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ABSTRACT

WILD AND WELL: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MANIFESTO FOR THE LOVE OF BLACK GIRLS

by

Tiffany J. Williams

Curriculum matters! In the process of teaching and learning, there is a seductive dance going on. Curriculum in social, political, and cultural space can make or break, conform and transform the individual into subject or object. To this end, an examination of such curricula is crucial to the "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2012) in which we endeavor to engage.

This autobiographical study examines critical educational moments in schooling and non-schooling contexts. Specifically, I conceptualize the tensions between planned and lived curricula and use Black Feminist Theory as a way to intervene and disrupt curricular patterns and practices. Additionally, I seek to understand the ways in which curricula sought to conform and deform, as well as inform and transform me. In this way, I reimagine ways of teaching and learning as spiritual and theoretical practices toward justice (Baszile, 2017; Dillard, 2012).

Using Critical race feminist currere (Baszile, 2017), a kind of currere, allows for the shift to curriculum as understanding for people of color, Black women and girls in particular. The critical moments around schooling, education, and the curriculum brings to bear the historical relationships between Carter G. Woodson's notion of miseducation, the crisis of schooling and non-schooling for Black girls and Women, and how Endarkened/Black Feminist ways of knowing disrupt and intervene in the discussion of knowledge creation and production.

The primary research question that guides this study is: *How does an educator educate in the midst of her own miseducation?* The study is significant for educators, especially teachers, as a model to examine their own relationships with education and explore their own *currerian* journeys as pathways to understanding, empathy, and teacher compassion.

WILD AND WELL: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MANIFESTO FOR THE LOVE OF BLACK GIRLS

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

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Department of Educational Leadership

by

Tiffany Jacqueline Williams

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION

To my daughter, Zoe Inez:

You are the bright beam of light in a world that is sometimes full of darkness. You have the audacity to be free in a world full of opposition towards Black girls. Thank you for showing mommy how to live out loud.

To my mother, Terry (Ann):

Thank you for holding my heart, my body, and my soul up to God. Thank you for sharing your wombman-ness with me. I am humbled to share in your life story.

To my sister, Charlene Danielle:

My Madea, my ride or die, cut a… Thank you for allowing me to love you and loving me in return. You may be daddy's girl, but you were my first beautiful brown baby.

You three embody the best of time: past, present, and future. You have encountered brokenness, healing, and reconciliation in the journey of life with grace, tenacity, and flava. Thank you for sharing this life with me. With humility and by grace, let us continue to live on purpose.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my beloved father, Charlie "June" Williams, Junior, my namesake. The first Black man who loved me. I love you forever. I finished this work to honor you.

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To my dissertation committee: Dr. Lisa Weems, thank you for keeping me curious about Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Youth Studies. I appreciate your candor and making a point of expressing how important it is to talk about Black girl magic in scholarly work. Thank you being in my presence and allowing me to stand in my Black girl fullness. Dr. Sheri Leafgren, thank you for being a breath of fresh air and my radical rebellious flower. Thank you for reading my work with love. Thank you for being in my life and sharing yours with me. Dr. Thomas S. Poetter, thank you for keeping me honest. Your critique and questioning made this work what it is. We have grown as colleagues and as friends. I will not forget it. Dr. Brittany Aronson, thank you for bringing fresh eyes and a youthful perspective to the team. Your thoughtful input and reflective nature help me to check my blind spots. I appreciate your guidance and your friendship.

To my scholarly crush, Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard, Nana Mansa II of Mpeasem, Ghana: You were God when I needed to see her. You LOVED me. Thank you for writing what you needed to read. Your words gave me life and spoke healing to my spirit and into my bones. Now, I write myself into existence and write for liberation.

To Jonnie Lewis Jackson, the Cornel to my bell, meditating gunrunner guiding night travelers to freedom: You showed me that Black men could love Black women wholeheartedly. Thank you for being my brother and my friend.

To my tribe, Crystal, Peggy, Esther, Tiffany N.: Some are sisters. Some are daughters. All of you are family. You made it easy for this Black girl to breathe.

To those who live in my head and in my heart: Thank you for keeping me accountable to myself. Be wild. Be well. Be free.

Part 1-Prologue: My Entry Point into the Field

A Love Letter to My 6-year-old Self and My 60-year-old Self

Thank you for showing up!
Thank you for never letting go.
In my times of despair and growth,
Thank you for the moments of chaos, clarity and calm.
As I, as we, decided to truly heal
As I, as we, decided to transform
As I, as we, decided to confront
As I, as we, decided to become what and who the Divine meant for us to be.

Thank you for sharing your critical moments
Your pain and shame
Your joy and triumph
Your desires and fears
Your faith and fortitude
As I, as we, decided to let go
As I, as we, decided to reclaim and flourish
As I, as we, decided to make this life as we saw fit to be.
As I, as we, decided to help others on their path to healing.

Thank you for sharing your perspectives
From the heart of a child
From the wisdom of the crone
The treasured gift from the Gods
The life of the Alpha Goddess
You are truly angels with souls
The best of me wrapped in some of the worst life experiences

Thank you for allowing me space to challenge
To get rid of toxicity and conformity

And to be transformed in and through and by
The lived curricula of our lives
I am forever grateful for your presence.
I am forever grateful for your company.
I am forever grateful for your love.
I am forever grateful your sacrifice.
Yours Always,

T

Chapter One: Introduction

Course Number: blah, blah, blah.

Final Grade: B+

Professor Comments:

This is nice but….

Me: Spare me.

In the news, in film, and in school and communities, and even in the home, who cares about what affects Black girls? Well, I do, but it seems not to matter. For the past 3 years, I have written about Black girls and women, but it still didn't seem to matter. When my work was labeled un-academic or therapeutic and anecdotal by some of my well-meaning yet indifferent professors, I began to wonder why nobody cared about Black girls. For me, Black girl things were all I knew or cared to write about because I was/I am a Black girl/woman. I am a Black girl raising a Black girl in a hard-to-be-Black girls world. That matters! It matters in the way Black girls need to matter. It matters that Black girls are represented, beyond the stereotypical projections of being criminal, loud, and deficient. When Black girls are rendered invisible, erased, silent, or misidentified by the curriculum—of schooling, of media, of church, of family, of educational research—we are broken into pieces. We are forced to substitute or replace our own ways of knowing and being with foreign and alien concepts and constructions that choke and bind and limit. In this way, we are not only mis-informed by curriculum, but we are also deformed and then forced to conform to degrading ideas and images of who we are. Confronting this reality requires that we take an active role in telling our own stories, in making ourselves subject (hooks, 1992). In other words, part of putting our pieces back together again, part of re-claiming ourselves is about telling our own stories, in our own language, and in our own voices, because there is power and healing in the telling.

As someone who sees the need and truly wants to teach in a way that supports Black girls/women, I realize that one of the most powerful ways I can do that is by sharing my own story/stories of Black girlhood and how I make sense of them, how I make sense of my own lived curriculum, how I have made sense of my own confrontations with curricula that have othered Black girls/women. If I want to teach Black girls to be revolutionary Black women, then we must recognize the importance of both telling our stories and reading our stories and, from them, learning about the historical, social, and cultural dynamics that shape who we are and how

we are. Thus, in what follows, I offer a short but—I hope—powerful autobiographical manifesto for the love of Black girls. I draw on curriculum theory and Black Feminist theory to both frame this study and to analyze my narratives. Specifically, I use Baszile's (2015) Critical Race Feminist *currere* to discover, reflect on, and to learn from my own narratives, narratives that embody my increasingly contentious engagement with various curricula—school, media, church, family—and how they have shaped the raced and gendered contours of my being Black girl growing into Black woman.

The Mis-Education of Black Girls: A Curricular Problem

"[T]here would be no lynching if it did not start in the classroom" (Woodson, 1933/2010, p. 2). In the field of education, there are multiple approaches to determining the nature, meaning, or purpose of education. Education, as a social science, explores teaching and learning, curriculum development, instruction, outcomes, the student, and schooling through social processes. Wexler (2009) cited Collins' notion of social theory in education as rooted in history that is "social knowledge both in terms of contextual, environmental, social, institutional, and cultural influences that shape it, and as well as in terms of traditions of social understanding" (p. 3). Influences can be discussed as a type of curriculum. Likewise, contextual, environmental, social, institutional, and cultural *curricula* educate. Further, examining education through a sociological lens, the curriculum can be an educational site of construction, which produces, projects, or conforms the self as subject or object, as center or outlier.

Education can be understood as a social construct. Education is defined by social movement or changes over time. What education is, its value, who gets to be educated, and what curriculum is taught also change as socio-cultural shifts happen within societies. As a result, those in power, along with their desire to maintain that power over a subordinated group whether by class, race, gender, etc., determine what educators can teach, as well as the design elements of the curriculum, whether in terms of schooling or non-schooling. In my work, an educational experience is defined as both schooling and non-schooling experiences, in which learning and growth occur through interactions in academic and/or social spaces contributing to identity formulation (Nelson, 2001; Oliver, 2004). In this way, curriculum can be understood as a teaching tool or mechanism to show a person how to think, how to act, what is acceptable, or how to behave in certain situations, as it refers to official and unofficial bodies of knowledge intended to make subjects and/or objects. Knowing this, I argue that, without full discourse

analysis of the curriculum, its intentions toward objectivity, normalcy, rationality, or logic and complex dialogue between the self and those who are producers of the curriculum, problem posing only further maintains systematic power, domination, and control over those oppressed by the curriculum.

Using scholars of color, Black Feminist scholarship in particular, became a way to fill in the gaps while simultaneously putting myself back together. Black Feminist scholarship helped me to remember, reconstruct, redefine, and reimagine what it was, what it is and what it can be for Black girls in schools, communities, and in the world.

Dillard (2012) talks about (re)memory as one form of resistance to alien constrictions, constructions, and concepts of colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy. Further, she suggested endarkened Feminist epistemology as a way forward for Black girls and women to become whole. She said,

> But in order to heal, to put the pieces back together again, we must learn to remember the things that we've learned to forget, including engagement and dialogue and cross-cultural community that theorize our varying spiritualities, experiences, definitions, and meanings of black Womanhood. In this way, (re)membering becomes a radical and endarkened response to our individual and collective fragmentation at the spiritual and material levels, an endarkened response to the divisions created between mind, body, and spirit (p. ix)…. It is also a response to our on-going experiences and understanding of difference and identity, the sticky, sometimes uncharted, spaces both within a collective African heritage and across our multiple identity differences. (p. 17)

Woodson's (1933/2010) notion of mis-education describes the impact of social forces on Black bodies in the U.S. context. This mis-education, as he surmised, is filtered through public space: the society and the social institutions as schools. Mis-education, according to Woodson, is a product of the tenet of historical U.S. schooling in that the Negro is taught his or her own inferiority and self-hatred through the curriculum. I attempt to add to the complicated conversation (Pinar, 2012) of curriculum theorizing by engendering (Hendry, 2011) and browning (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015) the curriculum as a way to "present an argument for curriculum theorizing at the intersection of race and gender using a Black Feminist perspective" (Baszile, Edwards, & Guillory, 2016).

I grounded this autobiographical study in Black Feminist theory because of its critical tradition that values and recognizes the complexities and complicated contradictions in the lived experience of Black women and girls, versus their counterparts. Further, I use curriculum theory, Critical Race Feminist *currere*, in particular, to frame the study, because I will be using storytelling and critical testimonio to delve into the onto-epistemological questions revolving around and centering the experiences of Black women and girls. While Critical Race Feminist *currere* will be used as the specific approach by which curriculum theory is used, there will be several Black Feminist *entry points* through which this study will walk. Chapter 2 expands on these in greater detail.

The Research Overview and The Question

Baszile (2006) contends, "all work emerges from deep-seated autobiographical questions, whether those are made explicit or remain strategically or unconsciously implicit" (p. 90). As a graduate student, I had taken part in many conversations about race, gender, and the curriculum but had not fully been able to explore what that could mean for an educator at the intersections of mis-education, Black Feminist co-theorizing, and teaching, and learning that seeks to embody the self as praxis. The use of Black Feminist scholarship to disrupt and intervene on sites of curriculum for Black women and girls is one objective of this study. With autobiographical inquiry as methodological approach, namely the use of Critical Race Feminist *currere*, I use my own stories to understand how curricula conform and deform, while still leaving room to be transformed in, through, and by the self (Grumet, 1980).

Aoki (1993) suggested the lived curriculum "is not the curriculum as laid out in a plan, but a plan more or less lived out" (p. 257). Further, Aoki stated, one's lived experience "deserves the label 'curriculum' as much as the plan deserves the label 'curriculum-as-plan'" (p. 257). Critical Race Feminist *currere*, as a type of *currere*, allows for the use of essay, poetry, and creative non-fiction as (counter) storytelling and testimony (Baszile, 2015). Additionally, Critical Race Feminist *currere* works to remember and continues the practice of counter-story through testimony and storytelling—"sometimes as an entrée into theory, sometimes as theory, and sometimes as an interrogation of theory" (Baszile, 2015). Finally, because of its autobiographical quality, Critical Race Feminist *currere* asks the question: how might photographs, poetry, auto-poetic narrative, music, soul writing, dancing, listening, traveling, relocating your desk or your whole life help you decolonize or deconstruct your creative process? In this way, living artifacts,

journal entries and stories, serve as data that describe the lived experiences through one's educational journey.

When thinking about story-ing the self or narrating one's identity, the self becomes situated in and of the story as a reflection of that self-in-practice (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998) in relation to power, knowledge, and difference. The following question guides this autobiographical inquiry: *How does an educator educate in the midst of her own mis-education?* Eakin (2008) proposes, "narrative is not only a literary form but part of the fabric of our lived experience" (p. 148). Narrative, or the stories we tell about ourselves and the world around us, the stories we tell our children about the world and our place in it and the tales others tell about the "other," are integrated into part of self that make up how we see our "selves."

In each autobiographical chapter, I story the self through the use of *critical moments* of my educational experiences. Critical moments can be described as, Hendry (2011) suggested, "to remember and recount, to reconnect through seeking patterns and themes" (p. 7), in order to tell stories "in relation to who can be a knower and what can be known, and what this reveals" (p. 13). Said another way, the self is "situated as a conceptual self, mired in a collection of diverse forms of self-information" (Larrick, 2018). The critical moments are told as conceptual realities, in order to declare one's scholarly identity, operate as radical Black female subject, and exist unapologetically, which symbolizes hooks' (1992) notions of being *wild* and being *well* (p. 49). Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology and methods in greater detail.

Why Black Girls Matter: The Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it examines how an educator's implicit and explicit biases, perspectives, and beliefs about the process of public education and schooling impact teaching and learning. The literature regarding teacher preparation in culturally relevant pedagogy (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 2006); personal examination of social identity and intersectionality in the backdrop of social systems and institutions (Baszile, 2015; Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984); the value of multicultural education in the lives of students of color (Anyon, 1997; Banks, 2013; Banks & Banks, 2010; Delpit, 1995); and the transformative power of radical and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 1986) all speak to why educators should know themselves, know their students and the ways they exist in the world, and understand how social systems impact educational experiences.

Like other critical studies, this dissertation seeks to understand more deeply how oppressive systems, education, schooling, and the curriculum, work against marginalized populations while reinforcing their own domination and control (hooks, 1984, 1994, 2003) and simultaneously adding color to the curriculum canvas (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015; Hendry, 2011). In this study, I examine my own Black girl woman journey through conformity, deformity, and transformation using Black Feminist Theory and Black women's work as curricular disruption and intervention. Further, I use these texts to tell a different story while examining the lessons within them (Baszile, 2017; Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2012; hooks, 1992) as a way to theorize conceptual and contextualized understandings of knowledge and knowledge production.

While there may be other theoretical frameworks or critical perspectives that celebrate Black women and girls and place them in the foreground (Hudson-Weems, 2004) and speak to their African heritage and the global impact of oppression, domination, and control, there is a gap in those frameworks' ability to show how racism and sexism is foregrounded in the curriculum, particularly for people of color and women, or to center the feminist contention that "the personal is political." Further, although studies of Black girls in schools talk about and center the impact of schooling on Black girls, or the plight of Black women in non-schooling spaces as they attempt to live their lives unapologetically in the face of racism, sexism, capitalism, and white supremacy, many of those works give second-hand accounts under the researcher/researched dichotomous paradigm (Brown, 2009, 2013; Collins, 1990, 2004; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1984, 1989, 1992; Love, 2012; Morris, 2016).

Thus, there are few autobiographical stories written by Black women and girls about their personal educational journeys that speak to the socio-cultural spaces that interface with those educations, to produce their own educations. Additionally, this study promotes the kind of critique of the histories of curricula that constrict and conform (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015; Hendry, 2011), that erase and make Black women and girls invisible (hooks, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994), while at the same time Black women and girls succeed in finding power, voice, and agency through identity development and self- actualization (Collins, 2004; hooks, 1992), engage in decolonization of mind, body, and spirit (Dillard, 2012; Oliver, 2004), and seek holistic research, teaching, and learning in education (Baszile, 2015; Dillard, 2012; hooks, 1994, 2003; King, 2005).

Layout of the Dissertation

In this study, I examine my own relationship with curricula in schooling and non-schooling spaces using Critical Race Feminist *currere* (Baszile, 2015). In Chapter 2, I provide a review of literature that talks about the status of Black women and girls in the U.S. context and understands curriculum as raced and gendered text. In the second part of the Chapter, I discuss Black Feminist Theory as curricular disruption and intervention, give an overview of Black Feminist Theory, and talk about the key Black Feminist Theory used in the study. In Chapter 3, I discuss Critical Race Feminist *currere* as kind of *currere*, as well as outline the *currere* in its fundamental stages. In addition to discussing the tenets of Critical Race Feminist *currere*, I talk about how Critical Race Feminist *currere* intervenes on traditional notions of *currere* to bring Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory to bear on questions of identity, difference, knowledge, and power. At the end of the Chapter, I lay out how the data was collected and analyzed and the framing of the chapters. These Chapters conclude Part One of the study.

In Part Two, I introduce **Tiffany6**[1], or (**T6**) **girl child**, **Tiffany36** (**T36**) **Woman child**, and **Tiffany60** (**T60**) **Woman Unapologetic**. In Chapter 4, **Tiffany6** begins to tell her stories as she talks about her experiences growing up Black girl. In Chapter 5, **Tiffany36** digs a bit deeper, as she tells a different story to understand the curricula from within and becoming Black woman, a radical Black female subject. In Chapter 6, **Tiffany60** lives her life unapologetically, as she tells her story of self-transformation. In each chapter, the stories give testimony of my lived experiences in schooling and non-schooling spaces at the intersections of race, gender, and the curriculum. A reflection follows each story, and I outline lessons learned using key Black Feminist Theories as an entry point. In Part Three, Chapter 7 concludes this work, and I reflect on the process and its significance.

[1] The shift to Arial Bold font signals a change in voice to critical moments in past, present, or future throughout the dissertation.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Literature Overview

In this chapter, I give a brief description of curriculum as stories told about Blackness from the lens of their counterparts. Next, I discuss what curriculum is, its varying forms, the tensions between curriculum as development and curriculum as understanding, and curriculum and the psyche. Then, I introduce Browning and Engendering the Curriculum. In the fourth section, I share how Black women's stories told by Black women tell a different story. An overview of Black Feminist Theory follows. In the final section, I speak to the key Black Feminist Theories used to frame this work.

Curriculum as the Stories They Tell

There is no shortage of statistical data involving the lives of African descendants. For more than four centuries, white folks (explorers, historians, sociologists, economists, social scientists, anthropologists, biologists, criminalists, law enforcement, judiciary, policymakers, lawmakers, cultural commentators, media professionals, and educators) have long been regarded as experts on Black men, women, children, and families. These "experts" documented snapshots of Black lives and Black bodies from their time being forcefully taken from the mother continent to their lives as slaves in the Caribbean, Europe, and the Americas, to contemporary times in the United States. These documentaries of Blackness have made the assumption that Black people are inferior, deficient, and incapable of knowledge attainment and production. These narratives continue to contribute to the ways in which Black folks are depicted in contemporary society. Further, these viewpoints have a long-standing tradition of being indicators by which Black bodies are evaluated and narrated.

In the early 1900s, W. E. B. DuBois sought to challenge the long history of others, mainly whites, describing and deciding what Black life was/is. His books, *The Study of the Negro Problem* (1898), *The Negro in Business* (1899a), *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899b), *and The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) to name a few, gathered statistics from the U.S. census to use mainstream, quantifiable data to reveal racial disparity and inequality. This data also contributed to the socio-cultural, historical, and political landscape by speaking to the lives and circumstances of Black people in America, which DuBois hoped would tell a different story. Where white narrators depicted Blacks as lazy, diseased, criminal, and promiscuous, DuBois chronicled actual accounts of Black citizens as hardworking, healthy, and law-abiding. In all of

his efforts, DuBois' found data can be, and in the case of Blackness, is always seen through the lens of racism and white supremacy (Morris, 2012). Although DuBois' ground-shaking work continues to talk back to historically negative accounts of Blacks, there is still a need for truth telling that speaks to the ways in which Blackness exists under, within, and through racialized viewpoints in the United States and beyond. Additionally, the long history of the oral traditions of Black folks telling their own stories (slave narratives, autobiographies, and blues traditions) should be acknowledged as primary data that account for and tell stories of Blackness. In this work, I attempt to tell a different story.

Understanding Curriculum

Curriculum Studies is a diverse field that reflects varied definitions of curriculum and the purposes for studying curriculum. Some define curriculum as "the field interested in the relationships among the school subjects as well as issues within the individual school subjects themselves and with the relationships between the curriculum and the world" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008, p. 6). Another definition suggested, "the field of curriculum…resides at the very core of education" (Eisner, 1984, p. 209). In this manner, the curriculum is at the core of current debates as to: what is knowledge, what is growth, and what is worth knowing. Additionally, this curriculum leaves the classroom and leaves room for understanding how the curriculum interfaces with the teacher or even the student, or engages with their personal, historical, social, economic, gendered, and racial identities.

A major tension in the field is between curriculum as development and curriculum as understanding. Before the 1960s, the major emphasis in the field was on development. Generally, when curriculum is discussed, it is in terms of textbooks and the instructional material associated with what is to be taught. While curriculum scholars may argue at varying degrees as to how the curriculum should engage students, promote democracy, or generate new or build on existing knowledge in the classroom, these scholars infer that learning is constructed out of academic and scholastic histories. Further, this knowledge is developed mainly from what is taught by teachers (although not necessarily prepared by teachers) and through curriculum construction.

This form of curriculum construction is most notably, for instance, associated with the work of Ralph Tyler. The Tyler Rationale (1949), summarized as four elements (educational experience or *objectives*, learning experiences or *design*, educational organization or *scope and*

sequence, and educational attainment or *evaluation*), was the basis of measurement for student growth and success. In this way, rarely do the curricula engage the lived experiences of the student or intend for the student to collide, interface, or conflict with the curriculum of the classroom.

I argue that in order for life-long learning within scholastic and academic spaces to occur, the curriculum that is lived by the student has to show up in the curriculum that is prepared for students (on the syllabus, in the textbooks, and even in the voices of those who teach). This is not to say that curricula do not make room for students' lived experiences or that learning outside the classroom does not show up in classrooms. What is important to note is that these curricula inevitably reproduce old ways of constructing how students think, what they know, and how they should be/exist.

