this draft I have tried to understand why I spend so much time creating context, why that felt so necessary in a search to understand my journey as a student. I surmise, the student experience is colored by so many layers such that directly exploring only my student experience would not make this study applicable beyond me. Additionally, I infer that resiliency may be tightly connected to the context and environment of schools and classrooms—equally or perhaps more so, than what students of color can do on their own and within themselves.

Culturally unresponsive teachers. The first part of the research question is directly relevant to teaching (can purposeful engagement in self-study cultivate cultural competency in culturally unresponsive educators?). But, because I do not consider myself to be culturally unresponsive I wonder if the reflection in the chapter above has unearthed findings about cultural unresponsive educators. Culturally unresponsive teachers are those who either do not incorporate culturally responsive ideas and strategies into their practice, or teachers who claim to do so, but in practice, according to various frameworks such as Cain's (2015) multicultural teacher capacity scale or Banks' (1993) dimensions of multicultural education, actually are not culturally responsive. These educators talk the talk but when presented with opportunities to actually address inequity, avoid, shy away, and/or make excuses.

An example of a culturally unresponsive approach from my time at the Good School is the lunch time think-tank organized by the school's leadership to encourage teachers to collaborate around "problems of practice" with "puzzling" students. The first two students to be discussed were Black boys (who made up a small percentage of the school population). When this was brought to the attention of the leadership, the response was, "thanks for bringing that to our attention. It is something we need to think about" but no actual steps were taken to reform the approach to these meetings even though at least one teacher offered to assist.

At this point, I cannot make claims about whether or not self-study would impact the mindsets and practices of unresponsive educators. I do wonder though, if my research question is more about these teachers' exposure to self-study or their actual engagement in self-study.

Chapter 7: Storytelling

In middle school and high school, I attended a private boarding school on the south shore of Eastern Long Island. I was one of maybe seven Black students in a 7-12 grade school of 150 students. At this point, being one of few was normal—not necessarily comfortable but expected. White students were not an extreme majority (about 50 percent) because there were a lot of international students. Most students had attended the school for several years like me. So everybody knew everybody. For example, it was not uncommon to hear an American student ask how to say something in Korean, or to have German students share their perspective on the Holocaust in history class, or to have traditional snacks brought to class by Chinese students. These things happened without plan.

We were in U. S. history class, junior year the day I realized my friend didn't "know" I was Black, or rather, she exempted me from being Black. I don't remember the topic of the class discussion, but we had managed to divert the discussion and were off on a tangent. Sierra (pseudonym), one of my best friends since 7th grade, made a comment and laughed hysterically at herself. For some reason we were discussing the lines at the department of motor vehicles (DMV). Anyone who lives in or near metropolitan New York knows, when you take a trip to the DMV, you bring a book and you prepare to wait. This was one of the first lessons we learned when learning to drive. So, we were discussing the DMV and Sierra said, "All the ghetto Black people drive up in their big cars playing loud music."

I wrinkled my brow, unsure of what to say. A thousand thoughts ran through my head. *What did she say? Why would she say that? She knows I'm Black right? We've never talked about me being Black, but clearly she can see it, right? Do I not act Black enough? She has to know I'm Black. I'm not ghetto, no way. But on behalf of the* ghetto *Black people I am offended.*

"Excuse me?" is what came out. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Not you," she said.

Then my teacher told me to, "Calm down. She didn't mean it like that."

"Like what?" I said.

"Oh, you know what I mean" she said.

…I did not.

Sierra and I didn't speak for weeks after that. I felt disregarded and confused. It felt like my friend had been looking through me all these years. Selfishly, I wondered how she did not see that I was Black and that in making a blanket statement about *ghetto* Black people she was also talking about me? I also felt shame that I kind of knew what she meant when she said, "not you"—that I was able to envision the stereotype to which she referred; that because of my educational and class privilege, I did not fit that stereotype and I felt bad for feeling relieved about that; that in that moment I felt displaced and a need to belong…I was not Black *like that.* I definitely wasn't White. So what am I?

As a teenager I was not able to find the words to explain and in the interim I have lived with the pain of this encounter and others like it without any way of dealing with it.

Our Lives are Storied

Unlike a lot of traditional academic writing, storytelling allows the author to pursue the process and product of writing as demonstrations of what she writes about. So instead of talking about being storytelling, for example, I tell stories and explain the process, purpose, and profess my gleanings.

Even though the risk of misinterpretation is high, storytelling—testimonio— can be a powerful conduit for cross-cultural understanding and communication (Behar, 1997; Gilyard, 1991). In *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*, The Latina Feminist Group (2001) defines testimonios as "stories of our lives" (p.1), and they demonstrate their point of survival through what and how they tell.