In the 1960s and 1970s, several scholars argued that the field should not focus too narrowly on curriculum development, but rather should also attend to the project of understanding curriculum. The shift toward understanding curriculum meant that "curriculum is conceived to be an active force having direct impact on the whole fabric of its human and social context" (Eisner & Vallance, 1974, p. 135). Instead of thinking about curriculum as objectives and outcomes, the move toward understanding curriculum positions it as representing and producing identities.

This acknowledges the dialectic between notions of: *the curriculum shaped me* and *I can shape it* (Grumet, 1980). That said, the student is not always a reproduction of what she has ingested nor does the student always represent and reflect the curriculum. Curricular contextual dialogue that is contrary to the nature of the student (her inclination, logic and reasoning, and subjectivities) forces the student to make choices, sometimes to her benefit and sometimes to her detriment. In some circumstances, the curriculum enlightens and empowers the student. Still, when the curriculum does not make room for the student's lived experiences, there is conflict where the student is forced to remove pieces of herself to fit the curriculum, which results in curricular homicide. It is the psychological, spiritual, and intellectual death that occurs at the hand of the curriculum as the student and the curriculum collide at the intersection of her socio-cultural, historical, economic, gendered, and racial ways of being. The curriculum kills, damages, and deforms the student. Still, how does the student engage in *complicated conversations* (Pinar, 2004), in this case with the curriculum, and still be whole? If she is not

made whole or empowered by that curriculum, how does the student reimagine a curriculum that does so?

Aoki (1993) talks about planned versus lived curriculum. As noted above, he suggested the lived curriculum "is not the curriculum as laid out in a plan, but a plan more or less lived out" (p. 257). He stated, "it deserves the label 'curriculum' as much as the plan deserves the label "curriculum-as-plan" (p. 257). By expanding our understanding of curriculum as more than schooling, social forces and institutions can enter the discussion of how curriculum gets defined. No longer is the planned curriculum focused on curriculum, as *literal* methods for instruction and course content. It is also the lived curriculum, as *dynamic* ways of understanding, which capture how the student interfaces with the curriculum, her social identities, and the social environment in which the curriculum unfolds. The turn toward reconceptualization in curriculum studies moved the curriculum from an abstract, abject, and literal thing to a contextual, dynamic, and fluid thing that teachers and students could mold, interact with, and engage. He, Schultz, and Schubert (2015) stated, "throughout history, humans have been deeply concerned with what their children become" (p. xxiii). They go on to say, "those who engage in curriculum studies must deal with what makes such influence good and why and how that influence can be accomplished" (p. xxiii).

Pinar (2004) defined curriculum theory as "the interdisciplinary study of educational experience" making curriculum theory "a distinctive specialization within the broader field of education" (p. 2). Just as curriculum theory rests within and through interdisciplinary spaces and interacts with various curriculum stakeholders within the field of curriculum studies and education, the curriculum also rests in historical, geographic, racial, gendered, classed, political, cultural, and onto-epistemological spaces. When those who are invested in curriculum do not acknowledge where and how the curriculum exists, as well as how they themselves move within and between the intersections, the curriculum *construction* project harbors a lack of self-interjection and reflection as it attempts to act on contemporary social issues.

Baszile (2015) described curriculum theory as a field "where radical efforts are taking shape to displace traditional notions of curriculum" (p. 119). Moreover, the curriculum is "the stories we tell and the stories we do not tell" (Baszile, 2017a), as well as the conversations we have with that curriculum. Looking at the curriculum as much more than a literal process, as a

deeper, meaningful, and dynamic one, we can begin to understand how there is a curriculum both in schooling and non-schooling spaces, systems, and institutions.

In the realm of understanding, scholars also viewed the curriculum in metaphorical terms. Again, Baszile (2006), referencing Pinar (2000), referred to the curriculum as "complicated conversations about the identity of a nation" (p. 98). This would include thinking about curriculum as raced, gendered, classed, political, etc. text. However, despite the efforts to open the field in this way, the roots of the field are still predominately grounded in the white, male psyche/voice/epistemologies/ideologies (Au et al., 2016; Baszile et al., 2016; Grant, Brown, & Brown, 2016).

Curriculum and the Psyche

Psychoanalytic social theory, as discussed by Oliver (2004) in *The Colonization of Psychic Space*, interrogated how the psyche and social systems are linked. She challenged traditional Freudian notions of psychoanalysis as being too narrow and some social theories (critical theory/object relations theory), in the same manner. She suggested that Freud's overemphasis on the psyche neglected to address how social forces interfaced with the psyche. Oliver also noted how critical theorists narrowly focused on the social, which limited how those theories could work to interpret or explain psychosocial behavior. She suggested, "rather than privileging the individual ego and psyche, or social institutions and political economy, however, we need a psychoanalytic social theory that develops concepts between the psyche and the social by *socializing psychoanalysis*" (p. xvii, emphasis added).

Psychoanalytic social theory examines the psyche and its interconnectedness with the social through the psychoanalytic notions of sublimation and idealization. Oliver (2004) said, "colonization and oppression operate through depositing the unwanted affects of the dominant group onto those othered by that group in order to sustain its privileged position" (p. xix); she added that "oppression and domination undermine the ability to sublimate by withholding or foreclosing the possibility of articulating and thereby discharging bodily drives and affects" (p. xix). As a result, Oliver (2004) suggested, the process of *de*colonization "demands a close analysis of the affects of oppression and how those affects are produced within particular social institutions" (p. xx). Additionally, she argued that subjectivity, subject position, and subject formation are interconnected to institutions of oppression. She said,

> subject positions, although mobile, are constituted in our social interactions and our positions within our culture and context; history and circumstance govern them. Subject positions are our relations to the finite world of human history and relations—the realm of politics. Subjectivity, on the other hand, is experienced as the sense of agency and response-ability constituted in the infinite encounter of otherness—the realm of ethics. (p. xv)

In particular, subjectivity is developed in relation to subject position, which can determine one's subject formation, or ideas of self. Oliver (2004) postulated that subjectivity, or "one's sense of oneself as subject and as agent" (p. xxii), is developed through one's ability to recognize one's own position as an idealized subject within society. Whether or not, one's presupposed position is one that is marginalized or oppressed, one's view of one's self as idealized changes how one moves in, experiences, and transforms the world. This is not to say that having an idealized sense of self can permanently change how one views, moves in, and experiences the world. It is through the decolonization of the psyche and the continual interrogation of oneself as a subject, being both oppressed and idealized, that one can make meaning of one's life, in social context, as (de)(con)(trans)formed.

To think and feel is to be human. Affective life consists of impulses and drives, which as Oliver (2004) suggested, can be/are predicated on one's own sense of one's agency, to be subject. How one feels can also be transferred from one's body, move between bodies, and be dictated by other bodies. For this reason, affect, impulse and drive are relational. They correspond or interact with, move through, or from one body to another. To this end, decolonization of the psyche demands full examination of one's *feelings*: how one feels (hopeless/empowered) and/or how one is interpreting feelings through social, historical, political, or cultural lenses (as woman, as poor, as Black). Oliver (2004) noted, "to understand the relationship between oppression or social context and affect, we need to postulate the existence of the unconscious" (p. xxii), or subliminal, as a way "to explain the bodies of the oppressed, not to mention their oppressors" (p. xx). She said,

> Affective life is caught up in one's sense of oneself as subject and an agent. And oppression and the affects of oppression undermine subjectivity and agency such that

> even those very affects become interpreted as signs of inferiority or weakness rather than symptoms of oppression. (p. xxii)

In this way, decolonization is an act of resistance toward self-agency, toward self-understanding and toward healing; which call for disruption and retellings of Black girls and women stories, histories, and bodies.

How is this problem of mis-education constructed in raced and gendered contexts? As noted above, Woodson's (1933/2010) notion of mis-education describes the impact of social forces on Black bodies in the U.S. context. This mis-education, as he surmised, is generated from public space: the society and the social institutions such as schools. One solution to the problem as Woodson suggests, called for the reexamination of public spaces, in this case schooling and the curriculum, to deconstruct and reconstruct public discourse that constructed schooling for all as justice, as fair, and as equal for Blacks and to position schooling as white property, mis-educating its Black constituents.

Woodson (1933/2010) suggested that education for the Negro should not be a means of subjugation for the benefit of others (p. 3). He said that education should also be "determined by the Negro" according to his or her makeup and "by what his environment requires of him" (p. 4). Mis-education, according to Woodson, is a product of the tenet of historical U.S. schooling in that the Negro is taught self-hatred through the curriculum. The curriculum situates the Negro "as a problem" (p. 7), which dismisses all argument to the contrary. Further, Woodson noted that other systemic institutions (economics, history, philosophy, literature, and religion, p. 5) work to reinforce those messages within the curriculum. In this way, he suggested, "the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of the oppressor…when you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions" (p. 3).

To this end, Woodson (1933/2010) stated, "to be successful, [education of the Negro] must be built upon accurate knowledge of the psychology and philosophy of the Negro" (p. 4). He goes on to say "the differentness of races, moreover, is no evidence of superiority or of inferiority. This merely indicates that each race has certain gifts, which the others do not possess. It is by the development of these gifts that every race must justify its right to exist" (p. 5).

Engendering the Curriculum

"When curriculum is our lived experience, history is always in our midst" (Hendry, 2011, p. xi). In her book, *Engendering the Curriculum*, Hendry (2011) examined curriculum, history,

and the notion of subject positions as a way to construct gendered curricula. She noted "curriculum as a discursive practice is understood as historical text" (p. ix). As with curriculum theory, she suggested, one cannot interrogate the curriculum without acknowledging "the conversation between curriculum theory and history through a gendered analysis of subjectivities made possible and impossible in particular historical moments" (p. x).

One definition of curriculum as Hendry (2011) stated can be described as "a continual negotiation of [one's] lived experiences within and against multiple ideologies/discourses of education" (p. 2). She went on to suggest, "this complexity provided not only a counter-narrative to the dominant curriculum histories…but disrupted the very category of 'history'" (p. 2). The second point to engendering the curriculum understands "history is a site of memory, or re-membering" (p. 4). Hendry (2011) said,

> Memory is not mere nostalgia or sentimental reminiscence, but an interpretative, political, and creative engagement that asks us to question: what does it mean to be human? How do we know? Who can be knower? What is knowledge? (p. 4)

In this way, memory serves as artifact, or data, that is unearthed to provide contextual knowledge of/about/in the past. This is not to say that memory can be held as "fact," but rather that it is a recollection of truths.

Finally, "curriculum history has less to do with knowledge and everything to do with the subject positions that it makes visible" (Hendry, 2011, p. 5-6). Hendry (2011) went on the say that "those subject positions are inscribed in discourses, modes of thought, and structures of knowledge that appear as normal and obvious and provide what is thinkable and what is not" (p. 5). She argued that, by engendering the curriculum, we make space for gendered subjects' identities that resist, interrogate, and challenge traditional and historical notions of curriculum. Additionally, she acknowledges that multiple, varied subject positions "imaging, embodying, decolonizing, unsettling, and experiencing curriculum" (p. 6) must be taken up. In this way, we are drawn to "recount, reconnect, and remember—to engage in the ongoing process of becoming" (p. 6).

Browning the Curriculum

Gaztambide-Fernández (2015) discusses browning the curriculum. He defined "browning" as "an attempt to unsettle curriculum—both its study as well as its making, in order to describe what it could have been, had it been what it cannot be" (p. 416). Browning the

curriculum then becomes a process of decolonization that involves anti-racist (-sexist, -classist, etc.) turnings or *leanings* (Dillard, 2000) that uncover the hidden curriculum of domestication, civilization, respectability, and democratization. Gaztambide-Fernández (2015) noted "understanding curriculum as always-already a colonial project…and to 'brown' is to expose while it is also to dirty—to mess with and in the process to change by making explicit what is otherwise supposed to remain hidden" (p. 416).

Baszile, Edwards, and Guillory (2016) present an argument for curriculum theorizing at the intersection of race and gender using a Black Feminist perspective. Their work represents "an effort to recognize and represent, to some extent, the significance of Black Feminist theorizing as intervention on the 'complicated conversation' (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004), that is curriculum theorizing" (p. xii). Curriculum theorizing of race, gender, class, etc. colors the curriculum such that it manifests in the psycho-socio-cultural ways we do curriculum. Baszile et al. (2016) asserted that

> curriculum theory that intersects with Black Feminist Theory gets folded into our thinking and doing as scholar-activists who teach, write, profess, express, organize, engage community, educate, do curriculum theory, heal and love in the struggle for a more just world. (p. xii)

Further, this "activism of Black Feminist Theory," as cited from Surgia Nayak by Baszile et al. (2016), is "the dialogical relationship between experience, practice and scholarship [that] produces the methodology of the activism of Black Feminist theory, where the how to do and the doing of the project intersect" (p. xvi).

In this way, the browning of the curriculum through Black Feminist disruptions and interventions seeks to decolonize the curriculum as a site of power, knowledge, and difference as well as identity formation, reproduction, and representation. Although, there are many possible lines of inquiry in the field, my work is focused on curriculum theorizing through Black Feminist ways of knowing/being (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2012; hooks, 1992), radical theorizing through the use of metaphor or "diva style"[2] (Brown, 2010), and the dialectic between planned and lived curricula (Aoki, 1993).

[2] Kimberly Nichele Brown (2010) emphasizes the importance and function of style in Black women's writing. She uses the diva trope to describe how style—as a defining characteristic—functions as a metaphor for Black feminist agency. Brown notes three interrelated aspects of

The Stories She Tells: Black Feminist Theory as Intervention on the Curriculum

Like W. E. B. DuBois and others like him who challenge the white world's narration of Blackness, the images of Black women and girls in U.S. social consciousness in contemporary times are painfully reminiscent of historical stereotypes. These images are filled with historical depictions of Black woman and girls as hyper-visible yet invisible, irresponsible, irreverent to authority, and incapable of self-understanding and autonomy. Further, it is rare to find academic or scholarly data recounting the lives of Black women and girls in education and schooling by Black women and girls in positive light. Although Black women and girls are discussed in terms of social class, sex, gender, and race, their relationships to and with men, or their lives in contrast to Black men, white men, and white women, I argue it is necessary to unearth stories of Black women and girls told in their own voices outside of those stories written for and about them.

Black women writers have long been telling the stories of and about Black women and girls as counter-narratives to white, male ideologies and sensitivities of Blackness as inferior, non-human, and savage. These texts circulated at the margins and primarily came through Black women's literary and blues traditions and autobiographical texts.[3] Baszile et al. (2016) alluded to these texts also being counter-public, antithetical or non-canonical academic texts[4] (p. xiv).

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style relevant to Black women's creative work, particularly in the work that emerged during the Black aesthetic movement in the 1960s and 70s: style as survival strategy, style as performance, and style as subjectivity.

[3] From this place, Black women and girls have written narratives of activism and political struggle (Davis, 1974; Shakur, 1987), humanity and personhood (Lemert & Bhan, 1998; Stewart, 1832; Truth, 1851), feminist ways of knowing and being (hooks, 1984, 1989, 1992) and their love/hate relationships with others (Collins, 2004; hooks, 1990, 2000, 2001). Additionally, Toni Morrison (*The Bluest Eye*, 1970*; Sula*, 1973; and *Beloved*, 1987), Ntozaki Shange (*For Colored Girls*, 1975*; Sassafras, Cypress, & Indigo*, 1982), Maya Angelou (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, 1969), Zora Neale Hurston (*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, 1937), and Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*, 1982), to name a few, wrote black women as the central character and protagonists in their stories.

[4] Along with cultural texts such as those mentioned above, Black women in academia have created a space to speak to Black women's lives. These Black female scholars talked about Black women's bodies politics in history and contemporary context (Collins, 1990; hooks 1984, 1990, 1992, 2005; James, 1999; White, 2001), Black self-love (hooks 1989, 1990, 1992, 2005), spirituality (Cannon, 1995; Dillard, 2012; James, 2013; Williams, 2001; Sanders et al., 1989), social class (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1992, 2005) sex, sexual orientations, and reproductive health (Collins 2004; Lorde, 1984; Morgan, 1999; Roberts, 1997), and black families and community (Collins, 1990, 2004; hooks, 1984, 1992, 2001). Black Feminist/ Womanist Anthologies and readers (Baszile et al., 2016; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Hull, Scott, &

Although Black woman's oral, literary, and Blues traditions, autobiographical, and non-canonical academic texts are critical spaces for Black women and girls to find their place, it is equally important to document schooling and non-schooling experiences of Black women and girls' journeys to education. As they tell their own stories, they become a part of the racial, gendered, socio-cultural, economic-political, legal, and educational landscapes.

Current myths and stereotypes regarding the status of Black women and girls in media, in culture, and in schooling tell stories of them as hypersexualized, as criminalized, and as criticized. Social stigma depicting Black female bodies populate media and the social psyche as non-human, fit to be discarded (e.g. Sandra Bland) or objectified in the gaze of the other as "one of disgust, disdain or one desired and lusted after" (Brown, 2017).

In the educational sphere, Black girls are vulnerable to disciplinary approaches that push them out of schools and sometimes into the legal system (Morris, 2016). Many times, these girls are removed from the classroom/instructional space for lack of alternatives to current expulsionary practices. Morris (2016) noted that Black girls who have recurring negative interactions with school administrators and teachers suffer from what she called "school to confinement pathways," which are "the policies, practices, and prevailing attitudes in educational institutions that lead to contact between youth and the juvenile and criminal legal systems" (p. 50). Besides academic harm, these girls will also suffer mental, emotional, and physical trauma. Educators, administrators, and other stakeholders (policy makers, parents, school leaders, etc.) should consider behaviors read as aggressive and dangerous or the labeling of Black girls as loud, sassy, and combative as rooted in systemic social issues surrounding Black girls daily lived experiences. The centrality of oppressive living conditions, coupled with troubled schooling and disciplinary practices, place Black girls in a unique position in which they are likely to experience race-based and gendered-based discrimination and violence at disproportionately higher rates than their white and male counterparts (Crenshaw & Ritchie, 2015; Morris 2012,

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Smith, 1982; James, 2013; Phillips, 2006; Smith, 1983) give accounts of race, gender, class, politics, and education. Additionally, there are qualitative studies and texts dedicated to Black girl struggles and victories in the neighborhood (Brown, 2009, 2013), unfair school practices (Crenshaw, 2015; Morris, 2016), their connections to music, media, beauty aesthetics, and love of self (Brown, 2009, 2013; Love, 2012; Morgan, 1999), and life in the schoolhouse (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tatum, 1997).

Slate, Gray, & Jones, 2016; Wun, 2016). This includes rape and other sexual assault and physical violence.

Although there are many examples of statistical data and stories of and about the status of Black women and girls in the popular socio-cultural psyche (schools, community, health, education, identity, relationships, literary and blues tradition, autobiographies), there are few autobiographical stories written by Black women and girls about their personal educational journeys and all of the socio-cultural spaces that interface with those educations. Although studies of Black girls in schools talk about and center the impact of schooling on Black girls, or the plight of Black women in non-schooling spaces as they attempt to live their lives unapologetically in the face of racism, sexism, capitalism, and white supremacy, many of these works give second-hand accounts under the researcher/researched dichotimous paradigm. This is not to say that researchers, such as Monique Morris, Bettina Love, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Ruth Nicole Brown, to name a few, do not give meaningful accounts of these interactions in their qualitative studies.

What is important here is that this work explores how education, both schooling and non-schooling, happens to and is experienced *by* the storyteller, both as reflection but also in process, written as an expression of her own thoughts and feelings and in her own words. This type of autobiographical inquiry becomes significant because it contributes to the fields of curriculum studies/curriculum theory, Black feminisms, and speaks to the self as praxis in a way that centers the storyteller as she interfaces and interacts with, in, and through those spaces.

Overview of Black Feminist Theory: Brief Historical Analysis

A historical analysis of the topic can stem from the works of Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Anna Julia Cooper, and Maria Stewart in the Pre-emancipatory era. These prolific Black women spoke of Black women's humanity (Truth, 1851); the need for equality, recognition of Black women as human, and Black female personhood (Stewart, 1832), the specific space of oppression and state sanction of violence through lynching practices (Duster, 1970), and suppression and oppression unique to Black women's bodies (Cooper, 1894). Even while abolitionists advocated for racial equality and suffrage proponents advocated for gender equality, Black women in many cases were forced to choose between their gender and racial identities. Still, in the contested space of white feminism, where Black women were active participants in the struggle for gender equality with white women, it became evident that Black

women's plight for racial justice was ignored. Moreover, Black women's positions in the Black community were to be situated as a racial issue, rather than a struggle for both gender and racial equality.

In the 1970s, Black Feminists, or Black women who advocated for racial and gender equality, came into the social, political, economic, and cultural public spaces. The National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), found in 1973, was the first to *talk back*, or give a response to systems of power that sought to silence them. Although the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) tried to present a unified front for Black women as they sought to move toward racial and gender equality, there was dissent within the group. As if being a Black woman was not already a contentious space of marginalization, they did not seek to speak up for those Black women at the margins of sexual orientation. As a result, there were Black women who broke from the group to create another space for Black women who advocated for intersectional feminism that challenged cis-gender, heterosexual Black women, Black men, and white counterparts for open sexuality and sexual freedoms for Black lesbians.

In 1974, the Combahee River Collective put forth a statement of their politics concerning the Black women's (mis)representation, their situated sites of oppression, as well as the problem of ignoring and erasing Black lesbians, and their plan of action and future projects. Both the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) and the Combahee River Collective moved forward to advocate for Black women at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality that carved out a space for themselves by themselves.

Additionally, Alice Walker (1983) introduced the term *womanism* as a response to the lack of collective unity with and by white feminists, who neglected their Black counterparts in the ongoing struggle for women's rights. According to Walker, a womanist is: "a Black Feminist or feminist of color... a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female...Womanist is to feminist as purple is to Lavender" (pp. xi-xiii).

Still, there is some argument regarding what constitutes a Black woman being a Black Feminist or having Black Feminist consciousness. Much of the argument revolves around biology, one's birth gender or sex, social constructions of race through time, as well as the geographic location of Black women, whether on the African continent or in the diaspora. Some scholars contend that Black Feminists are women, particularly *Black* women, with a "feminist

consciousness" and women of African descent (in the Diaspora), but not necessarily on the continent of Africa. This definition suggests that only diasporic women who are descended from Africa could be Black Feminists, suggesting futher that these women possess a consciousness that is in some way different from other women, even African women. Further, in this definition, one's sex organs, rather than a matter of feeling, knowing, or being defined as a "woman," govern one's status as a potential Black Feminist. By this definition, a trans person of any racial makeup could not be considered a feminist, because she does not possess a vagina.

Before ending the discussion, it is important to recognize and define what consciousness can be. Collins (1990) suggested that whether or not a person considered herself Black Feminist, categorized herself in another Black Feminist framework (Womanism, Africana Womanism, African Feminist), or wished to be ascribed to such a definition, it is the important to develop what she called "a Black woman's standpoint." She noted:

> Developing adequate definitions of Black Feminist thought involves spacing the complex nexus of relationships among biological classification, the social construction of race and gender as categories of analyses, the material conditions occupying these changing social constructions, and Black women's consciousness about these themes. One way to address the definition of tensions in Black Feminist thought is to specify the relationship between a *black woman standpoint*—those experiences and ideas shared by African American women that provide a unique angle of vision of self, community, and society—and theories that impact these experiences. (p. 21, emphasis added)

Even still there are many more themes that contribute to Black Feminist thought or consciousness. Collins (1990) outlined these themes in *Black Feminist Thought*, which are echoed by many Black female scholars—who may or may not identify as Black Feminist—as they put those core themes, in part or in total, into practice. In this work, I refer to consciousness as discussed in Collins' work as a Black woman's standpoint.