In the conceptual framework I introduced Derrick Bell's and Patricia Williams' use of story and counternarratives as components of critical race theory. They declared that merely because the research community is now more receptive to story as a part of scholarly inquiry does not mean that all stories are judged as legitimate in knowledge construction and the advancement of a discipline. So what makes story useable in research? In a very practical sense, Bruner (1994) explored what narrative storytelling is. He explained that the form of thought that goes into constructing stories or narratives is unique and that it is worthwhile to examine how one constructs herself/himself autobiographically to the same extent the world examines the thinking of more well-established domains such as physics or history. This is helpful in bringing more authority to creative ways of knowing and being, but, the connotations of using a status quo method to determine validity should be critically considered. However, status quo is not inherently bad and some of its structures and processes, when not exclusionary, are useful for making sense of the world and of research. Thus, Bruner is included as a source with caution so

that his positionality as a White male is not masked in what it means to advance and expand the acceptance of more creative forms of thinking and writing in academia.

Science and creativity are often pitted against each other—with science posited as the winner—in Western conceptions of approved knowledge. Curiously, anything that cannot be structured and broken down to an inquiry process is deemed “creative.” Children’s writing when they are first learning to put crayon to paper is creative. I have heard numerous professors and teachers respond to a student’s idea that didn’t quit seem to make sense as creative. Visit a museum and listen to folks talk about what they see. You will hear the word creative a lot. My mother sometimes describes my fashion choices as creative. In these instances, and a lot of other moments like them, the person who uses “creative” is really saying, this is unfamiliar and strange to me. It does not fit into my schemas of understanding. It is foreign. But, I don’t want to be rude about my confusion or distaste or misunderstanding. So, “it’s creative” is said as if further explanation is not warranted. This is one way that institutional norms become entrenched in everyday interactions and perpetuate status quo thinking—e.g. that which is not scientific is creative and creativity is therefore less valued.

The portraiture method of research challenges such notions and blends the use of scientific and creative thinking. So often African oral traditions convey information through story and metaphor, are excluded from “official” ways of knowing. But Bruner’s work begins to highlight why such ideas and habits should be questioned. Broadly speaking, he asks, in light of the contextual perspective of any given storyteller. Is there a set of narrative rules that lead a narrator to structure her/his account of an experience in a particular way? What are the common things that people think about and do when they tell their stories? These are significant questions to ask as I ponder how to make visible my practices as an educator and processes as a self-study

researcher. The perspective and perch of the narrator determine what story is told. Even the same person recounting the same story won't tell the exact same story twice. It probably seems overwhelming to try and provide scientific structure, too. So instead of appreciating story, it is outcast as lesser. But it really is a powerful tool. Storytelling is a conduit for building across difference and understanding the process of storytelling can help deepen one's own story and sense of self.

It was through storytelling that I was able to name my confusing racial reality. Superficially, race refers to skin tone, but socially, how one talks about race reveals more. The fact that my White friend could *see* and name a particular group of Blacks and then *see* me as "not like them" demonstrates that Black does not equal skin tone. This situation is also an example of the social power and influence Whites have to name and define—an element of power that maintains the status quo. Sierra defined Blackness as "ghetto" and "loud" and disassociated me with that definition. My teacher then cosigned as she defended Sierra's statement, solidifying for us all the *truth* about Blackness in the U.S.—the people with power get to define it while dismissing the implications of their ignorance. Retelling experiences like these. through story, has expanded my view of self because I more deeply understand how the world *sees* me. At the same time, this realization constrains my being because I realize how I have become trapped in White dominant cultural expectations and have limited my being.

My friend not seeing me as Black was both symptomatic of the status quo's contemplation of race more broadly, and, the psychological trauma imposed upon me as an individual. Social commentator/activist, DeRay McKesson has referred to this kind of trauma as light trauma—trauma bestowed in less physically or viscerally violent manners. Heavy, or intense trauma is much more physically abusive. To tell such stories and reap the benefits, calls

forth a commitment to vulnerability, which is a weakness I flexed and developed in this process. In chapter 8 I present my most vulnerable experience.

Chapter 8: Tell *Your* Truth

The older I get, the more I believe there is no Truth. There is the truth as one sees it, but there is not *the* truth. Experiences like history class in my junior year of high school have shaped this perception of truth. *The* truth just doesn't matter that much because there is likely going to be someone with more power and privilege than me who will manipulate a situation to fit *their* truth. Even though unintentional at times, this is a tool of White supremacy culture. All have mental schemas through which we filter experiences, but when certain people's/groups' truth (Whites, the rich, men) become *the* truth, a distinct culture and narrative develop. Counternarratives are truths developed from the perspectives of people of color (and other marginalized people) that help explain the truth of the oppressed. Here, is the truth of my Black, female, cisgender body.

An Ode to My Body

I *fucking* hate my body sometimes
Not because it's larger than average
Even though it is
And people make it seem like fat people can just flip a switch and not be so anymore
And hearing that is fucking annoying
No more excuses!
Boris fucking Kodjoe
High blood pressure and diabetes do not 'run in your family.' Pork chops, mac 'n' cheese, and tons of soda do! (Harris, 2015, p. 107)
What the fuck does that light-skinned skinny dude know anyway
If I *was* skinny I couldn't be with a man who thought like that
But I'm fat
And I'm also curvy
And *girls like me, with coal skin and hula-hoop hips (Watson, 2017, p. 7)*
Get teased for being fat sometimes
And whistled at for our curves other times
In church we are told to cover up
As if our curves should conform to suppress the desires of the seemingly gangs of ravenous horny boys and men populating the pews
Teach the men to uphold the standard of the body as holy
Don't chastise women for living in our skin
It's a wonder I don't hate the church
I guess I am able to see the church as people
People as imperfect
But still deserving of God's love

But "the church" hurt me
Taught me to treat my body as a temple
But also defiled my body
Do you know
Nearly 80 percent of 21-year-olds abused as children have at least one psychological disorder based on one study?[34] (Child Help, 2018)
Striving. Living. Surviving.
I fucking hate profanity
I rarely use it
But that's how much I fucking hate my body
I knew it was wrong
No one had to tell me that
It hurt
It was uncomfortable
It was secretive
It was sweaty and hot
It felt cold
Hide your private parts
Close your eyes. *All attempts to repress our/**black peoples'** right to gaze had produced in us an overwhelming longing to look, a rebellious desire, an oppositional gaze* (hooks, 1992, p. 116).
Take off your pants. *Grandma said "if the **boys** try to put they hands down your pants you tell them NO."*
Too late grandma
Fuck!
Before I'd even learned to read
Shh.
Don't tell anyone what we did. "*Now, I didn't hurt you. Don't get scared"*
(Angelou, p. 79).
How do you enjoy sex with a four year old
I fucking hate my body sometimes
They try to make you feel comfortable so you think nothing's wrong. "*He held me so softly that I wished he wouldn't ever let me go. I felt at home" (Angelou, p. 79).*
He had me sit on his lap
In front of other people
Under a blanket to keep us *warm*
A deacon's son
It's just a title
The (p)raised penis touched me
Faithful fingers felt me up
Lordly lips lynched my childhood
Now I'm past 30
My four year old shadow sits with me and wonders
When will I grow up
She is me
But I wish she wasn't always there
She is brave
I am not
She grew up so fast
I'm growing up slow
We have thoughts and desires that a
Thoughts and desires that a
Four
Year
Old
should not have
Are we making him happy?
Are we pretty enough for him?
Are we sexy enough for him?
How can we make him notice
Play became foreplay
Ken and Barbie were sex toys
___

I'm past 30 now
She will always be four
Stuck in time
She is me
Her childhood ended the first time he touched her
I fucking hate my body sometimes

[34] https://www.childhelp.org/child-abuse-statistics/

Tell *Your* Truth vs. Storytelling

My faith in and relationship with God are extremely important to me. This is partially why I rarely use profanity. Also, it just doesn't sound natural rolling off my tongue. So when I use it, I am *using* it. And, because I believe in a relationship with God and not that s/he is a dictator lording over us, I know that forgiveness will come as I use it in telling this story—perhaps self-forgiveness is what I'm searching for anyway. Using profanity helps me tell this story because profanity, much like child abuse, feels foreign yet permeates our culture and is familiar. That's how I feel when I relive being molested, no, raped and sexually abused over and over again, as a little girl. I feel outside of my body, like it happened to someone else, but also knowing it did happen to me because I am still living out its consequences. That little girl seems so foreign to me yet she is definitely a part of who I am.

I used to (and sometimes still do) get incredibly visibly anxious when addressing groups of people. Groups of 2, groups of 200, it didn't matter. I was either silent or very soft spoken or stumbled over my words, covered my mouth, played with my hands, swayed, hung my head, everything! Four-year-old me is that scared and unsure little girl hiding behind her mother's leg afraid to really be seen. She comes out when 30-year-old me is anxious and afraid. It was as if, doing those things covered up who I really am. And, it wasn't about my physical appearance. It was about, what can people *see* when they look at me? Can they *see* I've been abused? Can they *see* my lack of experience? Can they *see* that I don't know what I'm doing?! When I am not the focus of attention I conversely think I've done something wrong and/or I work hard for positive attention. A lot of that stems from a twisted idea of vulnerability that says if attention is placed on me, people see a little girl and she is either trying to please or being taken advantage of. If I seek that attention instead, I can put forth a version of me out that I believe will be liked and wanted.