One of the struggles in developing a Black woman's standpoint amidst racial and sexist discourse, Collins (1990) noted, is succumbing to the trap of Eurocentric, male-centered ideology within power structures in social, political, economic, and academic spaces. She suggested that Black women embrace "a consciousness that is simultaneously Afrocentric and feminist" (p. 26). Collins suggested that the feminist, Afrocentric consciousness considers that:

> Blackness and Afrocentricity reflect long-standing belief systems among African people (Diop, 1974; Richards, 1980; Asante, 1987)...[and] is the continuation of an Afrocentric worldview [that] has been fundamental to African Americans' resistance to racial oppression (Smitherman, 1977; Webber, 1978; Sobel, 1979; Thompson, 1983). In other words, being Black encompasses *both* experiencing white domination *and* individual and collective evaluation of an independent, long-standing Afrocentric consciousness. (Collins, 1990, p. 27, emphasis in original)

In this way, a Black woman's standpoint reflects the consciousness of a Black woman as she enters the conversation at the intersections of race and gender. She lives in a unique space situated as marginal, oppressed, erased, and invisible yet speaks through and upholds her voice as center. Additionally, Collins (1990) said,

> Black women's work and family experiences and grounding in traditional African American culture suggests that African American women as a group experience a world different from that of those who are not Black and female. Moreover, these concrete experiences can stimulate a distinctive Black Feminist consciousness concerning that material reality. (p. 24)

She goes on to say, "African American women as a group may have experiences that provide us with a unique angle of vision" (p. 25).

Key Black Feminist Theories

Endarkened/Black Feminist epistemology: What is it? What it is not? An endarkened feminist epistemology, as described by Dillard (2012), is situated in

> how reality is known when based in the historical roots of global Black Feminist thought. More specifically, such an epistemology embodies a distinguishable difference in cultural standpoint from mainstream (white) feminism in that it is located in the intersection/overlap of the culturally constructed notions of race, gender, class, national, and other identities. (p. 59)

Dillard (2012) said,

> Maybe most importantly, it arises from and informs the historical and contemporary context of oppression and resistance for African ascendent women. From an endarkened feminist epistemological space, we are encouraged to move away from the traditional metaphor of research as recipe to fix a "problem" to a metaphor that centers in/on

> reciprocity and relationship between the researcher and the research, between knowing, the production of knowledge, and its use. Thus, I have forwarded the idea that a more useful research metaphor of research from an endarkened feminist epistemological stance is research as responsibility, answerable, and obligated to the very persons and communities being engaged in the inquiry (Dillard 2000,2006b). (p. 59)

Intersectionality. Intersectionality, defined by Crenshaw (1991), explained "how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" (p. 1243), as well as how (white) feminist and antiracist discourse is situated as an either/or proposition. Crenshaw suggested, "because of their (Black women's) intersectional identity as both women *and* of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one *or* the other, women of color are marginalized within both" (p. 1244). She suggested that "intersectionality provides a basis" for the reconceptualization of identity "to acknowledge how our identities are constructed through the intersections of multiple dimensions" so that "we might call attention to how the identity of 'the group' has been centered on the intersectional identities of a few" (p. 1299). Further, she suggested that intersectionality can be a means of coalition building between groups and among groups as we "summon the courage to challenge groups that are after all, in one sense, 'home' to us, in the name of the parts of us that are not made at home" (p. 1299) to reconceptualize what it means to be raced and gendered in the United States.

Radical Black female subjectivity (RBFS). Radical Black female subjectivity is having the power of self-identification, self-definition, and self-expression that leads to self-liberation. Further, hooks (1992) explained the process of self-liberation that leads to healing and self-awareness in *Black Looks*:

> To all of us who love Blackness,
> who dare to create in our daily lives
> spaces of reconciliation and forgiveness
> where we let go of past hurt, fear, shame
> and hold each other close.
> It is only in the act and practice of loving Blackness
> that we are able to reach out
> and embrace the world
> without destructive bitterness

and ongoing collective rage. (p. 1)

There are three fundamental elements for developing, maintaining, and sustaining radical Black female subjectivity in one's daily life and in one's scholarship. These elements call for us [Black female scholars] to make use of teaching and learning as a way to make space for our own voices by filtering this learning through socio-political, economic, and cultural realities. While filtering these educational moments through contextual realities, we can begin to define scholarship through a process of naming what it is and what it is not. Finally, when we clarify, define, or name our scholarship, then we can and must defend this work. In this way, these processes of carving out a space for one's voice, while operating as radical Black female subjects, Black female scholars carry out naming and cultivating Black female scholarship.

Incorporating hooks' notion of radial Black female subjectivity helped to create the environment to address the needs of Black female scholars to write ourselves into existence in order to read those things we wished we could have read as little Black girls. By carving out a space for voice while making her self-visible amidst invisibility and hyper-visibility, the Black female scholar moves forward beyond barriers of white supremacy and patriarchal sentiments. Additionally, the power of naming releases Black women and girls from previous bonds to negative, harmful, and hostile language written upon their bodies. The cleansing power to reclaim and name oneself helps remove social stigma, mental injury, and psychological trauma acquired by harmful sites such as schooling and non-schooling curricula (Collins, 1990; Dillard, 2012; hooks 1984, 1992). When Black women and girls are able to love Blackness, demonstrate love and care for the self and transfer love and care to others, collective liberation can occur (hooks, 1992).

bell hooks talks about love as a critical point towards self-awareness and understanding that contributes to collective healing. In her book, *All About Love*, hooks (2000b) discusses how love should be applied, not just as an intimate thing as it is generally discussed in Western Eurocentric thought, but as a mechanism of wellbeing and collective wholeness. She said, "A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well. To bring a love ethic to every dimension of our lives, our society would need to embrace change" (p. 87). She goes on further to say, "embracing a love ethic means that we utilize all the dimensions of love—'Care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect and knowledge'—in our everyday lives" (p. 94). Outlining these components (care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and

knowledge) as vital to the construction of a love ethic, hooks said, "We can successfully do this only by cultivating awareness. Being aware enables us to critically examine our actions to see what is needed so that we can give care, be responsible, show respect, and indicate a willingness to learn" (p. 94). When one is committed to a love ethic, she is responsible for how love is given to her as well as given to others. This responsibility first takes place as acts of self-love and self-care. This kind of self-love does not exist in isolation, but it is fostered in relationships with others with the expressed commitment to individual and collective well-being.

Spirituality and The Sacred

One cannot engage in a love ethic without investment in the sacred. hooks (2000b) suggested "a culture that is dead to love can only be resurrected by spiritual awakening" (p. 71). This is not to suggest that religion and spirituality are the same. hooks critiqued religion as a contributor to U.S. capitalism and consumerism. She suggested that religion, being marketed as spirituality, as well as New Age spirituality consisting of individualistic and separatist notions of success and achievement, has stagnated the spiritual growth of many seekers of healing and divine connection. Further, the life or death of the spirit has a direct correlation to the depth of one's own connection to the divine outside of religious institutions. It can be said that, in many secular traditions, parishioners are in solitude, absent from active participation in their life's purpose, calling, or destiny, waiting for a deity, divine spirit, or divine connection to reveal spiritual truths or give their lives meaning and direction. For this reason, spirituality moves from traditional connections to organized religion to being a connection to the divine that engages us as active participants in co-creating our existences.

Dillard (2012) talked about spirituality as praxis in research and teaching. She defined spirituality as a "conscious relationship with the realm of the spirit, with the invisibly permeating, ultimately positive, divine, and evolutionary energies that give rise to and sustain all that exists" (p. 2). For Dillard,

> *Spirituality* refers to having a consciousness of the realm of the spirit in one's work and its ability to transform research and teaching. When we speak of *the sacred* in endarkened feminist research, we are referring to the way the work is honored and embraced as it is carried out, the reverence with which it is done, whether teaching or research. (p. 76)

As a result, we operate as an inter-connected spiritual being with the mind and body, not in opposition to it. Additionally, there is no position of authority, power, and privilege created by differences that break down or fragment the self.

Further, Collins (1990) speaks of this practice as a "both/and" dichotomous thinking. She noted,

> This dimension of Black women's standpoint rejects either/or dichotomous thinking that claims that *either* thought *or* concrete action is desirable and that merging the two limits the efficacy of both…. Instead, by espousing a both/and orientation that views thoughts and actions as part of the same process, possibilities for new relationships between thought and action emerge. (p. 28-29, emphasis in original)

Said another way, Dillard cited hooks' 1994 text, *Teaching to Transgress*, stating, [hooks]

> welcomes these contestations in naming, perspectives, positions, and language, seeing these confrontations as less about naming and more about how these 'differences [mean] that we must change ideas about how we learn' (p. 113). Rather than fearing conflict, we have to find ways to use it as a catalyst for new thinking, for growth (p. 113). (Dillard, p. 71)

Dillard noted, "At the core of Black feminism (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984) and endarkened feminism (Dillard, 2006a, 2012) is the recognition of the expertise that Black women acquire through our lived experience and specific to our lived conditions" (p. 80), where

> the place of the sacred in endarkened and transnational feminisms requires radical openness, especially on the part of the researcher, who understands deeply that her or his humanity is linked with that of the people with whom he or she studies. (p. 81)

Further, she said, "endarkened transnational feminist research is research that makes space for the mind, body, and spirit to be part of the work" (p. 81). In this way, attending to mind, body, and spirit, Black women—as scholar, as researcher, as teacher—move toward justice in incorporating those *selves* as they lived in contested, racial, and gendered context. Finally, Dillard (2012) outlined four areas that represent considerations and questions relevant for research/teaching and researchers/teachers (pp. 80-81). In this study, I will focus on two areas as a response/reflection: (1) on the sacred nature of experience, and (2) on engaging mind, body, and spirit (see pp. 78-81).

Summary: Black Feminist Frameworks as Curriculum Disruption and Intervention

Teaching and research are both political acts. Whether carried out as an act of resistance or an act of love, the Black woman who subscribes to a Black woman's standpoint and works towards becoming a radical Black female subject seeks to change the narratives of Black women as object, foreign, or invisible. While upholding self-love and care as critical components to the scared and spirituality, she understands that the work she does is important beyond its material application. These Black women advocate for intersectional feminism, remember endarkened feminist epistemology as a pivotal form of inquiry, and seek to tell their own stories in the classroom and in their work. Their scholarship is presented as gift, as art, and as means of survival to themselves and others like them; who see their scholarship as a mechanism of hope. In this way, this dissertation operates within a Black Feminist *spirit*, thereby, crafting the work and seeing research and teaching as a vocation or a calling. Dillard (2012) says it another way:

> in order to heal, to put the pieces back together again, we must learn to remember the things that we've learned to forget, including engagement and dialogue and cross-cultural community that theorize our varying spiritualties, experiences, definitions, and meanings of Black womanhood. In this way, (re)membering becomes a radical and endarkened response to our individual and collective fragmentation at the spiritual and material levels, an endarkened response to the divisions created between mind, body, and spirit and an endarkened response to our ongoing experience and understanding of '*what difference differences makes*' (Wright, 2003). (p. ix)

Using Black Feminist theory in curriculum as an intervention is to be aware of the spirit of the work of research and teaching as sacred practice. It is also to be mindful of mind, body, and spirit of both the researcher and the researched and to seek out and acknowledge the humanness of those in the room, whether in the classroom, church room, courtroom, or bedroom.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Overview of Methodology

In this chapter, I give a brief description of the study of self, including the self as praxis and self as story. Next, I introduce Critical Race Feminist *currere* as a type of *currere* and give a foundational description of *currere*. Then, I discuss the tenets of Critical Race Feminist *currere*. In the second part of this chapter, I share the data collection process, data analysis, framing of the chapters, and summary.

The Study of the Self

Self as praxis. Black women and girls can use autobiographical inquiry and narrative identities to understand the self in relation to schooling and non-schooling curricula. In Western culture, the self used to be considered "the complexities of a human's ontogenesis that embraces biological growth and maturation as well as mental, affective, and cognitive progress, and adaptation to the requirements of society" (Zsakai, Karkus, Utczas, & Bodzsar, 2015). More recently, however, scholars have proposed more fluid notions of the self in relation to how identity is influenced by external forces (social, cultural, political, economic). In *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds,* for instance, Holland et al. (1998) discussed a theory they called self-in-practice. They suggested that "selves are socially constructed through the mediation of powerful discourses and their artifacts—tax forms, census categories, curriculum vitae, and the like" (p. 26). As "readers" of the socially constructed text (the self in practice), we can either comply with the behavior in accordance or resist. Nevertheless, they stated, "the 'subject' of the self is always open to the power of the discourses and practices that describe it" (p. 27).

Holland et al. (1998) goes on to suggest that, when looking at the self, there is a need for critical disruption in our way of thinking about the self as fixed, as traditional, Western thought would imply. They noted:

> We can discern at least three interrelated components of the theoretical refiguring of the relationship between culture and self. First, culturally and socially constructed discourse and practices of self are recognized as…the (static) elements of cultural molds into which the self is cast. Rather, differentiated by relations of power and the associated institutional infrastructure, they are conceived as living tools of the self—as artifacts or media that figure the self constitutively, in open-ended ways. Second, and correlatively, the self is treated as always embedded in (social) practice, and as itself a kind of practice.

> Third, "sites of self," the loci of self-production or self-process, are recognized as plural. (p. 28)

Following this definition then, we can think of the curriculum as one site of the self that is socially constructed by the discourse of powerful institutional forces that render some powerful and others not; some visible and others invisible; some at the center of the text and others relegated to the margins.

Self as story. Narrative can be described as the stories we tell about ourselves and the world around us, the stories we tell our children about the world and our place in it. It can also be the tales others tell about the "other." These narratives are integrated into parts of self, as Holland et al. (1998) suggested, which make up how we see our "selves." Eakin (2008) suggested that narrative and identity are so closely connected that, at best, they are hard to separate. He said, "narrative is not merely something we tell, listen to, read, or invent; it is an essential part of our sense of who we are" (p. ix). Thus, narrative identity is "the idea that what we are, could be said; to be a story of some kind" (Eakin, 2008, p. ix).

To live autobiographically, the storyteller lives the story and writes in process, not in retrospect. Memory and reflection are part of the fabric of the narration. Additionally, the story is not told at the end, but should be regarded as an autobiography-in-practice. It is the journey and the telling from within the story that reveals the story. It is the vulnerability. It is the yearning and striving that make the story and reveals the author's humanity and her most conscious self. Eakin (2008) suggests,

> making autobiography turns out to be part of the fabric of our experience as we live it…this making involves a trying on of stories and their attendant identities, it is an art of the future, and it is always an act of self-determination no matter what the circumstances. (p. 148)

The interface between curricula as story and story-ing the self can conjure up moments of contempt or praise based upon how the curriculum was channeled in, with, and through the subject. Grumet (1980) said, "Curriculum as lived and curriculum as described [planned] amble along, their paths sometimes parallel, often not, occasionally in moments of insight intersecting" (p. 24). All of these things are the curriculum, both tangible and intangible. It is the story, the environment that the story is told in, and the storybook itself. It is the person telling the story and the way the story gets told. All of these "things" are part and parcel of the curriculum story.

Critical Race Feminist Currere as a Kind of Currere

Pinar's *currere* as method/ology comes out of the field of curriculum studies and curriculum theory, which is an interdisciplinary study of one's educational experiences (Baszile, 2015; Pinar, 2012). Additionally, *currere* centers autobiographical inquiry, although being grounded in phenomenology, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and feminism (Pinar et al., 2008). Pinar outlines *currere* as an educational process in which the individual, historically the student, writes about their educational experiences across the four temporal stages: regressive (focusing on past experiences), progressive (focusing on the future), analytical (focusing on the present), and the synthetical (integrating all the previous moments to take action towards liberation). Baszile (2015) advances Pinar's seminal text (1975) and develops Critical Race/Feminist *currere* to extend *currere* further into marginalized spaces, particular to women and people of color.

Baszile (2015) describes curriculum theory as a field where radical efforts are taking shape to displace traditional notions of curriculum. Critical Race Feminist *currere* intervenes on traditional notions of *currere* to bring Black Feminist theory and Critical Race Theory to bear on questions of identity, difference, knowledge, and power. The primary focus in this work is to seek a deeper understanding of the socially constructed self that is mis-educated by curricula, one site of construction by way of educational experience, as well as how I reshape and transform those curricula. Although *currere* seeks to understand a deeper meaning of educational experience, the method foregrounds schooling as its central, contextual space. In my work, an educational experience is defined as both schooling and non-schooling experiences in which learning and growth occurs through interactions in academic *and* social spaces contributing to identity formulation (Nelson, 2001; Oliver, 2004). Non-schooling experiences can refer to all the forces that interface with the schoolhouse yet exist outside of it, including social, cultural, economic, political, gendered, and racial experiences. These can also be familial, community, and religious affiliations. All of these forces influence, impact, inform, and empower, as well as construct, conform, and deform. While the use of several qualitative methodologies is possible, I am interested in looking closely Critical Race Feminist *currere* for this study.

Critical Race Feminist *currere* (CRFC) rests at the intersection of three theoretical traditions, including curriculum theory, critical race theory, and Black Feminist theory, and is interested in interrogating race and gender and, further, the curriculum. Because the focus of

curriculum theory is on the lived experiences, Critical Race Feminist *currere*, positioned as a kind of *currere*, operates to center lived experiences of women and people of color in ways that *currere* does not. Delving into the onto-epistemological questions revolving around and centering the experiences of Black women and girls, Critical Race Feminist *currere* can be used as a model for women of color (WOC) to make meaning of their schooling and non-schooling experiences and help the researcher understand how curricula intersect, interact, or converge in academic, social, political, economic, and cultural lives.

Critical Race Feminist *currere* can be described as a gathering of artifacts, or data, for, with, and through the self by way of storytelling. Historically, Black women's storytelling has been a way for them to make sense of themselves and their world (Collins, 1990; Hurston, 1937; Morrison, 1970, 1973, 1987; Shange, 1975). Whether written or oral tradition, storytelling is the fundamental way knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. This knowledge can be viewed as anecdotal or metaphoric, as it is based in lived experiences as told by the author about her life from her perspective.

Critical Race theorists speak of counter-narrative as storytelling, as a way to make space for "unique voice[s] of color" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) suggest that counter storytelling, in particular Black women's storytelling as counter storytelling, is critical. Because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, "writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that whites are unlikely to know" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). The notion of counter storytelling gives voice to minority groups as a way to "apply their unique perspectives to master narrations of minority groups" (p. 10). Storytelling is represented here as artifacts of the self in an effort to move toward self-understanding through examining the critical educational moments of my life. To this end, Critical Race Feminist *currere* as method/ology is the *why* towards the *how* in this work.

The tenets of Critical Race Feminist *currere* include:

1. Critical Race Feminist *currere* is first and foremost the cultivation of what bell hooks has called radical Black female subjectivity (hooks, 1992).
2. Critical Race Feminist *currere* is an autobiographical exploration guided by radical Black female subjectivity that asks onto-epistemological questions. For example: who am I as a nonwhite woman? Where is my voice in the curriculum? How am I experiencing it? How

are my educational experiences different from my counterparts (white males, white females, and Black males)? What learning emerges from my experiences that can serve others?

3. Critical Race Feminist *currere* is engaged in the Black radical tradition of hope and all works that transgress oppression (i.e. the autobiographical writings of Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglas, Angela Y. Davis, Eslanda Robeson, Anna Julia Cooper, Paul Robeson, Ella Baker, W. E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Nina Simone, Ida B. Wells, Gloria Anzaldúa, Grace Lee Boggs, Russell Means, Derrick Bell, and Patricia Williams to name a few).
4. Critical Race Feminist *currere* works to remember and to continue the practice of educating through testimony and storytelling—sometimes as an entrée into theory, sometimes as theory, and sometimes as an interrogation of theory.
5. Critical Race Feminist *currere* encourages creativity, asking: How might photographs, poetry, auto-poetic narrative, music, soul writing, dancing, listening, traveling, relocating your desk or your whole life help you decolonize your creative process?
6. Critical Race Feminist *currere* is interested in speaking to how one might undergo the process of decolonizing one's mind or delinking from dominant perspectives and their reinforcement of race and gender hierarchies (Baszile, 2015).
7. Critical Race Feminist *currere* is not limited to a linear or ordinal way of engaging in *currere*, as Pinar suggested. It gets at how the individual progresses in past, present, and future temporal spaces to interrogate, analyze, and make meaning of those experiences, while allowing for fluidity across those places.

Data Collection

This autobiographical study employs tenets of Critical Race Feminist *currere* to bring Black Feminist theoretical frameworks and Critical Race Theory to bear on questions of self in relation to identity to answer its research question:

How does an educator educate in the midst of her own mis-education?

Although other qualitative methods such as narrative inquiry or phenomenology could have been employed for the study, Critical Race Feminist *currere* links this project with the autobiographies of the educational experiences of individuals, as told by individuals (Pinar et al., 2008). Additionally, curriculum is "the significance of subjectivity to teaching, to study, to the

process of education" (Pinar, 2004, p. 4). As another definition of curriculum, Hendry (2011) stated that it is "a continual negotiation of [one's] lived experiences within and against multiple ideologies/discourses of education" (p. 2). She went on to suggest that curriculum could be understood as "history" as "a site of memory, or re-membering" (p. 4). Thus, memory serves as artifact, or data, that is unearthed to provide contextual knowledge of/about/in the past. Critical Race Feminist *currere* provides a way of gathering of artifacts, or data, for, with, and through the self. These stories do not reflect mere narratives of how systems of oppression, domination, and control impact one individual's lived experiences, but are positioned as political, collective sites of agency within, through, and against such systems for minority groups, particularly Black women.

I intend to engage in the process of *currere* as a way into curriculum co-theorizing and "complicated conversations" (Pinar, 2012, p. 2) at the intersection of race, gender, and curriculum (Baszile et al., 2016, p. ix). Throughout this project, I seek not only to critique my own curricular *selves*, but also to reconceptualize and/or reimagine new selves through unlearning colonized modes of thinking that reinforce systems of oppression, domination, and control. Critical Race Feminist *currere* provides a space for the researcher to think, beyond traditional research methods, through the self about the self in socio-cultural and political moments as the entry point to shed light on a different truth.

The primary artifacts of the study were drawn from short stories and poetry. These artifacts are entries written in personal journals. As a practice, I write in my journal as and when I am inspired. I am not a daily writer. Some stories were written prior to starting the doctoral studies program in the fall of 2013. Some stories were written during the program. When reading through these entries, the stories seemed to connect and speak to one another. In the end, I was able to compile these critical moments into one story.