Even now, I still get a bit nervous in groups, but mostly, I have learned to manage my anxiety better. I had to meet that little girl. Stop ignoring her and embrace her. Tell her, I see her struggle and let her know that everything is going to be ok. Let her know she is going to grow up to be confident and successful. At this point, we are still getting to know each other so she hasn't quite grown into the me I am going to be. But, she is definitely less afraid and I can talk her down when she begins to get really anxious. I look her in the eye and say, "I know you're scared boo, but you have done this before and this is your passion and purpose. How people respond, is NOT a reflection of your worth. You are great *even if they don't think so*. You are great even if they *do* think so."

I was able to get to this point by acknowledging and telling my truth. In school, even as an adult learner, I consistently sought (and somewhat still do) the approval of others because in my core, I was very unsure of who I was and who I could trust. Being raped as a child by people I was told I was supposed to trust; being raped and feeling it was wrong but being manipulated into thinking it was ok was psychologically damaging being told my features were weird yet attractive. Right and wrong, safety and danger, the trustworthy and the suspect—the distinction between these things was thwarted for me very early on. As a result I try to separate the world into "black" and "white" (a damaging dichotomy as can be seen in my discsussion throughout)

and tried to please everyone around me. This was exhausting, trying to be friends with everyone and giving so much of my time and money and self in relationships. Now, I tend to initially suspect and distrust people, and put up a guard until they do or say something that gives me an inclination of who they are. This is also exhausting and is further complicated by my growing affinity to my disposition as a Black woman, and frustration that others don't want to see the me that way and chastise me or call me radical or different because of it.

So, despite learning in church at a very young age that sex before marriage was bad, I knew what it was before I even started kindergarten. I was violated. Molested. Raped. At a very young age I became very aware of my body, the ying and yang of power and vulnerability it holds. I wanted to focus on this story because it highlights a trauma in a way that I think more people can understand. I want to draw attention to the fact that traumas like this are experienced by a lot of students in classrooms. Students from marginalized communities may be traumatized by physical abuse, racism, sexism, and classism. Trauma should not be ignored; nor should teachers try to teach over or beyond it.

In his analysis of identity, memory, and hope, Poulos (2013) decrees, "Writing autoethnography is a quest for meaning, for truth, for discovery" (p. 475). With truth-telling, you deliberately tell the story that doesn't want to be told. It is a choice to confront a demon and slay it. It is the choice to be honest with self about self. It is personal integrity and accountability, a deep scrub. Telling your truth is the acknowledgement of a broken place and intentionally going in to fix it. It is the step that must be taken beyond thinking that all the steps have been taken and after all the attempts to avoid it have been exhausted. It is now. It is unavoidable. It will always find you. When you face it, it will set you free.

Self-Talk

Upon rereading this section, I recognize I have truly been broken. I was a victim and I acted as if the world owed me something because of terrible things I experienced both in and out of school beginning at a young age. Working through this dissertation over the course of five or so years pushed me through a process of acknowledging, accepting, confronting, and beginning to move on from this victimization. I was raped and repeatedly abused and once it stopped, continued living, wounded and bandaged. I also remember in kindergarten when I first realized that being Black meant something to other people than to me. I was at a sleepover with a classmate and her brother pointed at me and said I was Black. I burst into tears. I don't think he meant any harm. I think he was making an observation, but somehow my five-year-old self knew that observation was rooted in something more than just color. Nowhere in my community—at

home or at church—had anyone pointed out that I was Black. Then the first time I visited with a White family, my Blackness was something to be observed and pointed out. And, I kept living—wounded and bandaged.

Many small wounds left unattended seeped into each other and soon each traumatic experience mattered less on its own. This is at least partially why a quest to think about life as a student has manifested memories for many areas of life. But still, the wounds needed attending. Sonya Renee Taylor (2018) suggested, "Radical self-love [is] the balm to heal the wounds inflicted by these violent systems [of oppression]" (book cover). I am ready to let the light in and pursue radical self-love, in community with other beautifully broken spirits.

Chapter 9: **I Am We**

> Yaw nodded. He sat in his chair at the front of the room and looked at all the young men. 'This is the problem of history. We cannot know that which we were not there to see and hear and experience for ourselves. We must rely upon the words of others. Those who were there in the olden days, they told stories to the children so that the children would know, so that the children could tell stories to their children. And so on, and so on. But now we come upon the problem of conflicting stories. Kojo Nyarko says that when the warriors came to his village their coats were red, but Kwame Adu says that they were blue. Whose story do we believe, then?'
>
> The boys were silent. They stared at him, waiting.
>
> 'We believe the one who has the power. He is the one who gets to write the story. So when you study history, you must always ask yourself. Whose story am I missing? Whose voice was suppressed so that this voice could come forth? Once you have figured that out, you must find that story too. From there, you begin to get a clearer, yet still imperfect, picture' (Gyasi, 2017, pp. 226-227).
>
> *Homegoing*

I imagine, I could now see the world differently, and that the world could see me differently, if we thought of an taught history this way in U.S. schools.