These entries consist of what I call critical moments. Critical moments can be described as moments in my life that caused me to think more deeply, question, or reflect on what was happening in me or around me. Some of the original entries were written in full detail while others as bullet points and free flowing entries like drawings and mind mapping. These moments can be viewed as spontaneous *utterance* in a particular moment in time. As the story is told, other *things* are mentioned, such as colloquial terms and biblical references. The terms and references serve to add meaning and context but not to deflect from the overall flow. There are

two critical moments in Chapters Four and Five. One reflects on my life in the context of schooling, particularly in the classroom. The second one is reminiscent of non-schooling spaces as in the community, in the home, or adjacent settings. In Chapter Six, there is one critical moment that combines both schooling and non-schooling in the context of the community.

Authenticity of each story is limited by the act of retelling (Hendry, 2011). Further, these entries can be described as memories about a particular moment, not necessarily for the purpose of academic work. They were written as pensive reflection in the moment to speak to my own self-understanding in racial, gendered, historical, contemporary, and contextual context (Baszile, 2017c). As Eakin (2008) described, "making autobiography turns out to be part of the fabric of our experience as we live it…and it is always an act of self-determination no matter what the circumstances" (p. 148). Therefore, I suggest that each one offers the most authentic account of my (re)memory that a present level of knowledge and awareness allows (Quantz, 2011). Finally, I used a set of questions to choose stories to include in this dissertation. These questions helped me narrow the focus of each chapter as it pertained to the work, because I had written many stories. These questions are included in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Each story is followed by reflection and lessons learned, which lend themselves to theoretical analysis. In the reflection, I look back and look forward to reflect on what I know now as a result of the storytelling. Following the reflection, I discuss what lessons were learned and how Black Feminist frameworks intervene and disrupt oppressive, conformist curriculum patterns. The analysis of the stories draws from key Black women's work—Black Feminist text and scholarship. I provide an analysis that is specific to each artifact. Although this writing structure and organization may seem linear—critical moment, reflection, and lessons learned—the study was not processed in this way. Each critical moment has its own origin or birth date, which did not happen in any particular sequence, as Pinar's *currere* makes use of. That being said, each chapter was written to link or weave psychic thought processes together, which Critical Race Feminist *currere* articulates. Each chapter closes with a summary that threads into the next chapter.

Framing the Chapters

*Introducing **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, & **Tiffany60***. "The past is real, and there is evidence of it. However, evidence does not reveal the past, but instead points to interpretations of the past" (Hendry, 2011, p. 12). While entering these critical moments, as Hendry (2011) suggested, "to remember and recount, to reconnect through seeking patterns and themes" (p. 7) in my own lived experiences, I sought to recollect, reimagine, and return to my own sense of radical Black female subject as a path to self-empowerment and self-agency. Acting as life historian, working to unearth and excavate these critical moments, "my interest is in the narratives…constructed in relation to who can be a knower and what can be known, and what this reveals" (Hendry, 2011, p. 13).

Each critical moment is narrated in the voice of a past, present, or future self. These selves act as guides as they tell their stories to one another. As each critical moment is narrated, the voices talk with and through one another in hopes to re-educate the self out of mis-education and reimagine a new self through decolonization towards a collective self as educator, as Black woman, as human. While examining past moments, **Tiffany6**, or (**T6**) **girl child**, talks about her experiences growing up girl. **Tiffany36**, or (**T36**) **Woman child**, explores the entanglements of conformity while developing radical Black female (inter)Subjectivity. **Tiffany60**, or (**T60**) **Woman Unapologetic**, tells the story of her life in a sustainable community, living unencumbered by her former states of being.

Chaos, clarity, calm. In the midst of many of the stories and poetry I had written, I understood my writing process to be what I call moments of chaos, clarity, and calm. These terms should not be defined in traditional ways. I describe them as conceptual manifestations of how I wade through my own writing process. The best way for me to describe these moments is as space held in time. They are expressed as feelings, ideas, or movements. Chaos is described as a moment that requires a shift of some sort. Chaos acts as a catalyst for this shift to take place. The purpose of chaos is a call for my full attention, telling me that I should make every intention to shift in some way. This can be a physical change as in relocation, having a baby, death, or divorce. It is a cloudiness of mind, physical illness, or restlessness of the spirit. Chaos is an onto-epistemological, existential conundrum that shakes the foundation of who I think I am as Black, as woman, as educator, as mother, as human. In order to move through chaos, it demands presence of mind, body, and spirit and to be present *differently.*

In the struggle to readjust and reorient myself, new knowledge manifests. There is a deeper level of thinking about what and how I exist in my present circumstance. I begin to reevaluate what it is I believe about myself in the context of who and what I hope to become; what it is I seek to gain from these lived experiences; what lessons learned; how I will make better use of this new knowledge as a person and member of humanity. Clarity steps in as a psychic Aha! moment. These moments can be described as occurrences of clairvoyance and clairaudience. I *hear* my stories, and I *see* my poetry. The path is clear. I know what I am doing and how to proceed. It is balance and harmony of mind, body, and spirit.

Peace of mind in body from the spirit regulating my environment represents the calmness I experience. This does not mean some of my physical lived experiences have changed. How I view my circumstances has. More importantly, how I respond to those circumstances has also changed. Similarly, clarity represents the application of psychic calm. "What wisdom do you now possess? What new ways of being? What is known?" (Dillard, 2012, pp. 49-50).

Summary

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

1 Corinthians 13:9-10, King James Version

Teaching and research are revolutionary acts. Amidst the social, political, and economic forces *coming for* us as educators, it is important for us to know the answers to the questions: Who am I (as educator, as raced, as gendered in context), and why am I an educator (what is my political project?). The audience for this work is made up of educators, more specifically pre-service and classroom teachers. Working with faculty on how to incorporate the use of Critical Race Feminist *currere* in the curriculum, I find it necessary that, before an educator attempts to educate, she should know how she has been educated. Further, she should know how she has been constructed as a raced and gendered subject. Is she really subject? Where is she? Does she know? Possibly, there is no other way to attempt to give an answer to these questions but by *currere*.

Learning the methods of *currere,* and its virtues, as Baszile (2017c) suggested, helps with contemplative and reflective processing of one's own understanding of the journey of education. People of color, Black women in particular, tell stories to make sense of the world around them. Storytelling is a radical act that gives power, agency, and authorship to the storyteller. Critical

Race Feminist *currere* makes room for Black women to tell different stories about themselves, their bodies, and their existences. The process of gathering artifacts, or data, through story creates a new inroad for teaching, learning, and research, as those critical moments provide historical memory for critical reflection. The artifacts in the study show a glimpse or glimmer to one Black girl's thoughts and reflection as she attempts to make meaning of herself, the world she lives, lived, and will live in, and the world around her and its social, cultural, historical, political, and economic systems and institutions.

Part 2-Walking through the Field while Engaging in Complicated Conversations

Chapter Four: Chaos & Fetching Memory

*11/3/13: The Day **Tiffany6** and **Tiffany60** Showed Up*

(Tiffany6, Tiffany36, and Tiffany60 sitting at the kitchen table)

T36: Who are you?!?!

T6: Don't you recognize me? I am you.

T36: (Confused and frustrated) What were we meant to do?

T6: Here, let me show you.

T36: Where are we going?

T6: Along this path here.

(The little one points toward the ceiling, which agitates T36 a bit)

T36: Where will it take us?

T6: As far as we want to go.

T36: You have the vision? The blueprint? The life decree? Give it to me? Please?

T6: I have it. Well, I think I have it. I don't remember.

T36: What?!

(In a calm and comforting voice, Tiffany60 steps in)

T60: Ladies, calm down. Let's remember together. Okay, T36, tell me the last thing you remember of it?

T36: Here's the thing. It's as if the life decree has been broken into the pieces. Fragmented and floating along with no sense of direction. Much like my life has been up until this point! No cohesiveness. Just pieces of a jigsaw puzzle; like broken glass, but I don't know what the finished picture is supposed to look like. So, as I find pieces, I attempt to piece them together. Sometimes they fit and other times things fall apart. But you! T6! You've seen the full picture. Please tell me what this life is supposed to look like.

***Tiffany6**: Moments of Chaos*

The conversation above is the moment **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60** meet face to face. There is tension in the room because **T6** and **T60** appear to **T36** as she is on the verge of a meltdown. She has given up on life, her life. **Tiffany36** is mentally, physically, and emotionally drained but in a last stitch effort to run the course, she cries out for help. She comes to her own rescue in the form of a past and future self.

They begin to talk about the life decree, a document that was thought to have explicit directions and guidelines for **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60**'s life but was either lost or destroyed, at least damaged, at some point. Confused and conflicted, **Tiffany36** reach out to **Tiffany6** and **Tiffany60** for answers and a bit of hope. This is when **Tiffany6** begins to tell her story.

The critical moments in this chapter take place in regressive moments as **Tiffany6**, my past self, tells her stories of growing up Black girl. As she fetches the memories, she becomes caught up in those moments of anguish, pain, and shame. She tells how she felt in the classroom, in the church, in the neighborhood, and in her body.

Critical Moment 1: Lions, Lambs, and Wild Horses - Teaching the Animals

Walking to school. Broken glass. Abandoned buildings with busted out windows and missing windowpanes. Tall grass. Tiffany6 strolled several feet behind her older brothers and sister. Her legs moving as if she were walking through a murky swamp in waist-high, algae-colored water filled with snakes and alligators. She came to the corner and waited for the light to turn green. "Green is for go," she said. As she crossed the street into the school building, the noise of children overwhelmed her. Tiffany6's fight or flight reflexes had kicked in, but Mrs. Brooks broke her concentration.

"Move along children, the bell has already rang. You will all be late for class."

Tiffany6 climbed the three flights of stairs to her classroom. She reached for the door, but it flew open and hit her in the head. She brushed off the pain and walked into class. She hated that her desk was in the middle of the class because everyone would see her as she walked to her desk. Plus, she is left-handed. This meant she had no room to move around because the right-handed desk was awkward for her; there was only one left handed desk in the class, and Macy was already assigned to it. She was also left-handed, which meant Tiffany6 would have to be inconvenienced, as Ms. Jacobs called it. So, she climbed in and did not make a fuss.

Ms. Jacob was Tiffany6's teacher. The fair-haired, fair skinned young woman who seemed charming and mild mannered to Tiffany6. She was sweet, but obviously too inexperienced to handle a classroom full of children like hers. Every morning, the children ran around as Ms. Jacobs tried to corral them like wild horses that had broken free from their stable. The boys played and jumped around, while the girls laughed and played with their hair. Nobody paid any attention to Ms. Jacobs or Tiffany6. Tiffany6 was

still. Seated in her desk in the middle of the class. Waiting. She did not know what she was waiting for, but she waited. Maybe Ms. Jacobs would be able to teach her something important today. Most times she was only able to keep the wild horses locked in their desk-shaped pens. Other times, she had to separate them because they like to fight. Ms. Jacobs was new to the school, and it seemed as if she had no clue about her new school environment. This was Tiffany6's third teacher, but she like Ms. Jacobs because at least she did not yell. She would ignore most of the kids who pulled and tugged at her for help or attention while rustling up those "wild ones" to send to the disciplinarian. And to think, it was only 9:00 a.m.

Tiffany6 waited. Maybe Ms. Jacobs would notice that she was ready and willing to be taught today. Maybe Ms. Jacobs would see that Tiffany6 does not complete her class work not because she does not want to, but because Ms. Jacobs talks too fast. She wished she could tell Ms. Jacobs that the desk is so uncomfortable that it was far beyond an "inconvenience," but that was the least of Ms. Jacobs' concerns or Tiffany6's for that matter. Maybe Ms. Jacobs would like to know why Tiffany6 sometimes sleeps in class after breakfast. The reality was that, most of the time, Tiffany6 did not eat the night before and the stomach pains were too much to sleep through. Tiffany6 waited.

The little girl's home life and neighborhood had an eerie resemblance to her school environment. As Tiffany6 started to daydream about the night before, she let her thoughts drift away from the chaos in the classroom. Broken, abandoned, and dreadful, Suzanne, Tiffany6's mother, began to show signs of anorexia. The disease had taken hold of the mother of four as she struggled to keep her children clothed and fed. Tiffany6 was not quite sure if her mother's thinness was from the lack of food or her severely depressive state. Max, Tiffany6's older brother, routinely was disconnected from reality in the small two-bedroom house. He dreamed of being a scientist. He hoped to escape their impoverished circumstances and save his mother by becoming rich, so he worked feverishly on his old, used chemistry set.

Tiffany6's brother, Jonathan, was three years older than her. He was a part-time thief and part-time provider for the family of five. Because Suzanne's live-in boyfriend had left them a few months before, Jonathan felt it was his job to provide for his little sisters, brother, and mother. Wearing his windbreaker, he would shop at the corner store for "easy picking"—items he could easily conceal in the cut-out compartment he fashioned in the back of his coat. Yesterday, he brought home Jell-o and Spam. The macaroni and cheese made too much noise, so he had to put it back. Chloe, Tiffany6's

little sister, was missing. Not kidnapped or abducted. She had disappeared. Under the youthful and inexperienced eyes of her older brothers, Chloe managed to get out of the house … again. The neighbor, Ms. Jasper, found Chloe playing with her son, Noah. Ms. Jasper warned Chloe about wandering in the street and took her home. A few moments later, Chloe was in her front yard again, conveniently at mealtime. Although Ms. Jasper and Suzanne had the same existence, Chloe got a meal that night.

Tiffany6, Jonathan, and Max ate the Spam and saved some for their mother and sister, who had not arrived before their hunger got the best of them. No bread, no fixin, just Spam. Tiffany6 despised the main and only course but finished her portion and got ready for bed. Soon, Suzanne was home and made her way to the last of the confiscated meal. As momma tucked the four kids into the makeshift beds, piles of blankets on the floor around the four walls, Tiffany6 had hoped that, tonight, her prayers would be answered. She kissed her mother when it was her turn and began her nightly struggle for sleep.

Tiffany6 woke the next morning to the commotion of her mother, brothers, and sister.

"It is Monday again," she thought.

As she brushed her teeth, a tear left her eye.

"Why, God, why won't you let me die?" she screamed in silence.

This had been Tiffany6's wish as she recited the children's prayer with her mother the night before.

"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep

And if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take."

It seemed to her that God did not care much for her and her family, but she did not have time to interrogate Godly matters. It was time for school.

Soon the silence that engulfed her was interrupted by screams from the disciplinarian, Mr. Patterson. He grabbed a few of the boys and shoved them down into their desks. He did not care if the desk was the children's assigned seat. He pointed and threatened; the class came to a roaring halt. Ms. Jacobs thanked Mr. Patterson, and she began the day's lessons. By that time, it was 9:15 a.m. Tiffany6 had been at school since 8:30 a.m., and now, she was about to learn. She was excited because Ms. Jacobs started to read from her favorite children's book, *Charlotte's Web*. After ten minutes of reading, the bell rang. It was time for the next assignment.

Soon, lunchtime came. Tiffany6 was happy for the meal, as she sat quietly eating like it was the last supper. Cold ham sandwich, celery sticks, milk. She finished her lunch and walked into the gated schoolyard playground. She sat by herself and watched the other children, as she often did, but she felt there was something not quite right about her school. She wondered if all schools were like hers. Did they all not have what the children needed, like desks, books, and did students in other schools have to be "inconvenienced"? Were all the classes so loud and noisy? Did all schools have a Mr. Patterson, and why was he so mean to them? She wondered if, after recess, Ms. Jacobs would continue the story of Fran, Wilber, and the spider. Maybe she would have time before the bell rang again, or maybe Ms. Jacobs would spend the remainder of the day rounding up the wild horses.

Tiffany6 had not realized it yet, but she had developed the skill that made her invisible. She did not mind, because she had come to enjoy her invisibility. Being invisible meant not getting in trouble with Mr. Patterson and not being called on by Ms. Jacobs. Being invisible meant not being hassled by the bums on her way home from school. Being invisible also had a down side. She did not eat as much. Her invisibility also meant Suzanne did not have to give Tiffany6 much attention, because outwardly, she did not seem to be in trouble. Tiffany6 did not mind. She knew there was never enough time, energy, or resources for her and her siblings, or her mother for that matter, so she willingly chose to disappear so that her mother would not feel bad and her brother would not have to steal.

Tiffany6 and her family lived the life as many other American families like hers in the 1980s did. Broken and destitute, because they had purchased a part of the American dream but had not gotten a return on their investment. So, they waited, as Tiffany6 did, for their investment to pay off. It seemed to be in the children. Their investment for the future was in their children. But, their children were not receiving the same "breaks" as the other children—the children who are not like her. Black. Poor. Urban. Criminalized. Dehumanized. Savage. Inferior. Lazy. Not worth the investment of America it seemed.

There were fewer resources to go around when it came to the inner city's children. The link to success and prosperity—the Schoolhouse—seemed to have become lack luster as the divestment of federal resources left the community and drained the life, liberty, and freedom from the children's grasps. But, what about the community? The neighborhood. The families. No library. No playgrounds. Only corner stores and candy.

Liquor stores and churches. No community centers and after-school programs. No basketball goals, only dreams of leaving the hood.

Mr. Reagan promised a better future for the nation's children. They were at risk! Or, at least that's how Tiffany6 remembers the saying. She had watched Mr. Reagan a few nights before talking about us being in a war, and the children were at risk. He talked about drugs and poverty. Tiffany6 didn't know what all that meant, but she gathered that Mr. Reagan was at war, and the nation was on drugs, but he was not going the stand for it. Mr. Reagan was going to stamp out the at-risk nation, starting with the kids. He was going to have parents jailed for low school attendance and he was going to take their government assistance. Women like Tiffany6's mother had caused this war, because they did not have fathers for their children. Tiffany6 had a father. Suzanne just did know where he was. As she got on her knees as she had so many times before, Tiffany6 tried to make sense of all the fear she felt and the sadness she was experiencing. She recited her prayer and climbed into the makeshift bed. She gazed up at the ceiling as her stomach began to twinge. She closed her eyes and was determined to sleep tonight. She struggled with her nightly terror, trying not to wake her siblings. Between a dream and maybe a hallucination, Tiffany6 drifted off to sleep, but her rest was interrupted by the alarm clock. It was 7 a.m. Time for school … again.

*Reflection: What **Tiffany36** Thinks of **Tiffany6** Now*

In this story, **Tiffany6** talks about her experiences of the schoolhouse and the curriculum of growing up as a poor Black girl in an urban setting. From a child's perspective, she describes what the curriculum is to her. It was the school, but it was not just the school. It was everything attached to her life. It was everything that led up to the school. It was the school's environment, the walk to school, and in her home. It was in the smell of her neighborhood. It was the visual aesthetics of abandoned buildings and un-manicured grass. It was in the homeless man and the drug needles in the empty lot. It was in the school lunch and her dinner stolen from the corner store. It was in her mother's body and mental instability. At the intersections of race, gender, class, and disability, she attempts to cross the barriers of poverty and mental health that she carries, while engaging the schoolhouse with little success. Yet, the lesson that is taught beyond the schoolhouse, and other social forces as an extension of the schoolhouse, remain with her longer and had a far greater impact.

This story reflects on curricula of power, difference, and oppression and how they intersect in the lives of the poor. It illustrates how hegemony reinforces social systems of oppression to maintain order and control. In short, the powerful, in their self-interest, seek to maintain that power. In doing so, they create parallel power structures in institutions to control, the less powerful. Quantz (2015) suggested, "the institutions of society work to create narratives that work in the interest of the privileged and against the less privileged" (p. 103). He goes on to say that hegemony is a process in which, "the institutions such as the legal system, the media, the churches, the health care system, the economic system, and the schools are harnessed by the powerful to work in their own interests rather than in the public's interest" (p. 103). So, when we talk about schools, we would be remiss not to mention the social, political, economic, and cultural environment of the school setting that contributes to wellbeing and sustainability.

The curriculum, and its presumption of invisibility, makes it difficult to confront when it is positioned as natural, normal, or good. Curriculum or "a course of study" (Pinar et al., 2008, p. 28) is given legitimacy because it suggests there is a particular direction or path for inquiry that will be followed. Here, the curriculum represents classroom "products" (textbooks, classroom setting, what gets taught, etc.), but it also represents those intangible forces attached to those productions. Those attachments can be where the students sit, who gets help, acknowledgment, support, and the relationship the teacher has with her students. It can be the textbook but also the lack of representation of people of color in the text. It can be the selection of what gets read, such as *Charlotte's Web*, or even the choice of selecting a non-white, non-male author. If a student is not successful, the student is in error or deficient, not the curriculum. The lack of visibility and representation contributes to the curriculum as problem. Further, identity formation through the curriculum constructs an individual as the subject of the curriculum, or center. In contrast, an individual who is identified as contrary to the curriculum or who is objectified by that curriculum, becomes object or marginal (Nelson, 2001).

When reflecting on this moment, it was important to inquire from whence my idea of self, as Black, and woman, as classed, etc. came. And, what do they mean now? From this critical moment, **Tiffany36** sees her calling for teaching. As **Tiffany6** retells her experiences, she recalls how schooling, the curriculum, and other social forces, namely poverty and mental health, inform her understanding of what her life as a young Black girl would become. For many years, **Tiffany6** believes she could not be a learner. She was socialized to do just enough to be

satisfactory but never extraordinary. **Tiffany6**'s desire to engage in the classroom is stifled by disruptions and her teacher's inability to manage students. Although she had a love for learning, she was not recognized as a contributor to high achievement. Over time, **Tiffany6** loses her desire to become the teacher she longs for.

Her physical conditions, hunger and sleeplessness, contribute to her inability for perform at her best level in the classroom. It was difficult for **Tiffany6** to strive in school because she was more concerned with her physical state, hunger, than her education. Additionally, she developed her own relationship with mental illness, namely depression. Suzanne's inability to provide the basic necessities for the family contributed to mental health disparity in the same way it shows up in **Tiffany6**. She cannot distinguish between her need to be in a child's place (play, learning, exploration) and her desire to see her mother whole, so she is concerned with adult responsibility (being good and invisible). In this way, she takes on her mother's mental instability. **Tiffany36**'s choice in vocation as educator was born from her own difficulty and her own longings.

Pinar et al. (2008) defined hidden curriculum as "the unintended yet real outcomes and features of the schooling process" (p. 248). It can be characterized as side effects, whether intended or unintended, that individuals learn as a result of the curriculum in place in any institution. Both the curriculum and hidden curriculum educate and have long-term effects on an individual, whether negative or positive. Incorporating psychoanalytic social theory into the discussion, as Oliver (2004) said, would allow for an examination of institutional "side effects" that colonize the psyche and oppress the body as they function to "deposit the unwanted affects of the dominant group onto those othered by that group in order to sustain its privileged position" (p. xix). As a result, "the process of *de*colonization demands a close analysis of the affects of oppression and how those affects are produced within particular social institutions" (p. xx) and how subjectivity, subject position, and subject formation are interconnected to institutions of oppression.

Lesson Learned: At the Intersections of Race, Gender, Class and Mental Health

Intersectionality, defined by Crenshaw (1991), is "how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" (p. 1243), as well as how (white) feminist and antiracist discourses are situated as either/or propositions. Within these two discourses, Black women are forced to choose what can be characterized as a "primary identity." A primary identity can be described as the fundamental identity used to describe

yourself to others as it relates to social constructions of identity (race, class, gender, credentials, geography, etc.). Nelson (2001) defines personal identity, as "a complicated interaction of one's own sense of self and other's understanding of who one is" (p. xi). By this definition, most often, white women define themselves as "women" and Black men self define as "Black," yet Black women are defined as neither and/or one or the other (Collins, 1990, Crenshaw, 1991). In this manner, Black women are expected to choose race or gender as their identity. Yet, being marginalized as black and/or woman leaves Black women at intersects of lived experience not understood by their more dominate counter parts (Black men and white women).

Further, class is inextricably linked to race and gender (Alfred, 2007; Davis, 1981; hooks, 2000a). Historically, the poor and working-class people, particularly people of color and women, were relegated to domestic employment and service industries, which paid menial wages. These jobs, which paid less than livable wages, were tied to social perceptions that those who held them lacked higher-level qualifications, such as reading and writing or higher education. Additionally, these positions were seen as jobs that did not require any level of critical thought. As a result, many times, those who held such positions could not adequately provide for the financial needs of their families. The link between class and race coincides with how communities of color suffer as a result of the wage gap (Neal, 2004; Neal & Johnson, 1996; O'Neil, 1985). At the intersection of gender and race, Black women in the 1980s fell far behind their counterparts in employment and earnings. These disparities can be described as institutional violence, as sanctioned enforcement of policy trickles down to poor, urban, communities of color.

Crenshaw (1991) said that the "violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identity, such as race and class" (p. 1242). She concluded that an anti-essentialist critique of both feminism and antiracism is necessary, suggesting that feminism essentializes the category of white, middle-class women and antiracism essentializes the category of Black men. Crenshaw asserted that, because categorization is a way to give power and privilege to certain groups and to subordinate others, we must seek to acknowledge the binary nature of either/or propositions that marginalize women of color. She goes further to suggest that categories bare "particular meaning and consequences" and "the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies" should not be ignored (p.1297). Crenshaw suggested that "intersectionality provides a basis" for the reconceptualization of identity "to acknowledge how our identities are constructed through the

intersections of multiple dimensions," so that "we might call attention to how the identity of 'the group' has been centered on the intersectional identities of a few" (p. 1299).

One example of how multi- dimensional identity exists at the intersections of race, gender, class, and mental health is Suzanne, **Tiffany6**'s mother. She can be categorized as a single, poor, mentally/emotionally disabled Black woman who is also a mother. Describing her in this way also sheds light on the exclusionary status she bears. Although race and gender play a part, her status as poor, and to some extent being a single Black woman, pushes her further from center. The weight of such burdens also lay on her children as they experience the "side effects" of her intersectional and multi-dimensional identity. The story places emphasis on the impacts of social institutions on mental and physical health. Suzanne's struggles with physical and mental illness (anorexia and depression) can be described as side effects of her lack of resources. Resources can be tangible, such as finances and education. In the 1980s, Suzanne struggles to obtain employment above minimum wage during a recession. She does not have education above high school, so she works clerical and office jobs. Even with two positions, it was not enough for a family of five. She relies on her older children to provide care and guidance to their siblings, because there were no extended family members present. As a result, she was not able to provide basic necessities, which led to mental health concerns.

Suzanne also struggles with intangible resources, such as self-love and care. In her attempts to keep her family whole, she becomes engulfed in her circumstances, which lay hold to her body. Suzanne's mental and physical circumstances of brokenness manifest in her children's behaviors. Suzanne's children sought to ease their mother's burden by taking care of themselves and solving systemic problems with childlike ingenuity through working hard, becoming a thief, being silenced, and engaging in wanderlust. Luckily, Suzanne and her children's economic and environmental state changed. It took a far greater amount of time for their mental, emotional, and spiritual states to heal.

What is important to say here is that the family bond and connections to spirit and community have made a meaningful impact on their self- and mental-awareness. As I write the particular story, I am reminiscent of hardship, yet I am grateful for it being the mold in which I was able to grow. These hardships, like many poor families in the U.S., do not tell the complete story. Yet, it is woven into the fabric of their stories. Knowing this, I argue, the poor and poverty are separate and distinct. The poor do not always represent or embody the narratives of poverty

in the US, namely being that they are lazy, uncivilized, and uninformed. The poor are part of the greater system of capitalist, individualist, competitiveness that makes the U.S. what it is and has continued to be. Poverty, like other social systems, are constructed for the sake of hegemony, that is, to reinforce power, domination, and control for those in power at the expense of those not in power. Until, these systems are confronted, reexamined, and reimagined, poverty will always be a poor people's problem.

Critical Moment 2: Momma's Whip: Black Girl Silencing and Shame as Trauma

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Luke 6:45, New King James Version

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35, New King James Version

The lessons we carry that make us do not always happen in the school house. Sometimes, those lessons are learned in the curricula of life outside the classroom, yet they impact and affect how we see ourselves as learners, as leaders, as scholars. **Tiffany6** remembers a very crucial lesson she learned in childhood at the hands of someone she felt to be like a mother. Other mothers, like play aunties and other community caregivers and neighborhood relatives, hold special significance in the hearts and minds of children. These fictive kinships mold and sculpt as well as conform and deform the malleable clay that is the child's psyche, dreams, and fears attached to those critical moments. This is one memory, and lesson, she never forgot.

T60: What do you remember?

T6: I asked a question, and she shamed me as if I was being disrespectful. As if I was being too smart for my britches[5] or out of order [these phrases denote that I was trying to be brilliant but came off as ignorant, or worst, arrogant].

T60: When did this happen?

T6: When I was about 12 years old at a youth regional church service

T60: Who shamed you?

T6: A Female pastor

Being too smart for one's own britches has a particularly powerful meaning in a Christian context or setting for me, because I learned that Black women, and Black girls, were expected to behave in a certain manner regardless of the circumstance. I learned this…after I asked my question. My lesson was that women were to be docile (read: quiet, non-opinionated, or critical) and in some instances, dormant (read: invisible, erased, or violated). This same expectation was for girls as well, because we learned how women were to behave from the other women. More specifically, Black girls learned how to become Black women from the church mothers, female leaders (elders and ministers called mostly evangelists and missionaries), and designated young people who exhibited exceptional Christian behavior in the youth circles. I was not considered one of those youths. Moreover, only certain women, those designated ones, were allowed room to express their opinions or give commentary on a topic of discussion, which seemed to mirror other fore-mentioned commentary on the subject, particularly those opinions from Black male leadership.

I do not remember specifically what my question was nor what her direct response to my question was. In my memory, it did not matter. What seemed to be etched into my memory, and subsequently lived there until now, was how I felt in the moment. How the feeling grew inside me. In that moment, of chastising, of punishment for speaking out of turn, it grew into self-policing of my own voice. My own personal silencing. When I say voice, I mean using my ideas and understanding of my surroundings to describe what I see, feel, or think about what I see, think, or feel or engaging in dialogue with others. In this moment, I silenced myself and my own means of self-expression for fear that I would be called out, shamed, embarrassed, or even

[5]This wonderful, congruent conflation is a mash up of "you're too smart for your own good" and "too big for your britches," both describing a haughty person. This is a fairly common malaphor https://malaphors.com/2014/08/30/youre-too-smart-for-your-own-britches/

publicly ridiculed for mere questioning. In this moment, I understood that questioning was NOT a good thing. But, not just the mere act of questioning; it was questioning authority figures. It was also the types of questions asked by a child to authority figures. This meant parents, teachers, pastors, preachers, or any adult who, at one time, I believed was there to guide and support me from childhood to adulthood. I felt in this moment I could not ask anything of them.

I stopped asking questions, but my questions did not stop coming. They lingered in my head and expressed themselves in other, sometimes dangerous, and irresponsible ways. I acted out in private where I could not be seen, because I did not want to experience that feeling again. The feeling of shame. The feeling of unworthy-ness. The feeling that I was not loved or worthy of love. I also stopped talking. I stopped talking about what mattered to me. I stopped talking about those things I thought or felt, because I thought those things did not matter to anyone. I had questions about my body, my sexuality, my dreams, my fears and many others, but I could not, would not, ask them openly. Not anymore. I felt my elders did not care to know.

I can remember her face. The look of anger or maybe disdain for me. Maybe it was the perceived arrogance of my question. How dare you, child, ask such a question of your elders? Hey, it was a youth service where the adults were holding a question and answer session. Youth were encouraged to ask questions. I should say that this session was being held by the youth pastor of this particular church, but the congregation's pastor, the person who openly shamed me, was present. In hindsight, I should have known better. All I can say is that the room felt cold as if in a horror scene. You know something is about to happen like the killer will pop up any second, but you sit and watch the screen full of fear and anticipation anyway. No one had the nerve to speak. I guess they knew something I did not at the time.

After I asked my question, I felt misunderstood. My mother tried to console me as I shrunk down into the pew, tears streaming down my face. I tried to hide my face full of tears, because they embarrassed me more as the other kids looked on. To add insult to injury, the other adults amen-ed and nodded in agreement to her response. It angered me that my mother did not speak up for me, defend me, protect me. I felt like my character as a young Black girl was under attack, which made me cry more. I do remember saying to my mother, "That is not what I meant; she did not understand my question," as the pastor responded to my sassiness, not my inquiry.

Because I did not remember the actual question, I sat and asked myself, "Tiff, what the hell did you say?" For the life of me, I cannot remember what was said. This moment flashes as a bad thought or in bits and pieces. Maybe this is a protective measure; maybe it is a loss of consciousness.

Here is what I do remember: after the youth pastor acknowledged that he saw my hand raised, I stood up like instructed. Then, I remember the hiss of the crowd, her face, her finger pointed and wagging. I slid into the pew, wanting to run away, but I cannot. Maybe the moment was so traumatic for me that I blocked it out for fear that it would resurface. But it did!!!! It kept showing up, my self-policing. I was afraid of rejection, of denial, or embarrassment, or of the same type of shaming. I could hear, who do you think you are? Over and over again, every time I thought about trying something new, thinking outside the box, or asking a question. Every time I would hear, too big for your own britches! These questions were not just any ol' types of inquiry. The questions I felt most fearful to ask were thought-provoking, interrogating, challenging, and critical to and for my own well-being. These questions were critical for my development as a Black girl, woman, scholar, and human. But, I stop asking … then.

I was afraid of her from then on. I had a sense of reverence for her because I admired her as a female leader in a male dominated institution. I was in awe of her keen sense of style and vocal ability. Before then, I wanted to be like her. After, my reverence turned to avoidance of her and anyone like her, because I would not want to cross paths with someone I felt to be a bully. I never spoke out of turn or spoke up for myself in her presence or in church settings again. I would passively avoid her by not having direct conversation in or outside the church. Only to greet; but never engage.

I would avoid being singled out in other high anxiety or stressful environments as well, like school. I would rarely raise my hand or ask a question. I it chalked up, in confusion, as me not listening or being prepared. For a long period of time, I would never call on my elders, teacher-leaders, and the like for guidance, an explanation, or support. Thankfully, this did not remain the case. I can remember the kindness of Ms. Colvin, my tenth-grade science teacher, who encouraged my curiosity and Ms. Williams, my high school English teacher (I had her for tenth and twelfth grade years). She pushed me to do better. She made me a better writer. They made me want to be like them.

Even in this moment of confession, looking past my own pain, I realize that, to many, I seemed rebellious, even challenging, as a youth. Even still, early on, I believe my rebelliousness manifested as shutting down and going inside of myself to seek deeper,

more meaningful relationships with myself, with the Creator, and with my life's purpose. Further, my acting out or rebellion was a coping mechanism for my pain that, in hindsight, "protected" me from myself and possible dangerous decision making. One example is, as a youth, I felt a deep need to commit suicide.

Because I grew up as a Christian, I learned that suicide was a sin. I remember questioning God about the ridiculousness of this notion (not being able to take my own life), but I had no control over how I was to live the life he had supposedly given me. I remember arguing with the Creator about this so much so that, in my anger and misery, I said that if my life was not my own and others had more say about my life's trajectory as a Black girl than I did, I did not want to live anymore. If I was only to be as others envisioned me or if I were destined to lead a life of conformity, I did not want to live it anymore. I did not want God anymore. Thankfully, in this moment, God spoke. Audible and clear, the Creator responded immediately to my questioning with such accuracy to me that I was able to move forward. In this sense, my need for answer kept me from ending my own life, to seek out a deeper truth. On the other hand, my belief as a Christian kept me from premature death. In any sense, I understood that it was important for me to ask another question, a more deeply profound one, and listen for a response from within.

I would often reflect on this moment as a tongue lashing of sort. Like a psychological whip. Momma's whip. Momma's whip can be described as the chastisements, both physical and mental, that were meant to caution, protect, teach, and make her children mind her words and respect her as the authority figure. Further, momma is not always yo momma! Momma can be auntie, granny, neighbor, or an elder cousin given authority over you and your body. Yet, momma's whip felt a lot like master's. Our mommas, Black mommas, are those given the responsibility of Black baby lessons about who they are, what they can become, and how to behave in order for them to live, thrive, and survive in a world not always kind to their Blackness. But, those lessons, although traumatic and shameful, could not have begun that way. I understood that momma must have gotten those responses, those behaviors, from somewhere. She learned them before she passed them on to her children. Whether it was out of love or fear, she gave lashes with her tongue, her hand, and in her demeanor. But, is she to blame? Should she be held accountable for what she was taught? Should she be chastised for the lessons she has been charged to teach her young? How do we embrace her while helping her heal from her own shameful and traumatic scars?

*Reflection: What **Tiffany36** Knows from **Tiffany6***

Drowning in the shallow water. I was encouraged to confront my fear, my shame, by writing about it. The story, I believed, could not shame me if I stopped being victimized by the moment. It had already happened and held me in silence too long. I was ready to move past it, to heal. I realized that, in telling my story, narrating it, I was no longer the victim, but the author with full perspective. The moment would only have a measure of control over me if I continued to allow it to be the end of my story. I held the responsibility of how to respond to it. My thought, my memory. In this way, I was able to reflect on and flesh out my whats, whys, and hows. What was the specific "shame"? Blame? Embarrassment? What was the outcome? How did I grow from it?

I realized now that, as a young Black girl, I was not aware that there were unspoken rules or an invisible line that I should not cross in the church setting, yet this was not explained or explicitly discussed. When I crossed the line, a Black woman came for me.[6] Maybe she came for me, not to attack or clapback,[7] but to rescue me. Maybe she came for me like I was a drowning child, like alligator bait.

Selah[8]

She jumped into the water splashing and flailing. Grabbed me. Cleared my airway. Then scolded me for being in the water. All the while we are at the beach?! Was there not a presentation of openness for question from the youth? Are we NOT having a youth question and

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[6]"(Don't) come for me": Reconsider bringing any issues concerning me to light. Such issues include: shortcomings, false accusations, wise cracks, jokes, etc. Meaning there is a time and place for this and current company is not it.
https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=don%27t%20come%20for%20me

[7] "clapback": basically a comeback, most likely pumped with attitude, sass, and or shade. See https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=clapback

[8] "Selah": a biblical expression occurring frequently in the Psalms, thought to be a liturgical or music direction, probably a direction by the leader to raise the voice or perhaps an indication of a pause. My use of the word is to pause and give reflection on the previous statements.
http://www.dictionary.com/browse/selah

answer session? Is this an illusion of recreation without fun?! This was supposed to be the time and place for me to ask questions I had. All the signposts said, “Come, enjoy the water.” “No sharks or gators.” “Safe for children.” But, when I jumped in, like a cannonball, things went horribly wrong.

In retrospect, I realize that, if I had only observed the other children, I would have been safe. The others only splashed in the water at its bank or played near the shallow end, never really becoming fully immersed in the water, only, seemingly, appearing to be wet. And, to be having fun. The other children seemed to know things I did not. Something I had not yet been taught. Maybe this was my lesson. Maybe it was one they had already seen before. Maybe the other children were not as curious as I was. Maybe they had no desire to swim. But, I did. I was dressed for it at least. Little did I know I was not supposed to jump in because the water was cold, unwelcoming, murky, dirty swamp water.

The bayous of Southern Louisiana are filled with swamp land, beautiful and teaming with wildlife that is rare and dangerous. Like an alligator floating in the murky water with only eyes above the waterline, you can only see what it wants you to see until you are in its reach. Maybe she was trying to save me. Maybe she was the gator.

I think my question may have frightened her. Maybe it brought back a moment in her own life where she, like me, had asked such a question. Maybe her response to me was similar to a response she had received. Maybe her anger or chastening response was fear for me. A Black girl. Maybe she feared a worse fate for me if I continued on my curious journey. Maybe she feared I would experience ostracism and ridicule from my elders and church community. Maybe she did not want me to be labeled as rebel, as a backslider. Having to fight for space, to cultivate one’s own voice, in any mainstream-dominated institution (racist, classist, sexist, patriarchal, heteronormative, etc.) can be/is difficult to do, especially if you go it alone. Maybe she knew something she could not share, so she shared her pain…as shame…as silencing. I think of her fondly, even though the pain and shame of that moment lived inside of me for many years since. It resonated in my soul late into adulthood. Now that healing has begun for me, I have reconciled with that moment of pain and shame. Now, I respond with love, grace, and humility for the moment, for her, and for myself.

Lesson Learned: Spirit Murder to Spirituality

As I fought for my healing, to recover, to no longer be silent, I began to recognize where silencing my voice showed up and how its manifestation and mutation lived in my life both in schooling and non-schooling settings. In academic moments as a particular entry point, there were three ways silencing my voice kept showing up, which impacted my scholarly work: (1) fear of sharing my thoughts—"No, you cannot read my work!" I would say "My work is like my baby, and I do not want my baby to suffer harm."—; (2) writing in isolation for fear that my scholarly work would not be good enough, which translated into a fear I was not good enough; (3) painful moments during writing/revisions/edits so much so that I was afraid to publish. If I did not try, then I would not get rejected, so there was no shame involved.

Brené Brown, the author of *The Power of Vulnerablility* (2012), suggests that, in order to counteract shame and for healing to begin, you have to (1) return to the moment (recall it); (2) reconcile yourself to it (speak to it/ figure out what did I learn?), and (3) recover (begin again). Dillard (2012) says it another way:

> But in order to heal, to put the pieces back together again, we must learn to remember the things that we've learned to forget, including engagement and dialogue and cross-cultural community that theorize our varying spiritualties, experiences, definitions, and meanings of black womanhood. In this way, (re)membering becomes a radical and endarkened response to our individual and collective fragmentation at the spiritual and material levels, an endarkened response to the divisions created between mind, body, and spirit and an endarkened response to our ongoing experience and understanding of "*what difference differences makes*" (Wright 2003). (p. ix)

The Spirit, Trauma, and Momma's Whip

Dillard's (2012) notion of spirituality and the sacred that is echoed in the context of endarkened feminist epistemology states that "*spirituality* refers to having a consciousness of the realm of the spirit in one's work and its ability to transform research and teaching" and that *the sacred* refers to "the way the work is honored and embraced as it is carried out, the reverence with which it is done, whether teaching or research" (p. 76).

These spaces, the sacred and spirituality, exist in a delicate place in the body as it is connected to the spirit, which is connect to the divine. Whether described as the seat of the soul,

(Zukav, 2014) or a woman's primal source (Northup, 2016), the spirit is the most powerful place one can draw from. It is the place from which a Black girl's voice is cultivated.

It is also the place where spirit can be damaged (Holland et al., 1998; Oliver, 2004). Although the spirit can be damaged, it cannot be destroyed, for it is part of the divine connection to all things spiritual. Yet, there is a type of spirit murder that happens as a result of one being cut in two; severed from the divine. It is from this psychic space of the spirit that Black women can share trauma with their young, with themselves, and in their community. It is the place where their own little Black girl learned to cope with trauma. Trauma in this paper is shame and psychological violence and their impact on Black women and girls in the form of posttraumatic stress disorder (Brown, 2012; Dearing, Stewig, & Tangney, 2005; Etherington & Baker, 2018; Scarpa, 2003). The outcome for me was self-silencing. I felt small inside and to the world, in my world. I felt insignificant, unworthy, unlovable, unloved.

how dare you care about me
you ain't got no good sense
cause I ain't shit
you must be lower
than that to care

it's knock-kneed mini skirted
wig wearing dyed blond mamma's scar
born dead my scorn your whore
rough heeled broken nailed
powdered face me
whose whole life is tied
up to unhappiness
cause it's the only
for real thing
I know

September, 1968

Nikki Giovanni

The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni: 1968-1998

The spirit murder **Tiffany6** experienced was like the silencing when Maya Angelou stopped talking, even though she had every right to speak. To a child, telling a lie, which caused the death of her victimizer, was a greater offense than the crime committed against her. Nonetheless, she decided not to speak. Out of fear, she became silent.

> Mrs. Baxter, I thought you ought to know. Freeman's been found dead on the lot behind th slaughterhouse." Softly, as if she were discussing a church program she said, "Poor man."
>
> He was gone, and a man was dead because I lied. Where is the balance in that? One lie surely wouldn't be worth a man's life.
>
> Obviously I had forfeited my place in heaven forever, and I was as gutless as the doll I had ripped to pieces ages ago. Even Christ Himself turned His back on Satan. Wouldn't He turn His back on me? I could feel the evilness flowing through my body and waiting, pent up, to rush off my tongue if I tried to open my mouth. I clamped my teeth shut, I'd hold it in. If it escaped, wouldn't it flood the world and all the innocent people?
>
> I had to stop talking.
>
> Maya Angelou (1969, pp. 86-87)
>
> *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

Remembering Spirituality

When my concept of God shifted I was also able to heal. One important component to remembering spirit as one's connection to the divine is having an understanding of one's ancestral origins. For many years, God and I were not on the best terms. I had grown up believing as my parents taught me, that (1) God is all knowing and all powerful, (2) God is Love, and (3) Never question God, because He is always right. As I grew in my relationship with the divine, these precepts troubled me, because I could not reconcile this God with my lived experiences as a poor, Black girl. I did not readily receive the idea that God loved me, because my life was not the best. On top of that, I could not question Him about it. I also had a huge problem with being labeled as sinful. I was a child who could not possibly have been such a wrecked person that I needed salvation from someone who did not look like me—or himself if you believe biblical record—because I was born that way. I was also sinful because I was woman, Eve, temptress. I was 6! I was confused yet willing to undergo intensive conversion to

salvation. I was afraid I would die and burn. I was afraid I would be away from the presence of the divine.

Critiquing the origins of one's history and knowledge-base can lead to liberation. When I began to ask fundamental questions—Whose knowledge is this? Where did this come from? What do you believe in your spirit?—I was able to push past the rhetoric of religion to better understand my own connection to the divine. hooks (2000b) suggested that religion, being marketed as spirituality, as well as New Age spirituality consisting of individualistic and separatist notions of success and achievement, has stagnated the spiritual growth of many seekers of healing and divine connection. She goes on further to say, "They deny the unifying message of love that is at the heart of every major religious tradition" (p. 73). This is not to say that spirituality and spirit, or spiritual practices, do not exist within organized religion. For me, it was important to see God outside of religious context for my relationship with the divine to flourish.

Additionally, my use of gender in relation to the divine also changed. Historically, African, Egyptian, and other pantheistic spiritual practices prefaced the use of both the God and Goddess in daily life. There was worship of the powerful Horned God and the sacred Mother Goddess that predated all modern, Eurocentric, and Western religious philosophy. These spiritual practices were mostly earth-based belief systems, in which the people held the Goddess in high regard, as she was in control of the cycles of the seasons. In this manner, they understood it was important to recognize how both masculine and feminine energy are necessary for balance, harmony, and success of the harvest and other life functions.