The Adinkra symbols (Figure 3) are an adopted component of African American culture that originated from the Akan/Asante people whose history is centered in *Homegoing*. Stylistically, Adinkra symbols are based on observations and associations among people, objects, flora, fauna, and other elements of nature, parts of the body, geometric figures, and abstract ideas—all contextually couched within Asante culture and traditions. Additionally, the symbols have served as a means of communication, particularly in the Asante language of Twi, often giving advice or warnings. Thus, to deeply understand even one symbol would take time to responsibly synthesize the historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts of these diverse people.

While I am not deeply versed in knowledge of the Adinkra symbols, what I do know has influenced my values around the perception of cultures, and knowing history and its impact on the present. There is, in fact, an Adinkra symbol that embodies this very idea. It is Sankofa.. Sankofa exists in two forms (Figure 3) and means return, learn from the past. or go back and get it—basically, reminding us that history has answers to a lot of lessons we are still trying to learn today.

Figure 3. Sankofa Adinkra Symbol of the West African Akan/Asante

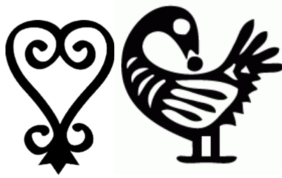

Figure 4. A selection of the Adinkra Symbols of the West African Akan/Asante

think ahead	welcome	good living	learn from your mistakes	two heads are better than one
hand come, hand go	congratulations	wisdom/knowledge	good-bye	have courage
strength	faithfulness	enjoy yourself	royalty	good fortune
give me your heart	forgiveness	faith	I shall meet you again	hope
two good friends	you have changed	house of peace	the king sees all	understanding

truth

I salute you

performing the unusual/impossible

love eye

drum

peace

Rather than teach children to memorize lists of leaders and capitals and dates (as I was proud to be the best at in fifth grade and could care less about now), the oral storytelling traditions of many African peoples and cultures emphasizes the significance of memory, personal context and positionality, and multiplicity of voice. These traditions actually cultivate understanding the complexity of history rather than oversimplifying it from the perspective of the winners and the power thieves. I make this point because traditional and contemporary African cultures are often labeled as unsophisticated and untimely. That is simply false. Storytelling, historytelling, is a complex craft, an art. An even though most Western doctrines have not tried to legitimize it and turn it into a science, that does not detract from its complex and sophisticated tendencies. More simply put, these cultural systems and traditions of (his)story telling ask differently of the listener/learner. It almost requires that s/he be a learner, willing to actively suspend personal perspective and judgment, and learn of and from the perspective of the storyteller. There are many voices relevant and important to telling history and an implied trust in the listener to interpret the stories with cultural intelligence—to appreciate linguistics and communicative patterning, and so on, and what they convey.

While we could never know every event in history in great detail, we could do a better, more culturally competent, job of knowing and teaching them than we do now. “We” means educators, philanthropists who give money to influence the policies and processes of education institutions and spaces, policymakers, writers, and textbook publishers—that is, those of us who have influence in how and what (his) and (her)stories are passed on to children in formal learning spaces in the U.S. If students did not learn history in this way, how would they learn history? The way Gyasi structured story in *Homegoing* is an example of a different approach to telling and remembering history. Each chapter is told from the perspective of a different character. She

moves through, backwards and forwards in time. By changing perspective Gyasi shows how themes and experiences travel from one generation to the next without listing dates. Story, history, and memory are collective experiences in this book, and in many marginalized cultures and communities. What if students experienced and told history this way?

Considering this, I took time in this chapter to tell a part of my story using a chorus of voices and perspectives to exemplify community and the dynamic of me as a Black woman and Black women as a diasporic community. Although Black women have a variety of lived experiences, we also have a shared experience due to oppression. Our voices are not the ones with power, making our story ever more important to crafting a more complete version of our history and our present.

One of my overall arguments in this self-studyis that the general narrative about Black womanhood that I have unintentionally and unknowingly adopted has been negative. In order to explore and unravel why that is, to write my counternarrative, I attempted to re-explore my personal history as a compilation of people's stories rather than a timeline of events. In this chapter, I enlist the voices of some kindred spirits, other Black women in my family and community who hold advanced degrees, to help tell the story of *successful* Black women. Jones (Eckart, 2017) has done work with Black girls in schools and clearly demonstrates a correlation between self-esteem, confidence, self-image and how they perform in school. She found that self-image is at least partially dictated by the negative perceptions that teachers, administrators, and peers may hold. Jones thought that if Black girls were encouraged to explore their identities at school, it might improve their confidence and dispositions toward school. She conducted an afterschool small group with Black girls designed to create community around and pride in Black culture and identity. The girls who participated expressed greater confidence (according to their

own and teachers' reports) and more connection to and involvement in school. The control group of girls, who participated in a mainstream mindfulness group, did not have as promising results. Most girls dropped out and gradually lost interest. We need our community to check attempts to control and kill our esteem and sense of being.