Further, the people saw their own divine connection and their part in the success of daily life. The God and Goddess had their part, as did the people. With this knowledge, I was able to shift away from a victim mentality. I was no longer waiting to be saved, but I began to save myself. I began to co-create my existence with the divine, to map out my life and, therefore, give direction to the sacred by which we could walk together. Endarkened epistemological thought situates Black women as co-facilitators with the sacred through ancestral spiritual practices (Dillard, 2012; King, 2005). hooks (2000b) said, "Spiritual practice does not need to be connected to organized religion in order to be meaningful. Some individuals find their sacred connection to life communing with the natural world and engaging in practices that honor life-sustaining ecosystems" (p. 81). In this way, I no longer saw God only, but also Goddess—

mother spirit and feminine energy—through which I saw myself as joined to the divine. I could pray to her, and she would hear me.

Black Girl Rhetoric on the Way to Radical Black Female Subjectivity

Black Girl Rhetoric on the way to becoming a radical Black female subject explores Black women's histories and curriculum written for, with, and by Black and Brown scholars, while pushing back and reclaiming our histories, bodies, and stories (Crenshaw, 1991; Brown, 2009, 2013; Hill Collins, 1990, 2004; Morris, 2016). Black Girl Rhetoric can also be described as demonstrating a Black girl's sense of verbal engagement. It is her way of expressing herself as individual in order to make herself visible, known, and heard. It is the common conjuring of magic from the essence of what and who Black girls are/will become as they struggle to become center (hooks, 1992).

Black Girl Rhetoric is a process of developing self-awareness, resistance, and agency while in the midst of the challenges of Black girlhood. It is the process of recognizing conflicting narratives of her personhood and rebelling while in the process of naming herself. It is the use of autobiography, storytelling, and testimony while exploring other Black women's stories in an effort to define herself. Black Girl Rhetoric is like a Black girl's "spidey sense." It tingles up and down her spine. It sets her on high alert. It warns her of danger. It puts her in fight or flight mode. It also causes her to speak out of turn, act womanish, and question authority. One must not read this behavior as disrespect or irreverence, but as scientific inquiry. It is a Black girl's way of "testing the waters" or seeing how close she can get to the fire without being burned. It is problem-posing and data collection. It is her way of figuring out how to get to and knowing how to be in her woman-ness.

Thus, development of Black Girl Rhetoric is the power of naming ourselves, defining ourselves, and defending ourselves while nurturing, maintaining, and sustaining love and radical Black female subjectivity (hooks, 1992). Declaring one's identity, including one's own scholarly identity, necessitates operating as radical Black female subject and existing unapologetically, which mirrors hooks' notions of being *wild* and being *well* (hooks, 1992, p. 49). Such inquiry and problem posing in the status of growing up Black girl fosters the development of criticality. Critical Black Feminist consciousness that espouses critical pedagogy goes hand and hand with radical Black female subjectivity (Collins 1990; Dixson, 2003; hooks, 1984, 1992). In this way,

radical Black female subjectivity in a *currerian* sense is developed by venturing into one's lived experience as testimony for hope and healing.

*Healing **Tiffany6**: (Re)Memory of her Divine Self*

What makes a little Black girl go quiet? When does her shame speak for her? How does trauma show up on her lips? In the life of **Tiffany6**, shame overran her ability to develop and adequately sustain a strong sense of self in her youth. Fortunately, for her, she came to her rescue. As **Tiffany36** and **Tiffany60** listened to **Tiffany6** tell her story, they made room for her trauma. In the end, **Tiffany6** just needed to talk and to be heard. Oftentimes, when there is miscommunication or misrepresentation there is fragmentation. Things seem to be left undone. But by **T36** and **T60** being gentle with the little one, she was able to let go of her pain, to remember a bit more.

Before **Tiffany6** began her life, there was a conversation between her and God. Even though the little one's understanding grew as she did, she tries to tell her origin story. There seems to be bits of memory lost in transit. She is not sure if the onset of her memory loss is due to spirit entering body or due to her short yet traumatic life. Still she attempts to give as much information as possible to **Tiffany36** and **Tiffany60** as she returns to the heavenly conversation.

Angels with Souls

Bright eyed and bushy tailed
Full of new life and unveiled
Gliding on the Rivers of the Nile
Birth from heaven
Placed in a manger
The blessed seed of God
Given to others to be broken
She is hopeful and unaware
Unlearned, yet full of knowledge
The whispered secrets on His lips
As she hovers at His throne
"Difficult tasks require special people, my child.
I ask of you this thing because few would be up to doing it.
It will be lonely, sometimes hard, and you will be misunderstood.

You will travel through this life as if cutting through the thick brush.
Thorns and thistles will scar your skin and rip at your heart.
Sometimes you will want to fall, but know I've kept your wings,
my love don't hesitate to call.
Angels with souls are the rarest of all creation. The best parts of me you embody."
Free will and a willingness to serve
Standing in all diligence given full measures of grace and mercy.
He tells her more of the life then seals the decree.
He asks her again, and she says in a word, "certainly."
She takes the assignment and tucks it in her robe.
It melts in a beam of light as it becomes etched upon her soul.
Where shall I go?
Who shall I become?
"Soon my child," He whispered lovingly.
As He takes her and rocks her
He wraps her in flesh
Carefully packing her wings in a gold laden chest.
"Remember what you are and what you are capable of.
For you my dear, you are my best.
The assignment of yours will be tough but remember your mighty roar.
The Loin of Judah, The seed of David,
The daughter from high lay on your brow
As a crown and a light
These words will keep you now."
He places her in a basket and nestles her tight
Darkness, turbulence, tugging, release
She's out!
Soft sounds of a baby's cry as she struggles to breathe
"Congratulations, Ma'am! It's a girl" fill the cold, sterile space
As she is comforted by a new face
Tear soaked cheeks glisten as the new mother's heart fills with love
A daughter, a blessing, a new life given from Heaven above
Onward a new task, full of heavy delight
Lived as Black girl yet graciously in His sight.

Chapter Five: Clarity & Transformational Moments

11/3/13

Tiffany60: One's life journey is never experienced in isolation. As we travel with others, our lives' purpose somehow gets entangled with those around us. Destinies get transposed. We reflect others as a mirror beholds an image. We take on other's behaviors, beliefs, and characteristics. The destiny meant for us was no different. This was never supposed to happen! We were given a life decree that was uniquely ours.
Tiffany36: There seems to be a picture here among the broken pieces. There must be something I could make out of them.
Tiffany60: Before we piece together this life, the question you should be asking is what are the pieces that do not fit in our frame? What you hold in your hands was not meant for you, for us. Open your bag, and empty it on the table. Together, we will discard those pieces that don't belong. Then, we can return to the task of collecting those missing pieces.

Tiffany36*: Moments of Clarity*

Tiffany6, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60** settle at the kitchen table to continue their conversation. Still confused but less frustrated, **Tiffany36** brings in her baggage. She takes the contents and empties bag by bag onto the tiny table. She starts to search through the things she has collected over time. She hoped there would be something in the bags that resembled the life decree. **Tiffany60** stops her and explains to her that the life decree is not lost, but it is hidden. She tells **Tiffany36** that, before it can be uncovered, there is work to be done, or she still won't be able to recognize it when it is found.

In this chapter, **Tiffany36** takes a step forward to understand who and what she has become. Moving through moments of clarity with **T6** and **T60**, **Tiffany36** is able to make sense of the life she has as she begins to discard those parts of herself entangled and conformed by others. In doing so, she is able to let go. In doing so, she makes herself whole.

Critical Moment 1: On Meeting Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard

"Movement is intentional and life sustaining."

-Audre Lorde

Sister Outsider

November 2014

In my Teacher Voice

I remember being at a conference. I was brand new in the PhD Program, so I was fragile. Like crystal or fine china not put away in the china cabinet, I was sitting open and exposed to the world but also to myself. I felt like my life was still not on track. Like I was out of place. I was floating above myself, in pieces, being led around like a helium balloon on a string, not sure who was holding the end. I was trying to be professional. I was trying not to be angry. I was silent and paying attention, because I was looking for a sign, from God, from anybody, just so I knew I was on the right path.

Dr. Denise Taliaferro Baszile has told this story a few times. Each time there is a bit of variation in some of the details (her version and mine), but the gist of the story was I was a crying fool. I do not deny the crying part. At all. At some point, I was sitting on the floor crying like nobody was there. The ugly cry. The help-me-God cry. I was sitting there crying because I was tired, physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. I was fighting, but I was not winning. I was in the ring, but I was getting my ass kicked.

There were many onlookers, but their faces were a blur. Maybe it was the mascara and tears. Maybe it was because I was not supposed to see them. Dr. Denise along with Dr. Lisa Weems were in the process of introducing me to Dr. Cynthia Dillard. This was when everything went to hell! I grabbed her hand. I may or may not have said my name. I started to cry. I slid down to the floor. Remember, ugly cry.

In classic Tiffany fashion, I "forgot" the whole thing. I went on studying, taking courses, teaching, and working toward finishing the program. I taught a course titled: "Socio-cultural Foundations of Education." The focus of the course was to discuss social institutions and their impact on education. These discussions entailed how philosophy, history, policy, the economy, and identity impact public education at the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability while interrogating narratives and mythos. The premise of the course was that everything is a text, whether visual, verbal, or written, and "reading the text" would help students understand more deeply how institutions played a part in the construction of education and the curriculum. This includes media, art, literature, music, and more. I loved this course,

because I was able to engage with undergraduate students on contemporary topics using an historical lens while examining its lived, real impact.

What was concerning for me was that my students were highly intelligent, yet with an inability to think outside the box. They were afraid, and sometimes resistant, to engage in conversation about hot topics in education. What was more disconcerting was that my students were not able to bring themselves and their lived experiences into the classroom. When their fundamental social identities were confronted or conflicted with texts or other students, some would panic and shut down. Others became defensive. In the end, we would work through the material. Some of them got it while others did not want to get it. Some of them said my class was their best class while others I never heard from again.

I believed the reason for some of my students' resistance was that I was the first, and only, Black instructor in their K-16 experience. Another explanation could be that I was too transparent about my own perspectives, lived experiences with public education, and social identity, all of which could have made some uncomfortable. This was in the age of the audacity of Barack Obama and the transition to "Make America great again" under Donald Trump, in a conservative state at a predominantly white institution that has named itself one of the original public ivies. Although some conversations were contentious, my goal was not to change their minds about a given topic in the course, but to reveal what was on their minds about a given topic. I did the same. I spoke of surviving Hurricane Katrina, being a single Black mother, divorcee, living just above broke, even though I had completed three degree programs, among other lived perspectives. I explicitly identified my personal biases as a way to make room for my students to do the same. In the end, my approach to teaching and learning was to help students become aware (conscious) of what their biases and blind spots were, interrogate what influences, events, and critical moments impacted their thinking, and help them to begin to think more critically about social systems and education.

I am of their Legacy

Where did this approach to teaching and learning come from? Surely, my own experiences up to this point would not lead me to such a radical way of engaging students. What were the events, circumstances, and moments that caused me to rethink my own legacy with education? To reflect on this, I had to go back to my own critical moments since being in the program, in order to understand what led me away from mis-

education. To answer these questions, I revisited Black Feminist readings, curriculum books, and other texts (spiritual, motivational, fiction). What I realized was that I had always embodied what was affirmed through those texts, readings, and conversations, yet had no language to explain. I had inadvertently put a little of this and a little of that in my head, the celestial bowl if you will, and created a consciousness that screamed, challenged, critiqued, reimagined, loved, and hoped.

I was in the process of decolonization, evolution, and revolution because of Black Feminist contextual connections. It was also because I was in the presence of the Great Ones. One example: working with Dr. Denise Taliaferro Baszile. I like to think of us as a tag team. She is the visionary, and I am the one who jumped into the sky, caught her vison, and nailed it down to paper. Because she was busy changing the world and had so many requests for speaking and other engagements, I got to do those things that fell off her plate. As a result, I was lecturing on diversity and inclusion, actively increasing under-represented populations on campus, training university faculty and staff, and planning conferences, retreats, and organizational programming. Denise put me in many situations where everybody in the curriculum game knew my name. Well, this is a bit of an exaggeration, but there are not many curriculum theorists I do not know or have not had the pleasure of meeting. It is an enviable place to be with perks and rewards. It is also a hell of a lot of responsibility. I am grateful for the exposure because, doing that work, I met Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard. Remember the ugly cry.

In working with students and digesting texts, I started to emerge. I was changing into something new, almost unrecognizable yet familiar. By delving into research, scholarship, teaching, and service, like diving in the murky water, I was becoming what I thought was out of my reach. I was becoming like the Great Ones. (My breakdown took place in the fall of 2014 at the Annual Conference for the American Educational Studies Association in Toronto. I wrote the following correspondence to Dr. Dillard on 11/13/16)

Dear Dr. Cynthia B. Dillard,

A few days ago, I was speaking with my daughter, and I mentioned you. We were talking about people that helped me "through" and "to" what it is I believe my purpose is and how these people "show up" in our lives. I told her the story of how I first met you; and how I cried at your feet in the middle of a restaurant at a conference. I did not remember all of the details of our encounter, but I remembered the feelings I had as well

as the resolutions that had grown from that moment to this present one. I wish to share these reflections with you.

I have heard the story told from others' perspectives a few times, but until now, I had not truly interrogated why I cried. I know my "why" now. At that time, I was lost, to myself. I was a new doctoral student full of anger towards God for tricking me into a PhD program. I felt like an imposter and a fraud, so I just wanted to disappear, which was one of my coping mechanism. But, God had another plan. Also, I had forgotten that I had I asked for all of this. Now keep in mind, I do not remember an explicit prayer or verbal request to be a Black Feminist scholar, educator, and teacher-activist, but I do remember feeling that my life was out of balance and praying God's will be done in my life. Oh, be careful what you pray for, honey, and hold on, because you may get exactly that!

I was taught through my religious upbringing that my life was not my own and that I was some sort of clog in the divine order, so I had to do what God told me to do whether I wanted to do it or not. It was my duty to be silent, to be obedient, to be submissive. At this point, God and I were not on the best of speaking terms, because I was angry. I felt that God had not considered me, his daughter, in His plan about me. He truly could not/did not love me because I was alone, away from family, single, raising a woman-child on my own and in a strange place—Oxford, Ohio. These were definitely not places and spaces I had prayed for nor wished to be in, although I knew myself to be a prayerful, obedient, God-fearing, although mad, Black woman.

In this mode of thinking, feeling, and out of necessity to feel connected to something, I stayed where I believed God had led me. I did not quit the program. I did not pack up and run for the hills, although I felt lost. In my despair, I cried, and God sent sisters, mothers, spirit guides, and mentors. In my alone-time, I realized He (God) was a (my) She. A Mother. I realized (S)He was a friend and partner in this journey, that God would take whatever form I needed at the time, in each moment, and in every circumstance.

In that moment, you were God. I know that there is a distinction between the two, and the connotation could be, for some, blasphemous; but for me, you represented a spiritual manifestation of God in human form. I needed God to be there, to hold my hand, to look me in the face as I gazed back. I needed God to see me, to hear me, to talk back. I needed to cry for my former self, to let her go, to release her, as well as to be acknowledged as something new, and I needed someone to help guide me to that newness. You were God.

In that moment you said to me, "Do your work, baby." At that moment, I heard God. I also heard that I was okay. I was going to be okay. I was enough. I had what it would take to do the work, because it was who I was. It is who I be. In that moment, I knew that I could not only do the work, but that I would have everything I needed to accomplish the task in this time of my life: clarity, experience, intelligence, and passion.

Thank you for being a representation of what I know to be God: caring, compassionate, forthright, stern, deliberate, loving, direct, and wise. The more I read your work, the more I understand why sister, mother, mentor, Creator, spirit, divine gift, the Almighty used you to articulate to me more that which was spoken but that which you could not have spoken. Yet...
I heard you. I was listening. I am doing.

In humble reflection,
Tiffany

Meditation:
"For when a daughter makes a conscious effort to connect to our wisdom, that is when an ancestor mother [a sister/mother/mentor/spirit guide] must reach out a helping hand"

Jackson-Opoku,1997, p. 227, as cited by Dillard
in *Learning to (Re)member the Things We've Learned to Forget*, p. 45

That same day, Dr. Dillard responded. This was her response:

Tiffany, dear Tiffany,

And I thought I was simply gon read your words, respond, and go on about my business?!!??? But here I sit, reduced to tears by a profound sense of gratitude and love. And so much of this, I know, is the emotional and spiritual aftermath of last week's election and the absolute betrayal (yet again) of our people. And of my sisters. But, in the midst of my sadness, here comes Tiffany Williams, mirroring my own words back to me and, in that way, extending and allowing me to see myself more clearly. I have felt over the past week very much like your piece about nakedness: trying to find the right words in the right tone to respond to the multiple requests I have received to "say something" about last week's election. I can't. More than that, I don't want to. And just like God sent me to you on that day, so the Creator sends you today full circle back to me to do a

similar healing. I thank you for sharing, and I thank you mostly for doing your work. It looks good on you. And it teaches and heals all that it encounters. That's the best kind of work ever.

More later but again, so very grateful for your spirit, courage, and wisdom, wise sister. Keep going.
Love and more love,
Cynthia D.

Being in the presence of Great Ones is an honor and also a responsibility. As a young educator-scholar-activist, I recognized that I had a responsibility to let her know the words did not fall on deaf ears. The Great Ones do not want us to be like them, as in imitation. The Great Ones want for us to be Great, like them. To find our genius! I say finding your genius as a way of answering the question: What are you passionate about? Finding your genius is also an entry point to answer the call to do your work! I knew it was not to be a sad imitation of my advisor Dr. Denise, a copy of my colleagues JJ and Peggy, or a replica of the Great Ones like Dr. Dillard. I was also a Great One. I just need to remember!

Reflection: ***Tiffany36*** *- What I Know Now*

A call to action is easy to say but difficult to accomplish if I were not willing to do my work. It would have been an uncomfortable mess as I made my way through the program without learning who I was but as my Dean, Dr. Michael Dantley, always said to graduate students, "You must write your way out of a PhD program." I listened because I knew that, on the other side, I would be okay. He is also one of The Great Ones!

Another signpost that you are in the presence of a Great One is when person speaks life, love, and wisdom into dark places in your life. In one instance, I was celebrating with a colleague her completion in the program. She was PhinisheD! Watching my cohort cross over is a happy occasion but can also be stressful. In those moments, people would ask me, "When do you defend?" But, I'd ask myself, "Am I good enough?"

During my colleague's celebration, a phone call interrupted my downward spiral thinking. It was my mother. So, I took the call in the midst of the party. I went to a spot where I could hear her better. We talked briefly about where I was and what I was doing, and she said,

“You will be there soon, honey. I believe in you.” I smiled and returned to the table at the restaurant as Dr. Sheri Leafgren, A Great One who is also on my committee, joined us. Sheri is high spirited and critically conscious, with a splash of flower child with all of the peace and love of that 60s era. I love her, and she loves me. Trying not to be rude, I quickly told my mother that I would call her back later, and as I was doing so, Sheri came over.

Sheri: Who’s that?

Me: My mom

Sheri: Can I talk to her?

Me: (Puzzled and confused) Sure.

Sheri took my phone and said, “Your daughter is a genius. Thank you for sharing her with us.” In that moment, I wanted to die. I felt a twinge in the pit of my stomach. In my head, I heard, “I ain’t no damn genius!!! Not even close!” Then, the voice of the Great Ones started to echo. “Own your genius. Transforming from student to teacher has taken place. Now, you teach! You are responsible for what you know, and you know much. You do not honor the legacy of those before you with doubt, fear, and shame.”

In that moment, I realized that I had to stop shying away from other’s recognizing that I had crossed into a greater part of myself, a transformed self. I had to own my genius. Many times, I had attributed my genius to something else, something outside of myself, thereby, disrespecting the very nature of the process, of my work. I would say, “I am not a genius. I have one.” At this moment, I would no longer say that my genius rests outside of me. I will live with the discomfort until it is no longer there. I am a genius, although brand new. Nonetheless, I AM A GENIUS. For creative souls, our art is life. My art is teaching. I teach to create critically conscious minions infused with seeds of onto-epistemological curiosity (Freire)—about the world and about themselves. My art is writing. I write myself into existence. I write for liberation.

“Create dangerously, for people who read dangerously…writing, knowing in part that no matter how trivial your words seem, someday, somewhere, someone may risk his or her life to read them.”

-Edwidge Danticat

Lamentation

04/22/16

Baby Catchers and Storytellers

The most important people of any community are the baby catchers and the storytellers.
The baby catcher stands guide, makes way, and gives support while mothers bring new life into temporal space.
She champions for the mother and child in a time of pain and struggle.
She passes along the little one, the joy and hope to the world brought forth from its mother.
She proclaims the arrival of a new generation.
She hears the first songs of love as baby cries a song from heaven.
She sees true love at its most holy and sacred as mother cradles new life in her arms.
She knows God as she works in HER service and acts as HER handmaiden.

The storyteller remembers generations past.
She tells the story of victories, triumphs, loss, and hopelessness.
She speaks of mountains climbed, battles fought, and changing seasons.
She remembers the elder in parables and the passing of loved ones.
She knows secrets, remedies, recipes, and gossip.
She tells the tales of grandmothers and grandfathers of decades long gone.

She speaks the history and strength of her nation.
She passes on dignity, hope, and pride of her ancestry.
She looks into the eyes of the young and speaks the wisdom of the old.
She laments the folly of fools to those not yet old enough to walk.
She chastises and cautions and admonishes and advises.
She warns and whispers and shouts out loud and cries.
She mourns the loss of wisdom as the old ones die.
She remembers and speaks their legacy as they cross over to the other side.
She instructs a new generation with the love she has in her heart.
She helps to guide them forward in peace and pride in their coat of arms.
She knows and she has been told and tells what she has been taught;
to teach them, to lead them, to guide a nation never to be last.

Those women,
these are women from
African ancestry and time.

Those women,
these women are here of our time.

They are doctors and healers,
midwives and nurses.
They are school teachers and professors,
preachers and prophets.

I am of their legacy.
I am from their tribe.
I am from this heritage.
I am priestess, prophet, teacher.
I am a storyteller.

Lessons Learned: To be Wild and Well is to be Free

Historically, women who were labeled as wild were considered insane or bewitched (Estes, 1992). Estes said, "It is not coincidental that wolves and coyotes, bears, and wildish women had similar reputations" (p. 1). This reputation describes wild women as, "innately dangerous, and ravenous" (p. 1). She describes wild as "to live a natural life, one in which the *criatura*, creature, has innate integrity and healthy boundaries" (p. 6). Estes challenges the European archetype of wild woman as dangerous by suggesting wildness is necessary for the health and wellbeing of women. She notes that both wolves and women share certain "psychic characteristics," like "keen sensing, playful spirit, and a heightened capacity for devotion" that possess "great endurance and strength," are "deeply intuitive," and "intensely concerned for their young, their mates, and their pack" (p. 1). Further, "she understands the words wild and woman intuitively" (p. 4).

Wildness and wellness is demonstrated by acts of self-love and care, resisting set norms, beliefs, and behaviors, challenging racial and gender politics and institutions of oppression and domination based upon race, class, and sex (Collins, 2004; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981).

Declaring one's identity—scholarly, social, spiritual—positions the Black woman as radical Black female subject. Here she can exist unapologetically, which mirrors hooks' notions of being *wild* and being *well* (hooks, 1992, p. 49). It is in this expression of wholeness that Black women and girls are able to make themselves visible. They can name, define, and defend themselves against other forms of *mis*representation, silencing, and erasure. Being free in her mind, body, and spirit moves the Black woman forward to express freedom in all aspects of life. This type of freedom would not be possible without developing a sense of radical Black female (inter)subjectivity.

Legacy

> Dillard (2012) said,
>
> one of the many ways that African feminist scholars work within endarkened frameworks are (re)membering or putting back together notions of time that honor and lift up 'the relationships that linger there,' which act as 'an attempt to ask a different set of questions, starting first with ourselves.'" (p. 10)

A portion of the reflection above, which I called "Lamentation," was written when I heard of my paternal grandmother's passing. She was in her 80s and had transitioned peacefully. Still, her death bore a sense of emptiness in my soul, because I felt heaviness at the loss of my elders. In retrospect, my heart was broken, because I felt a generation of elders was passing yet few were ready, by choice or by necessity, to take up the mantle or to continue guiding the younger generations.

In the lamentation, I sought to honor my foremothers and speak aloud the lesson I learned while sharing this life journey. Gladys Williams, my grandmother, taught me how to own my beauty. I would sit and watch her get dressed. She was meticulous in the way she routinely got ready for the day. My sister, cousin, and I would be running around the house, but I would stop in my tracks when I saw my grandmother in the bathroom mirror. I would go the door of her room and watch her lay out her garments and accessories. I would play in her makeup and watch her paint her nails. I learned how to participate as a member of another religious group from being next to her in Kingdom Hall. I learned order and cleanliness while washing the color coded dishes my sister, cousin, and I were assigned. Mine was yellow, I think. I remembered loving my grandmother and wanting to be as graceful and kind as she was.

Janie Marie Simmons, my daddy's older sister, I say your name. She and her daughter, Gladys Marie Rhodes Martin, (living), named after both our grandmother and her mother, taught me to love and cherish my own strength. Sylvia Journee, my mother's eldest sister, I say her name, was the one who named her business after me, Tiffany's Bakery. She bore no daughters, but loved me as her own. She uplifted all her girls—sisters, nieces, granddaughters—with her presence and drive. I learned to be the leader of my own destiny from her. My love for these women was often overshadowed by their love and care for me. I honor them by owning my beauty, strength, and drive by uplifting Black girls and women just as they had placed me on their shoulders. These are the Great Ones!

Much of this same mentorship happened in the academy. I am in close proximity of the Great Ones but was taught not to imitate them. For me, it was the metaphor of young David as the shepherd boy and King Saul in the face of Goliath (I Samuel 17:32-40). David showed up for battle to fight the giant, Goliath. There were many soldiers dressed for battle who were afraid. David was given the King's armor but could not wear it. It was not made for him nor was he fit to wear it. David knew to use what he had in his hand; he knew he had to use what was in his own arsenal: smooth stones and a sling. The Great Ones have big shoes to fill. Not my size. My lesson was that I am not meant to fill their shoes, but I am meant to stand on their shoulders and take the leap. I was meant to stand and fight using what I already knew using my gifts, my craft, and my skills. Using them would be the only way to win.

> "Speak. Speak. And speak some more. Speak until the words feel comfortable in your mouth. Speak them in ways that have love at the center, especially love of self. Speak them because we have the responsibility, once we have learned and healed ourselves, to go and teach and heal someone else. And we heal and 'fight the fight' as Yvonne suggested yesterday by showing up. Healthy. Strong. *Whole*. Embodying a keen sense of what our part of the work is, our Nia (purpose) for being here at this moment on this Earth in these bodies. And what beautiful bodies we are!"
>
> - Cynthia Dillard (2000)
>
> *Learning to (Re)member The Things We've Learned to Forget: Endarkened Feminisms, Spirituality, & the Sacred Nature of Research and Teaching*

Love and Spirit in Teaching and Research

Another life-lesson was love as a pedagogical practice. hooks (2000b) said, "a love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well" (p. 87), which "transforms our lives by offering us a different set of values to live by" (p. 88). This implies one must practice love of self before one can show up as love for others. Further, love is exemplified when each individual can live wholeheartedly.

Love as a pedagogical practice does not live as *eros*, lust, or as an intimate expression in European or contemporary definitions. hooks (2000b) said that embracing a love ethic means that we utilize all the dimensions of love—"care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect and knowledge"—in our everyday lives (p. 94). As a Western, patriarchal, sexist notion, love deviates from the spiritual, which becomes commodified or proselytized as sexual, deviant, and foreign. When we return to spiritual connotations of love as expressions of the spirit, we are able to see that "spirit is fundamental to the nature of learning, teaching, and by extension, research" (Dillard, 2012, p. 4).

Critical Moment 2: TED Talks and My Creative Genius

04/20/ 2016

American Educational Research Association Conference, San Antonio, Texas

Creative Therapy by TED

I am in my hotel room, bathing while listening to TED talks, feeling disconnected. Nonetheless, I decided to attend AERA after a hiatus from conferences. My hiatus was activated when I had a disagreement of sorts with an organizer of one of the conferences for which I am a member. I was working as a graduate student representative, but I felt there was no respect for my position, contributions, and talents. I was bothered by the whole "conference thing" because I was working and actively promoting graduate student participation, as well as trying to facilitate collaborative work with seasoned scholars. My efforts were being stalled, which lead me to shift gears, but I was pissed. How was it that students were seen as a problem? Was I not capable of leadership? Why was I being kept in the position of servant rather than viewed as one who serves?

Dr. Denise had encouraged me to keep moving forward with my writing, presenting, and working in conference space but mostly writing. So, I am here. I still want to disappear, though. From my work, from my life, especially this life, from everything.

Let me just say, I am not suicidal. I do not want to die, physically. I am not going to kill myself. That being said, I wanted to disappear because I felt spiritually and emotionally dead. Maybe I just want to run away. Or maybe I just need to be right where I am.

Over the past few months, I hover back and forth between bliss & joy and anxiety & depression; life abundantly and wanting to die. Unfortunately, these are not new feelings for me. When I am feeling high, I am like a freight train! I am moving and making lots of noise while expending lots of energy. I am full of creativity that cannot be stopped, nor does it want to be. When I am feeling low, I am like a screaming child no one can hear. I am walking behind my mother as I wipe tears with my hand and on her skirt tail. Screaming! Sometimes, I think I am being ignored. Other times, I hide because I am ashamed. Once more, I wonder how it is that I am so highly functioning yet so manic depressive. Imposter! Faking it! Wearing a mask. Trying to figure things out while trying to figure me out.

Being the self-diagnosed, intellectual genius that I am, I decided my therapy should be TED talks. These could not be just any TED talks though. I needed TED talks for writers, because I should be writing. My writing alarm says time to write. I came here to write. My advisor helped me with my writing outline, so I can start writing. But, still, I cannot write. I am paralyzed, again. So, I take another bath. This time I soak. Maybe the last 3 baths—well, showers—were not helpful. I needed to be submerged, covered maybe, so I sit and listen to TED talks. I figure an 18-20-minute talk should be enough to supercharge my writing reserves because they were empty. I had nothing, and most of all, I felt nothing.

Writing, for me, is about more than just pen to paper. It is about the moment. It is about an overwhelming, cannot write fast enough because the words are flowing like a waterfall kind of moment. It is peace in my heart and calm in my body. It is nirvana. You get it. But, I seemed to be lost to that moment. Not lost in it. Lost to it. So, I sought inspiration. TED Talks.

My intellectual need for inspiration from, who I deemed, like-minded individuals who had been there, done that, and could tell me how to get there led me to Shonda Rhimes' talk and her story from her recent book, *Year of Yes*. I had been listening to the book on the plane. Between moments of tears and moments of laugh-out-loud familiarity with the mommy wars, I felt a kindredness with her. Maybe, it was that she and I shared an astrological sign, Capricorn, and birth month, January. I felt she was relatable. She and I are single, Black mothers with teenagers who sometimes loved us and other times

not. We wear capes by day and flower halos made by fairies by night. This is how I had come to imagine her, because that was what I was doing. Relatable.

I listened to her story about the rule. The law that she made for herself of not being able to say no. Everything anyone had asked of her would be yes. It was heartfelt and life-changing for her, but I still felt empty. I had no problem with yes. I was saying yes already. I can admit to saying no to some things, but overall, yes was a permanent part of my vocabulary. It was not my solution. My problem had not been solved. The empty. The non-writing.

Shonda's talks ended, and the next group of suggested talks popped up on my Kindle. Elizabeth Gilbert was in the group, so I selected her. The feminist in me reminded me that we shared a gender and a passion for writing. She could possibly be the person to help me out of the writing abyss. The title, *Your Elusive Creative Genius*, seemed a fitting title to my problem, so I started listening eagerly awaiting my snap-out-of-it moment.

As she spoke, the atmosphere changed in the room. It was not because of what she was saying. She was comical and relatable like Shonda, but she reminded me of what I had forgotten about my writing process. She said, I am not a genius, I have a genius (paraphrase). She was referencing how creative energy lived outside of self. She talked about in ancient times; people believed geniuses were actual spiritual or physical beings who visited humans to share divine wisdom and knowledge they acquired from the gods. They did not exist within humans but alongside humans as guides. In that moment, I realized I had forgotten my genius. Soon, I realized that I was not listening, because I started to feel it. That it that was THE it I had been waiting for. The solution to my writing problem. She had come back; my it. Now, I know what she is. She is my genius.

My genius has a name. I wrote about her a few years back in a writing piece called *A Slave with No Name*, but I call her Sarah. Sarah was my spirit guide or genius. I believed she was a person who lived before. Maybe as a slave, maybe not, but she was a person. She had also grown to become a part of me. She would comfort me or slap my face if necessary. She was my number one cheerleader and my truth telling soul sista. For a while, she was gone. She left me, and I felt lost. I felt like I was going through the moments and movements of academia, of motherhood, of being who I thought I was supposed to be, pretending I had it and we were okay. But, I felt abandoned and I was drowning. Now, sitting in a bathtub, immersed in tepid water, listening to the sound of

my own breathing, Sarah hovered over me, and I felt calm. In an instant, I knew what to say, what to write.

Sarah's energy hovered over mine as she poured liquified words onto my dry, barren soul. Her hand touched mine, my writing hand, and I leaped from the water dripping words from my skin. I caught the words and pressed them firmly to the paper. She danced, and words spun from her body like gold and silver ribbons flowing to me, covering my nakedness as I wrote what I heard, because I could hear her. The words flowed. They were feelings connected to moments within me recalling and reviving old "writing" moments.

"Write about the writing," she said. "That is the work you must do."

"Nobody writes, really, about the process of writing" I replied, "The writing that is produced must be a finished product; though it has its origins in chaos; in moments; in movement."

"Write about the writing," she said.

She reminded me of the moment I sat in a meeting with my committee. She said, "Tiffany, write about the process of writing; your process." I was confused at first, because I had already written about one hundred pages prior about what I thought my committee wanted.

"Write about the writing," she said.

As she unwound her jeweled toned ribbons, my pent-up feelings of pressure to produce and perform as an academic emerged. Who cares about my writing process. Academic writing was not the same as creative writing for sure. My love for writing was about its creativity, but I needed academic work for the space I was in.

"Write about the writing," she said.

I was a writer! I am a writer, and writing is what I do. But the process was not always legible or coherent. The writing process, my writing process, was not to be known to others. Maybe, because I was still figuring it out myself. I was sacred. It was private. It was my vulnerability. It was my non-writing.

"Write about the writing," she said.

What I had come to know in that moment was that writing creatively is dynamic for me, not one dimensional or static. But, I needed to tell its story. Writing was the bright beam of light dancing around my hotel room. It was the ghost who sat next to me under the starry night sky. Writing was my spirit guide. Writing was Sarah. My concern was that

nobody would care about Sarah, at least not yet or at least not in the context for which I was being asked to write her story.

The writing I was supposed to be doing was academic, not stories. The writing I was supposed to be doing was my dissertation work—not writing about my feelings, about Sarah or whatever she had to say. But to me, they were the same. They were connected, and Sarah, my it, my genius, reminded me of that.

Creativity is not rational. Creativity must not be timed. It must be given time to bloom, to dance. Whether in a rural classroom, in a law office, or tagging the L train in New York City, creativity needs space. It must collide with, connect to, and coexist before giving up its secrets. She must deform, reform, and transform before she brings new light and perspective into the world. Time and creativity under rationality become enemies, yet they co-mingle energies when you sit and soak.

Creativity is not rational. It is paranormal. It is a feeling. It is a soul-connection to and through space and time. It connects the knower and the seeker as partners in the process of writing. The seeker becomes the scribe. It is soul-knowing. This knowing, sometimes, cannot be uttered, not in an instant, of course. First, she must dance. First, she must holler. First, she hovers. Then, she can reveal her secrets. Then, she can speak. In these moments, her knowing becomes part of the seeker. She comes to connect to something within the seeker to give clarity, to shock, to challenge, to transform, to calm. She is my genius. I am not. Yet. Though, she is a part of me. Knowing takes time. Here is what I know…

Knowing, Time, and Production

When creative beings, especially writers, are pressured by deadlines or restraints, we fail. This is not to say all writers fail, but some of us, we fail. I say "we" because I am a writer. I made this declaration about two years ago after realizing writing "comes" to me. When I say it comes to me[9], I mean Sarah and I talk. At least Sarah talks, and I listen, and I write. Maybe I am Sarah's assistant, dedicated to being her scribe, but for all intents and

[9] A note on proprioceptive writing: the word proprioception comes from the Latin pro-prius, meaning "one's own," which normally refers to our body's proprioceptive system. To say, I feel something "in my bones and in my muscles" would be to feel proprioceptively. To write proprioceptively involves inner listening and exploration of what you hear. Through proprioception, I am able to synthesize emotion, intellect, and imagination. For more on the process, read *Writing The Mind Alive: The Proprioceptive Method for Finding Your Authentic Voice*, by Linda Trichter Metcalf and Tobin Simon (2002).

purposes, I write, therefore, I take credit as author. As noted before, Sarah is not real. Not physical or on the material plane. She is a ghost or spirit or apparition. She is real for me, because we work together. We write. We co-lab. We co-mingle. We co-theorize. We co-exist. Sarah, like me, is very capricious; Sarah and I are full of contradictions yet connected intuitively to/with one another.

In the same manner, we feel agitation when the connections to the intuitive or spirit in academic work is undervalued. When production rules our day, the need to produce paralyzes us. Moreover, the need to produce quality, academic work stifles us. This is not to say creative work is not quality. There is a matter of distinction between the two that suggests creativity has no place in academe, much like schooling. At the onset, it paralyzes me. There is nothing. No words. No feelings. No moments. No movement. Just nothing.

The difference between my writing, the creative work, and that writing, is that the academic work strips us of time and puts restraints on what is or can be produced. It restricts our creativity. Academic writing is concise sentence structure with citations and references. Creative writing is strings of words and streams of consciousness riddled with imagery and metaphor. This and that are not the same. Academic writing is produced according to a rational, objective format that removes the self, its feelings, and is void of inner thought or reflection (or is it?). Creative writing is the moments of coffee, the jolt in the middle of the night, the frustrations of the day, the yearning and the longing. Then, the words. Its references are memories, and its citations are familiar feelings. Not rational but not irrational; it is non-rational. It is not opposite or inferior or dichotomous; just different.

As a self-described creative academic, I have come to call others like me: creators of light and life who reflect onto us their creative products we consume. This is the kind of scholarship in which I can read between the lines and reflect on their words. I would assume they too have a similar process—the same dilemma. They take time to steal away. They take time to reflect. They use time to heal and recover. They sit in time, reflect on time, and process with time. They sit in spaces of familiarity and comfort. Homeplace. These creative souls marinate in, tussle with, and confront their present moments. They blissfully or tumultuously hover in their past to reimagine their futures. In these simultaneous spaces, past, present, and future, they be. I liken their process to mine as I become knower.

Production, at face value, is not an evil or harmful thing. What can make production a detrimental instrument is how it has become the primary source of evaluation; a measurement for success and achievement. But, how do we measure pre-production? Pre-production is the work we have done before the actual product gets done. It is the working, the doing, the fretting, the anxiety. It is the gathering, the contemplation, the reflection, and the revelation. How is pre-production quantified? How is it included as a valid and legitimate contribution to the overall evaluation of what qualifies as production? Can pre-production be shown as outcomes to be determined as one's growth, performance or measures for compensation and recognition and reward? Pre-production is the process of seeker becoming knower. It is the chaotic flow of energy from ghost to host. Pre-production, for some, is the thoughts, feelings, agony, sleepless nights, joy, and anxiety of planning for what is expected to be produced. The result is the synergy of flow and the tears that generate from reading heartfelt poetic writing. It is the product.

Sarah's Parents: The Torrid Affair between Art and Production

Art and production are strange bedfellows. They are past, sometimes present, lovers who rendezvous in the middle of night. One leaves before dawn. They have a love-hate relationship with one another, yet they continue to hold one another's secrets and become jealous at the sight of the other's new love interest. They share no public displays of affection yet kiss and caress one another on sight when behind closed doors. They are lovers but not publicly. They are friends but only in closed quarters.

Art and production are polar opposites yet are attracted to one another for their unique qualities. Art is free and colorful; singing loud and coloring outside the lines. Production is all about planning and follow through; its word is its bond. Art is fashionably late and the life of the party. Production is a homebody in by 10 p.m. and up by 5 a.m. Art can sleep where it closes its eye, too drunk to drive. Production never wears the same outfit twice in a 14-day cycle and overreacts if you do not use a coaster. Yet, they are lovers, in love with the idea of being loved by the other.

Yes, their relationship has problems. Production wants a commitment, and Art wants to see how things go. Art calls at 11 p.m. to say I love you and says can I come over? Production lays in the bed looking at the phone, angry and longing. The cycle is endless. Midnight rendezvous. Passionate pillow play like pen to paper writing their love/hate story. There is beauty. There is magic. There is a product. They creatively

produce something brilliant and uncontainable. She is energy, light, fleeting, and elusive. Her name is Sarah.

The torrid affair of art and production is euphoria and frustration. It resembles a newborn wrapped in a blanket, like a notebook tucked under your arm or a drawing scribbled on the back of a scrap of paper. Sarah is the love child in those moments—those movements between art and production. Now, they have a decision to make. Do they commit to one another in nurturing the new light or do they go their separate ways, occasionally meeting in the night, only to exist as incomplete, broken parts of one another? Art needed a product only production could produce. A dilemma, their dilemma, still unsolved…

Production and Art love what they have produced. Its soulful angles and its melancholic melodies drift across the page as reflection of its mother/father. It dances and is precise, grounded yet flowing, revealing the best of both of its progenitors. Art seems to visit the young one to teach it how to manifest its greatness. Production's watchful eye glances over the lesson to add punctuation. The manifestation of art and production is their joy. Yet, it can be a painful reminder of their fleeting love affair, of how they produce, in the night, as strangers unknown to one another; yet, the young one becomes their connective tissue. Unknown to one another yet knowing one another biblically, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and physically; seldom socially or publicly.

In closing, I cannot say whether the process of art and production is a universal one or even an appropriate one. What I will say is that, for the most part, this is the process for me. I love the time and pre-production of the thing I call art. My art is mine and mine alone. My process is also mine. I called the synergy between pre-production, time, knowing and the product by the name Sarah. She is the haunting and unrest in my body. She is the joy and the admiration of a job done. What is most important is that Sarah and I need time away from one another to grow. She and I need time away to reflect, but we are never far apart. She is part of me. My muse. My genius. My friend.

Reflection: ***Tiffany36*** *- What I Know Now*

Creativity in motion: A slave with no name but I call her Sarah, my muse. For a while now I knew Sarah's name, but I had not yet come to understand why she and I were intertwined, soul-bonded as it were. She had been my strength, but in this critical moment, she was also my

inspiration, my spirit guide, my muse. Sarah and I came to know one another in one of my many moments of despair. I had come to know her because I was at the end of my rope. I wanted to give up. What I learned from her was that giving up was not the same as letting go. She taught me that letting go was freedom, because I was trying to fit where I did not belong. I was trying to wear the king's armor to fight my own Goliath. In order for me to become the knower, I had to know, return to, who I am. It was to be the (re)formed, transformed version of myself. It was time for me to stop try and start doing, no longer regurgitating what I had heard, but starting to write what I knew to be true, my truth.

I remember where I was when I got a piece of a title for my story. My story, something that I never thought to tell. It was November 17, 2013, and I was in the kitchen eating leftovers and pondering why I was struggling so much with trying to write my policy paper, which was due on Tuesday. It was Sunday, Sunday evening. Two weeks prior, I had emailed my advisors to tell them I had decided to quit the PhD program, because I was not smart enough to do it, and I was not sure if it was my dream. After intensive intervention, I was still in Oxford but still struggling. I had decided to be gentle with myself because of many reasons. Can I do it? was always my question as I held my head—in my hands.

I ate the last of the lukewarm, baked chicken. That's when I saw her hair, her shape, her figure. Not literally, but mentally or perhaps spiritually. She had come to me again. I saw her shape, but more so, I felt her spirit. It was as if she had come to encourage me, to scold me, to shake me.

Don't you dare give up! You go on through this here, the transformation, to truly be who you were meant to be.

In that moment it had occurred to me, she was me—my god-consciousness, maybe my angel, or spirit guide. She is like my pulse, my life's blood, there to teach me what no bible, book, person, or other could…. Who I really am, as God sees me.

Sarah and I were linked through our resistance, our tenacity, our desires, or pains, and our dreams. Her resistance was of slavery, tenacious to running away, refusing to be a good lil nigga gal, giving away her body, soul, and spirit to master and the plantation, the pain of the streets, and the auction block, or to the despair of the fields of cotton and the hope in stars in the

distance.

But, I had to find mine…. Mine! My resistance to death, my tenacity to never taking no as the final answer, my desire to achieve more in my life than just being somebody's wife, the pains of Katrina, separation, isolation, and longing, and the hope of transformation as I see the footprint in the sand in front of me.

Now, I see her. Sarah. Now, I know I have always seen her, the slave with no name. Now, I see her as if she were walking the same streets of New Orleans as I did but in tattered clothes and no shoes. I smell the musk from her skin, from hard work, and the dirt under her nails and on her chin. I can hear her making a scene when he came to harm her again. She puts up such a fight, so much so that he just decides to give up. She hides her mulatto babies and lies about their deaths. She gives them to the barren white lady, rather than see them live the life she never had a chance to choose. She plots and plans and never gives up hope, because she knows that, once she does, she is like those hung by the rope.

"Sarah!" I scream, "Please give me your strength."
She turns as if to slap my face and says,
"Guh, what you say to me?! Strength, hope, a dream was never in my reach. But you! You my offspring, nah, live the life you think you see in me."

In shock or in disbelief, I realized that I was wasting my chance. The runaway slave had more to handle than just me putting words on a paper. I wiped my face and checked for a bruise. I fixed myself and got back in the groove. My paper was turned in. Not an A, but not a F. I just kept rememberin', T, be gentle with yourself. With new found perspective and a few more years to go, I will honor Sarah when I walk away from this place because of what I now know. I see myself at the graduation ceremony, with degree in hand. I will always remember that it is by the grace of those who have gone before me that here, now, I stand.