Considering the above general description of Black girls' experiences, it makes sense that Black women have taken to social media for community, celebration of, and recognition of the trauma and progress of Black womanhood across the country and even the world. Table 1 includes some of the accounts I follow on instagram that promote self-love and love for Black women in a variety of ways.

Table 1: Instagram Counternarratives of Black Womanhood

Handle/Followers	Type of Account	Description
theculturespeaks 7,000+ followers	Media/news company	"A sophisticated, savvy, socially conscious news media platform designed to help more the culture forward one post at a time"
nastyfeminism 48,000+ followers	Public figure	"Intersectional activism and positivity"
mediablackoutusa 576,000+ followers	Positive Black News	"Positive Black news, Black culture, connecting America, Africa, the Caribbean, Pacific Islanders, and all Indigenous people"
quality._.equality 11,000+ followers	Personal Blog	"Feminism and Activism"
aaabookfest 1,000+ followers	Community	"We connect Black authors to their readership"

respectmyhair 564,000+ followers	Community	"This page is dedicated to beautiful hair"
for.harriet 85,000+ followers	Society & Culture Website	"Celebrating the fullness of Black womanhood"
becauseofthemwecan 374,000+followers	Media/News Company	"Black excellence-past, present & future"
2frochicks 100,000+ followers	Public Figure	"Creators of CurlsInFroMation 2 Frobabes Embrace the kinks"
Amaralanegraaln 1.5 million+ followers	Music artist, model, actress	"Brings awareness to the experiences of Afro Latinas"
Yarashahidi 2.5 million+ followers	Actress, activist, teen	"We don't integrate, we recreate #WeTooAreAmerica"
Blackwomenarepoppin 381,000+ followers	Community	"Black women, celebs & entertainment"
blackgirlsrock 512,000+followers	Nonprofit organization	"Black Girls Rock! Is an awards show, global women's empowerment movement + non profit mentoring organization"
nikkeycreative 16,000+ followers	Artist	"Let me slay your walls with some beautiful art! Professional artist. BFA in graphic design. Owner of nikkey creative art studio and gallery"

From fine artists, to activists, to bloggers, to intersectional feminists, to Black women and teens who simply see a need for positive representation and community, to men who see the need

for sharing content related to Black women's experiences, to White women who seek to make their efforts for justice intersectional, the kindred spirits and allies are there. And, the perspectives and purposes are varied. This is significant because in a time when so many claim racism no longer exists, or never did, there are intentional efforts to create and seek community for the collective and diverse needs of Black women. I surveyed some of my community about their experiences as students to help demonstrate the diversity and similarity of our schooling experiences.

A couple months before finishing a first complete draft of my research project, I sent this email to 11 women in my epistemological community:

Dear Community and Family,

*I am about to wrap up a close-to-the-end draft of my dissertation and I need your help as a member of my epistemological community. If you didn't know, my work is a self-study on my experiences in education (student and teacher) as a Black woman. One of my chapters is titled the We/Me Dynamic. In this chapter I explain how my experiences are simultaneously unique to me and indicative of a larger community of Black women with advanced degrees. The WE is partially in celebration of our amazingness as Black women and also a response to the intersecting oppression of being Black and female in America. To that end, this is the section in my work where I want to highlight the similarities and differences of our experiences by including your voice. Your name will not be included, only your words and my interpretation of them in relation to my own experience. In the next week (by 1/4), please reply with your response to these two questions. (**Note: There is no right or wrong way to answer the questions. And, the suggested length of a paragraph or two in #2 is just a suggestion. Feel free to say as much or as little as you'd like!**).*

1. *How would you summarize your schooling experience in one word? (It's ok to think about a particular time such as grad school, elementary school, etc.)*
2. *Please elaborate on why this one word in a paragraph or two (suggested length).*

Thank you for all you have done to contribute to my progress thus far and thank you in advance for specifically contributing in this way!

Love and Hugs,

(soon to be Dr.) Raedell

This is how my mom responded. A week after I sent the email she called me,

Mom: What you doin?

Me: Working

Mom: Oh, I'm sorry. I wanted to ask you about the things you sent but I'll call you later.

Me: What thing did I send?

Mom: Your email with the question about school. I don't know what you want so I wanted to ask you…about…

Me: Mom, that's the whole point. I don't want anything. I want you to just answer the question.

Mom: Well, I don't…I'll just call Aunt Mary and ask her.

Me: Well, ok, but I promise whatever you are thinking is ok to write.

The next morning my mom left me a voicemail:

I had prepared an answer for your um dissertation, and it's lost in cyberspace. Um…It was short. My word was adequate. Um and I chose that word because I felt that, um, for quote unquote negro girls, we were only, our education…only adequately prepared us for entry in to the workforce. Um, if you need more than that, call me back…and we can talk a little bit more about it. I'll try to rewrite it, ok.

I see so much of my mother in me, and, I see so much of internalized self-doubt in both of us that a lot of women of color have internalized (Steele, 1997; 2001). My mom was not the only one who replied with *qualifiers* and explanations.

"Sorry It's short," "I don't know if this is what you're looking for," and so on.

I think to myself, *I said, there is no right or wrong. Whatever you say will help.* So it is interesting then that these very intelligent (by any means) women—who are mothers, grandmothers, scholars, hold advanced degrees, have been *successful*— still had trouble just saying their peace. It had to be qualified. It had to be justified. As if to say, *just in case you think I am not good enough, I am already thinking it, too.* This is how I often approach the world—tip-toeing around people, particularly White people and men, so as not to appear overly arrogant or confident, yet, that is the very picture of what leadership and confidence is advertised as societally.

In the introduction to the first section of *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia,* Allen (2012) declares, "I'm sad to report that in the more than thirty years that I've been in higher education, I've met countless other women of color graduate students and faculty members, who have shared stories…" (p. 17); stories of

implied and explicitly stated incompetence based on other people's analysis of behavior and performance through the lens of White supremacy rather than their own culturally responsiveness. A lot of women in general feel this way. A lot of people of color feel this way, too. When you are a womn and a person of color, the internalized self-struggle is exacerbated.

Adequate. Aware. Uneasy. Resourceful. Struggle. Unengaging. Traumatic. These are the words that my community evoke to define their educational experiences. Adequate because she got just enough to enter the workforce for menial jobs. Aware of differences between self and others. Uneasy, often experiencing culture shock and trying to catch up to everyone else. Resourceful in using community to survive and thrive, and, struggle to just do the work expected on behalf of our own communities. Even with moments of hope and the willingness to be resourceful, the accumulation of years of microaggressions, blatant racism, inexplicit messages of not being enough, trauma can ensue. And, identifying and gathering my community revealed some of the reasons why community is needed. I look forward to the day when the *desire* to commune is a greater driving force than a *need* to because of shared oppressive experiences. That is the goodness for which I will continue to hope for and believe in.

PART III: Becoming

I have almost come to the end of this project, which means I have also reached an opportunity for new beginnings. Will I write other books or articles based on this text? Could I teach others how to employ the methods of self-study? Will I walk the earth and *see* it differently because I more deeply understand my stance and purpose in it? Could I develop a community group and join forces with other people of color to share strategies for addressing everyday racism and trauma in our own lives and in schools? The possibilities for what I could become are plentiful.

Chapter 10: The Aesthetic Whole

Have I become a better teacher? This is the question I now ponder as I look back at the whole of my research project. To answer this question, it is pertinent to spend some time directly addressing culturally responsive teaching.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

This quest to become better was founded on the premises of culturally responsive teaching, yet, I do not specifically address culturally responsive teaching in the process. Here, I examine how my thinking of culturally responsive teaching has evolved.

Scholars describe culturally repsonsive teachers as continually developing their knowledge base about cultural diversity; including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum; demonstrating caring and building learning communities; relating with ethnically diverse students; and responding to ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (Gay 1992; 2002; 2003; 2018; Irvine & Armento, 2001). Culturally responsive teachers understand the interaction of academic achievement, cultural competency, and sociopolitical consciousness in their practice (Ladson-Billings1995; 2001; 2009). They also understand education as part of systems of oppression, and, therefore, work in a variety of ways to combat its pervasiveness—through knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, and creating an empowering school and classroom culture (Banks 1995; 2009). These competencies

> successfully move the field of teacher education beyond the fragmented and superficial treatment of diversity that currently prevails, [and to do so] teacher educators must articulate a vision of teaching and learning in a diverse society and use that vision to systematically guide the infusion of multicultural issues throughout the pre-service curriculum (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 20).

I "knew" about culturally responsive teaching before I knew what it was. My search for a doctoral program and my search to become a better teacher were grounded in questions I had about how I interacted with my students and their families. These questions included, *How was it that I could have a wonderful dinner with a student's family when we did not speak the same language? Why is it that Black parents in a predominantly Mexican school and community were often more responsive to me than other teachers and staff? Why did some Mexican parents have great reverence for teachers and defer to my judgement even if my ideas were not best for their child? Why does my Teach for America coach talk to me in jargon, and systems and protocols matter more than relationships? Why does the curriculum tell me what to say?* I knew there was a connection to cross-cultural understanding, interrogating established systems, and being a good teacher, and I wanted to learn more.

That was why I began a journey towards a PhD in multicultural education. Along the way, I have developed some answers to those questions and asked new ones. I have begun to realize how complex it is to implement a truly culturally responsive practice because a strong teacher never stops asking—the questions just develop and change as you do. A question I now regularly ask myself is how to assess and understand students' readiness, and the willingness of fellow staff, administration, and families'. I used to think this was placating and giving into White supremacy, but now I know that pursuing these understandings can save me from more trauma induced by backlash from trying to promote an agenda that others may not be prepared for. I can still promote the agenda, but in learning the "audience" first, I will be better positioned to receive their truth when they respond or react.

Implications for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Self-Study

Educational researchers and practitioners of culturally responsive teaching likely engage in limited self-study implicitly. There is opportunity then, to explicitly incorporate self-study into cultural responsive research and teaching. This should be done to move the field forward so that teachers do not rush to learn methods or particular (sets of) practices without understanding them more deeply, thus running the risk of overlooking the role they play in perpetuating and correcting the inequity present in U.S. schools and society. If teachers begin with themselves, their own stories, they would be better positioned to hear their students' stories and view culturally responsive teaching as a necessary component of their teaching practice.

I can say with confidence that self-study fostered my cultural responsiveness but cannot speak assuredly about its impact on culturally unresponsive teachers. Through making sense of Suzie's and my experience at The Good School, I recognized the challenges of employing an explicit political curriculum in a private school, and that including ethnic and cultural diversity in the delivery of instruction also means considering parents and staff. In that process, I attempted to cultivate my students' cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness, and influence school culture to develop a more collective ownership of culturally responsive education. These efforts were not very successful, and thus, I conclude that more needs to be done to understand how self-study impacts those resistant to cultivating or early in the development of their cultural competency.

Self-study for me revealed a lot of apparently "hidden" dilemmas and cultivated valuable insights. Therefore, I believe it would be effective with teachers who have some cultural competence. It should be regularly incorporated into preservice preparation and ongoing professional development so that teachers are not alone in trying to craft ways to implement culturally repsonsive practices and do not have mentoring and support in their journeys towards

competency. As a former teacher coach and current team lead for teacher coaches on my staff, this concern around support is one a lot of novice teachers have. Obviously, more pathways, courses, professional development programs, etc. are needed for "packaging" teacher culturally responsive self-study at all levels.

(Temporary) Closing Remarks

I end this self-study with a current reality for Black women becoming. A few weeks ago another Black body was inhumanely taken by police brutality—Stephon Clark. There is absolutely no justification for the way he died. However, his death revealed that this man lived his life intentionally disrespecting Black women, using Twitter to announce his hatred of Black women. How can you hate what you come from?! Several of the Instagram accounts I follow "hosted" discussions around this situation. One user asked, "Black women, what you think? We still marching for him?" It is truly ironic, how the #blacklivesmatter movement is largely lead by Black women as it fights for the protection of Black men, several of whom expressed hatred toward them. No one deserves to die the way Stephon Clark did. But Black women are victims of police brutality, too. And they also are dying from carrying the heavy, invisible burden of caring for others while being demeaned or ignored. In a recent episode of the ABC sitcom *Blackish,* the family was celebrating Easter. During the meal, Bow's mother made a big deal of Bow preparing a plate of food for her husband, calling her subservient. A slightly heated conversation ensued until the grandmother spoke up and everyone realizes the bigger picture: "All I know is I loved making my Clarence a plate," grandma says. "When we came up it was different than it is now. When a Black man went out into the world they treated him like he wasn't a man. So the least I could do when Clarence came home was make him a plate."

Stephon Clark's disdain for Black women may be indicative of others who choose to distance themselves from Black women, who society has deemed unworthy. Black women have to continue to be resilient in the face of these denigrations by knowing who we are, what we believe, and what we are capable of. We cannot look to others to reflect our truth and tell our stories. We must continue to fight against being "othered," and create and celebrate our own self-construction with the hope that one day they will be recognized for their inherent worth, and others will see that we Black women have been here all along—not absent or invisible; not only surviving but thriving in our own way, in and out of school.

I mentioned earlier that I cut the authors of memoirs a lot of slack. I hope the reader will do the same for himself/herself and for me. Our stories are ever evolving and incomplete. The end of one experience really is just the beginning of another, especially considering external time constraints that don't always sync with our personal development, movement, and growth. For the sake of not adding another year, quarter, or even month to my graduate studies, this has to be wrapped up, but I know have a great tart to a future text, perhaps my own memoir, as I embrace this "new" world where I am no longer a victim, more confident, and have the letters behind my name to give my story official credence.

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