Lesson Learned: The Curriculum from Within - Dangerous Knowledge

For some Black women, the connection to the spirit and the divine is their most important relationship. Whether or not one believes in a higher power or thinks about spirit in terms of nature, spirit in some way is incorporated into the thought processes when she thinks about

herself as whole. Additionally, having a connection to something outside oneself as a means of relating to the divine helps her feel complete in the mind and in the body. This connection helps to guide her as she works with spirit in her daily life.

Dillard (2012) said,

> In many ways the all-encompassing nature of spirit and spirituality defies definition: it is all that is…. Spirituality...involves conscious relationship with the realm of the spirit, with the invisibly permeating, ultimately positive, divine, and evolutionary energies that give rise to and sustain all that exists. (p. 2)

The key in this definition is that spirituality involves consciousness, which is aligned with the very nature of teaching, learning, research, and scholarship. "Privileging the material over the spiritual" (p. 23), Dillard said, is one of the ways African ascendants, in the case of Black women, are seduced away from our ancestral and cultural ways of knowledge production. Dillard suggests that

> in order to (re)member, we must use our whole bodies, minds, and spirits as tools and sites to ask new questions of the goodness of science, of our multiple histories, of theory. These are questions that move far beyond Western pretenses of objectivity to a critical consciousness and awareness of life that has been previously silenced, forgotten, or dismissed entirely. (p. 21)

Incorporating the realm of the spirit into conversations of critical awareness and spirituality as consciousness in theoretical arenas opens the discussion to allow spirit into the realm of curriculum. Prefacing the spirit forces me to recognize that freedom, for me, is curriculum theorizing of and at the spiritual level. The curriculum of the spirit has always been at work in the struggle for a sense of belonging while working through spaces of identity and writing myself into existence. Additionally, theorizing as a "liberatory practice in and of itself" (Baszile, 2006, p. 89) is of greater importance than just working toward a rational, local, and objective way to talk about spirit within the work. In this way, curriculum theorizing of the spirit is a way of returning to the source that I hope "inspires alternative ways of thinking about the imperative role curriculum theorizing plays in moving us toward a vision of educational transformation" (Baszile, 2006, 90).

Understanding curriculum as liberation cannot exist without acknowledging it as conforming and constrictive. For the curriculum to operate as liberatory, Baszile (2006) suggests

that it must embody "discursive formations of identity and difference, to understand curriculum as raced, gendered and classed text, and to overstand the significance of the absence of African American cultural knowledge in curriculum production" (p. 91), which is what she calls dangerous knowledge. Baszile (2006) defines dangerous knowledge as the recognition of knowledge that has "its own dialectical existence in its ability to provoke states of oppression as well as moments of transcendence, simultaneously" (p. 91).

The journey to the true self is a journey of wildness. Wildness, going against the grain, and the metaphorical expression of the inner will to rebel (hooks, 1992) is at the heart of self, my real Black Woman self. The dialogical expression between the past self, **Tiffany6**, and the emergent self, **Tiffany36**, and their tussling with/in/against notions of truth in curricular aesthetics demonstrate the complex contradictions of curricular knowledge production. It is in rememory and the curriculum of spirit intervening at sites of curriculum that healing and transformation can occur (Dillard, 2012). Recognizing new truth through curriculum theorizing towards/with the emergent self "reshapes the present as it creates new visions of the future" (Baszile, 2006, p. 96).

*Healing **Tiffany36**: The Day We Let Go*

After feverishly discarding the piece of life that did not belong to her, **Tiffany36** realized she only had a few pieces that resembled her life. It saddened her because she felt she should have had more to work with. **Tiffany60** looks over at her and tells her:

T60: You are in the best position of your life. Now you get to make use of what you have and seek out what you need to make this life full.
T36: Yeah, how do we do that?
T60: We get to write a new vision for this life, but first,
there, that in your hand, you must let that go.

Tiffany36 opens her hands to see she had been clutching a tiny sliver of glass. She wipes it and holds it to her face. A distorted figure stares back at her. It frightens her so that she drops the glass. It shatters on the ground.

T36: What was that?! Was that me? Am I still not…?
T60: Your eyes fool you, dear. Have another look.

(T60 hands T36 a looking glass from her bag)
When we stop seeing ourselves at other's do, we truly become who we are.
Take another look. What do you see?
T36: I see...

Tiffany 60 hands Tiffany36 a pen…as they write themselves into existence…

Today I Let Go

If I can let go
The darkness will fade
If I can just let go
There's a light all around me
But the pain in my thoughts
Has kept me holding on
But I feel like letting go…

I feel like I am holding on to a tight rope hanging over water.
The wind is blowing strong, and I am in the middle of a storm.
But I want to let go.
I think I am hanging over the Atlantic Ocean to this tight rope.
But I want to let go.
My fingers are slipping, and my heart is pounding.
But I want to let go.
The sharks are circling below.
But I want to let go.
I stretch my leg to feel for the earth beneath my feet
Because I want to let go
I close my eyes tight and release my blood stained hands
Because I had to let go
A few inches and I drop to a solid mass
Because I chose to let go
The sun fights back the clouds and warms my cold battered body
Glad that I let go

Like Noah and Moses on dry land
I feel the earth beneath me
Dry, fertile, lush, and green
Like Eden or Gethsemane

Her hand outstretched to guide mine
Through the thorns and thistles to low hanging fruit trees
“Come, eat, my child, for you are weak and weary.”
“Rest a bit now for soon we must go, here is not your final destination.”
“You have more to become.”

Replenished, no longer famished
I wrestle between the present moment and the past
I stand
I walk
I move forward
I move past
My pain,
My hurt
and memory of darkness,
cold and strain

First a shuffle,
Then a shuttle
Moving in stride
Then a strut
It will take some time
I thought I was failing
I thought I was falling
In the worst of it all
Falling got me where I was going
As falling will soon turn into flying
To move beyond trauma

New legs and feet dry from the sun's heat
They move me to a new place
Even though I still remember the dangerous, acrobatic feat

Hanging
Bleeding
Crying
Scared
The tight rope
The waves
Shark infected waters
Being afraid
Pain has a memory but I chose to let go

11/3/13

Tiffany60: There can be hardship when what you dream for your life and what you see are not the same. When these two things do not mirror one another, you begin to question—which one is real? Is it the one you have or is it the one you hope for? Which one is the truth? Is it what I see, OR is it what I hope to be? I tell you it is both.

Dreams do not die. Dreams only wither away if not planted, cared for, and tended to. You hold the key to the future you desire. Dream a bigger dream! Like seeds, dreams need fertile ground to grow. A toxic mind is never a fertile place. You have already begun this process of transforming. Now, what have you been dreaming about?

Tiffany36: I dream of a place where what I have learned, what I have experienced, and what I hope for can become one. This is a place where we can live, generations together, as happy, healthy, and whole humans. Where the child lives and learns in the same place. Where the elders teach and rest. Where families thrive, not survive. A Community. A Homestead.

Tiffany60: These are your seeds! There have always been historical models of what you speak of. Black Wall Street for instance.

Tiffany36: Yes, but how?

Tiffany60: Seeds go into the ground to die. Death is an inescapable part of the cycle of life. As it is transformed by that death, it can become a tree. Yet, the seed has all it needs to become a tree inside of it already. It is not until it dies to one life that it begins to live another. It will be able to become that which it has the potential to be. It must be transformed.

Tiffany36: You are right! I would not have been able to see that this dream is possible until my own mind was changed. I could not see it being possible within myself. Now, I can see it.

Tiffany60: Dreams hold potential and vision. Movements express intentionality. Change happens in chaos. Only by moving through the stages of life is life truly lived. You hold the dream. Only you can make it come forth.

Tiffany36: So, without faith in action, there can be no substance to the dream. Faith binds hope to our reality, and reality humbles us. What we see keeps us moving forward to embody those dreams, to cause those things we cannot see to manifest. This is why the decree is blank! I am supposed to tell my own story—to write out what I see, feel, dream, become—as I live the life.

Tiffany60: Yes! Without our current reality and our future hope, the dream of life we were destined to live cannot exist. The life we were destined to live was only predestined to be transgressive and transformative, nothing more. This is why the decree is blank, my loves, it is a declaration of freedom; for us to live the life you choose.
Tiffany6: You speak of the decree, the assignment, as it was not written out for us in precise detail!
Tiffany60: It was a clean slate with a celestial signature.
Tiffany6: Yes, I know I cannot remember it all, but I do know it wasn't based on a dream! It was real! He would not do that to us, to me. HE LOVES ME! And I love Him so, No…He would not send me here without direction or a purpose to fulfill.
Tiffany36: You chose to come, Six.
Tiffany6: What?!
Tiffany36: You chose this life. You chose to take it; He didn't send you. You chose to come.
Tiffany60: Yes, we did. This life was not given as an order to fulfill but one to command! The life that was given was a decree of freedom, and you chose a life of extraordinary purpose! This is our life. The decree was our passport, not our instructions. It was just the approval from the Divine. It was a signature and a blank slate that gives us the freedom to live this life as we saw fit. This was the assignment. This is the decree.
Tiffany36: Don't be angry, little one. We were not deceived. It was not until we uncovered the hidden parts of our life that even I was able to see what has become of this life thus far. (Tiffany36 looks over at Tiffany60) T60, how do we become you?

Tiffany6 and Tiffany36 sit as Tiffany60 opens her bag and places her journal on the table. She tells them of the triumphs and struggles to make the life they desired materialize. She speaks of the homestead. She speaks of the community. As tears stream down her cheek, Tiffany36 says, "Tell me more. I love what we become."

***Tiffany60**: Moments of Calm*

Here **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60** continue to piece their life together. In these final moments, we see past, present, and future come to some resolution in their life. By discarding toxic, unhealthy, and colonialist mindsets, **Tiffany6** has begun to heal. By naming herself and defining herself, **Tiffany36** can see herself more clearly. In this chapter, **Tiffany60**,

the future self, talks about life as she lives it. She is older, wiser, and more sure that what she has begun to share would be a path she and cohort would be able to achieve. In these final moments, she shares the dream, now reality, as she gives **Tiffany6** and **Tiffany36** a glimpse of the homestead.

Critical Moment: The Souls of Black Folk: Harmony, Balance, and the Sustainable Community

It's almost sunset. Sitting on the porch hemming her granddaughter's skirt, Tiffany60 looks out over the horizon. Some of the children are covered in dirt and fun, while others study the earthworms they will use to fish tomorrow. Sarah, the youngest of the tribe, sneaks up behind her to watch over her shoulder. The little one studies her grandmother's hands, now older yet strong, as she pulls the needle back and forth through the torn fabric.

"See, now it all better. Nothing a little needle and thread could not fix."

Sarah climbs into the oversized chair with T60 who smiles as the child nestles closer to her. As the sun shares its last bit of warmth and sunlight, a symphony of insects gather and begin to play their familiar tune of gratitude for the soil, harvest and life.

"See how I pull the thread through the little hole right here? That makes a knot so the stitching doesn't come undone. I learned that in home-economics back when I was in school."

Sarah looks at her grandmother with a puzzled look on her face.

"Home economics? What's that?"

"Oh, I'm sorry baby. Home economics is what we call Life Learning Class here, but when I was in school, there was a class called Home Economics that taught girls, mostly, how to cook, clean, sew, and such,"

Sarah frowns, "Why just the girls?"

"I said, mostly girls, honey. You and your brothers and sisters need to know how to care for yourselves, so we teach everyone life skills."

"Seems only fair."

"What's fair got to do with anything."

"Well, fair is when I get to climb trees and play in the dirt like Joshua and Michael, and they get to wash dishes after dinner and do laundry on laundry days."

T60 laughs at the child's logic.

“Well, I guess that is fair, huh. We don’t make rules for girls and boys differently. We share in the responsibility of making our community better for all of us.”

“Yeah, cause me being a girl is just as wonderful as them being boys. We all God’s favorites!”

“That’s right, honey! We all God’s favorites.”

The two sit and listen as some of the children run around the yard playing tag and making mud pies.

“You better get some playing in, dahling. It’s almost dinnertime, and I will need your help cutting up whatever Pop Pop and the others bring from the pond.”

The child leans into her grandmother’s armpit as if to suggest she was comfortable right where she was. T60 lays the fabric, thread, and needle on the table and grabs hold of her little bundle and kisses her forehead.

“Gran’ma, tell me how school was when you was a little girl?”

Tiffany60 leans back in the oversized chair. Closing her eyes, she tells her story:

“School for me was an isolating place. I remember wanting to learn, but I could not relate the lesson to anything in my life. It was not always that I did not understand what the teacher was saying. It was that I could not find an applicable way to use what I was learning every day.

Whether or not the teacher was able, she did not teach the whole child. There was constant testing and evaluation but no room for art, play, and exercise. Children were ‘taught’ that their self-esteem, value, and worth was determined by how well or how poor they did. And teachers would get into trouble if they showed love and care for students because their job was to instruct not nurture or support.

I remember once, a child was placed into a trash receptacle not because she was garbage, but because she was acting silly. After, she felt like garbage. I knew I wanted to change how schools were from that day on.”

Sarah looked up at her grandmother puzzled.

“Gran’ ma, I know nothing of schools like this. Sounds terrible. Like kids in prison. Sounds like kids are held in schools against their will for the sake of learning. That bad! That ain’t right!”

(Tiffany60 laughs) “It felt that way too. I knew your mother was having a terrible time, like I did, and still, off she went to school, too.”

“To school jail?”

“To school jail, baby.”

“Gran’ma, why would you send momma to school when you knew school wasn’t for her like it wasn’t for you?”

“Well, it was what I knew at the time. But, when I learned better, I did better.

I decided to create a place for kids like your mother and you and you siblings, for Black kids, that would be a place where you could learn to love learning.

I knew the problem was not just schooling. It was the way we did education. We, Black folks, were moved away from what we knew about ourselves and how we lived in the world.”

“That’s when you started Hope Academy, Gran’ma?”

“No, baby, Hope Academy was still not the best place for us. In the beginning, it was a good idea to be separate from other folks that did not share in our struggles here in America. But soon as we moved to change the schoolhouse and the curriculum, the same ol’ mess crept in. People askin’, “How do we know if the kids are learning?” “How do we measure it?”

I did some reading and found a sustainable community model for curriculum and education was more important. Here is where we teach the whole person through lived experience. This is how you know how to sew, fish, count, climb trees, catch dragonflies, and pick vegetable from the garden. I learn life cycles by watching the baby chicks grow and respect and reverence for the ecology of life when we slaughter them for food. It’s all here when you wake up in the morning, and you tell it good night before you go to bed.”

“Is that why you make me dig and play and explore and stuff?”

“Why, yes, honey! How else you gonna know what you like and do not like so much. We teach to the future part of the child. You tell us who you are meant to be. If you do not have room to move around, to lay under the oak tree, and to count ants go into the ground, you’ll never be curious enough to ask questions about how, when, where or why things are the way they are.”

“So, home is my classroom?”

“Well our community is our classroom, and as you explore and take in your other lessons…”

“Life skills, Ancestors and Elders, Mathematics, Reading and…”

(Sarah rattles off the names of courses she takes on the homestead)

“Ahhhaaahha, yes! Now you get it! Some structure. Some freedom. A little free time. A lot of love.”

“Guess that’s why I know so much, huh, Gran’ma?”

“Yes, baby, you smart as a whip!”

“A whip? What’s that?”

Tiffany60 looks over the child’s face silently, grateful; she has no idea what a whip is.

“Questions like the busy little bee.”

“Bees pollenate the plant so the food can grow.”

“Yes, even the tiniest of us is important to make sure we all have what we need.”

“I guess it’s okay then, I mean, school? The way I do it.”

“Well, you tell me, little one. At least I know you mother is pleased.”

In the distance, a group of folks tired from a long yet productive day of fishing approach the back porch. Eron, T60’s husband, along with some of the younger boys and girls laugh and joke about the day’s catch.

“You should have let me help with pullin’ him in! We could have fed everyone on the meat from that fish.”

“Nah, next time, I’ll get him next time.”

“Pops, you been after that fish for years. You ain’t gonna get ‘em.”

He laughs. Eron puts his bucket and pole on the edge of the step.

“It’s not about me catching it. It’s in the anticipation that, every time I go to the pond, he’s waiting for me to try. I go to the edge of the water and cast my line waiting on him to get hooked, even though I know he’s so big he will snap my pole like a twig.”

“Well, if you know you won’t catch him, why you keep after it?”

“It’s not about my catching or not catching it, it’s about me showing up. I show up no matter what. We are like two gladiators fighting in the ring. There is no fight if I don’t get in the ring.”

“But you lose every time!” The kids laugh.

Eron smiles and says, “That may be true, but for me, it’s not about that, although I relish the thought of having him on the end of a fork.”

“That big ol’ fish is my own version of fear, of success, of struggle, of perseverance. I go after it because I know it’s hard to reel in. Sure, I got a whole bucket of fish, but that one is the elusive one. And he ain’t scared of nothing, floating and swimming at the surface! Letting me see him.”

“Won’t you just jump in and pull him out!”

The crowd laughs and nods in agreement.

“Yeah, I might one day, but like I said, the joy will come when I pull him in on this line.”

“Daddy, why you think you and that fish fight so much?”

“Well. he fighting for freedom, and I’m doing the same. It’s free in the water. We free on the land. We all fighting for our version of freedom, kid. I guess that’s why in my heart I glad he’s still in the water ‘cuz he’s free. He reminds me I’m free too.”

Tiffany60 looks over the homestead. The kids playing. The sunset. The community of people gathered around the home they have made for themselves. In that moment, she realizes the same freedom within herself. Tears swell in her eyes ‘cause she understands purpose. To be present, to live more, and love more was the final destination.

Eron gently kisses her cheek and the child’s forehead as he walks toward to kitchen.

“Coming lovelies,” as laughter and cooking oil fills the air.

“Grandma, I’m hungry now. Could I help with dinner?”

“Come on little princess, Let’s go help Pop Pop, filet that fish.”

Reflection: Through the eyes of ***Tiffany60***

> “Things falling apart is a kind of testing and also a kind of healing…The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.”
>
> Pema Chodron
>
> *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Ti*mes

On the homestead, we own our own land. We finance and produce our own goods, and we provide services for the community located on the site, as well as in the *real* world. There are tradesmen and women, professional, college educated, business owners there. There are framers, builders, masonry workers, and skilled crafters. There are mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and cousins.

There are single-family homes, a community center, ballparks, and other recreational spaces. There are cows, chickens, goats, fish, frogs, trees, flowers, gardens, pastures, and ponds. A tree-lined boundary, handguns, and a city charter for private communal dwelling secure it. We also have our own police and fire department. There is a place for worship and a place for the

elders to be laid to rest. We supply our own water, food, clothing, and energy. We build our own furniture and support the homestead's infrastructure.

We deliver our own babies, educate them, and don't make them leave when they are "adults." We model a healthy respect for the physical world and a greater one for the spirit. I support them from birth as members of the community and make them responsible for being loving, healthy, and productive humans.

This homestead is not utopic, but is a place of serenity for those who reside there. Just as in the beginning of our establishment, we sought out a way to be democratic and consistent in how we governed the space. There are three-member committees for admission, ordinances, guidelines, and treaties on which members of the community serve for one-year, unpaid terms. Admission is responsible for new members to the community. Ordinances are legislation. Guidelines are judiciary. Treaties are our trade and environmental protection branch. There is no one member that sits as executor. There is an electoral process in which all members of the community of the age of responsibility (age 14) can vote.

The maxim of the community is—when you tend to the souls and spirit of the person the body will follow (Dillard, 2012; Woodson, 1933/2010). There are no moral codes for the community. There is a general code of ethics, which states: "Do no harm, do as you will." This statement is focused more on will rather than harm. When the will is consistent with one's purpose and life call, there will be little harm to others. There is no guideline, policy, or sanction that expresses preference for or against persons based on race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status in any of its activities or operations (Discrimination Statement). The goal was to create a place for us, by us, in order to become.

Lessons Learned: Revolution as Self-transformation

Denise Taliaferro Baszile's work sets the stage for this work when she interrogates and integrates ideas of revolution and movement building as the next phase in the takeover of education, schooling, and the curriculum. When this story came to me, I was in the thralls of preparing the last of the work before you. For the most part, I had already compounded the stories and reflections for the others, but I felt I still was not hearing **Tiffany60**'s story. I would sit and ask her questions, but in her loving and kind way, she was not yet ready to reveal her story to me. So, as I worked on the others, this story started to emerge. It was not in new

knowledge that the revolution, and my liberation, would manifest, but it was in tweaking past knowledge for new application that I would be able to see what **Tiffany60** wanted me to. I understood that I already had in my hands—my pen—what needed to be written. It was the transformation and decolonization of mind that brought me into the knowledge of what Baszile (2017b) described as "in the pursuit of the revolution-not-yet" (p. 206).

I was not present for Dr. Taliaferro Baszile's presidential address at the American Educational Studies Association conference in Seattle, WA, 2016. I was on hiatus, as I spoke of previously in another critical moment. I knew my absence would be a bit disappointing for many, including Dr. Taliaferro Baszile. I also understood in that moment that I was in a place where I felt my cocoon shaking. Like being in a chrysalis, I was transforming into something new and something beautiful. Yet, I did not know what this new, beautiful life would look like. So, during this time of great anxiety, I chose to stay in *my hidden place* (Psalm 91:1).

The content of the talk was no surprise to me when I had the pleasure of reading it. She and I had discussed many times how we seemed to be on the same psychic wavelength and that our spiritual and intellectual eyes and ears saw and heard similar ideas. This is in no way saying my work is as great or as thought-provoking, or as intellectually grounded as my mentor. I grew as a scholar from her intellectual *milk.* Through many conversations where we would sit and contemplate and co-theorize about ideas of justice, liberation, and the ways in which we as intellectual, working class, community building, Black and Brown folks can start the next revolution, this story emerged. I will use her talk as a jumping-off point to express what visions **Tiffany60** shared with me.

Baszile (2017b) draws on the work of Boggs' and Kurashige's (2011) idea of a shift from viewing change as the result of transference of power to a two-sided transformational process of changing not only ourselves but our institutions as well. Similar to Carter G. Woodson's (1933/2010) notion of miseducation, the problem is not only in the institution but also in the minds of those governed by those institutions. Woodson admonished that, for Black Folks to thrive and then flourish, there needed to be a return to our own ways of self and existence in the world, thereby being the authors, advocates, and agents of our own destiny.

In the same manner, Grace Lee Boggs revisits her own work in *The Next American Revolution* (Boggs & Kurashiga, 2011) by building on *Revolution and Evolution* (Boggs & Boggs, 1974), **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60** were able to dialogue about what they saw

and what they knew with regards to education, schooling, and the curriculum. Although she held credential as a professor-instructor, **Tiffany60** realized that schooling and education reified social institutions of oppression, domination, and control because they set forth systems of capitalism, individualism, patriarchy, heteronormacy, and white supremacy in the classroom.

The master's tools will never dismantle the house (Lorde, 1984), unless we all die as Samson (Judges 16:23-31) within the house. The shift was made to what **Tiffany60** calls transformative education or the sustainable community model for schooling, education, and curriculum. This model is similar to what Baszile (2017b) talks about as the shift from "current neoliberal movements" to "two-sided transformational process as revolutionary praxis" (p. 213). **Tiffany60**'s example of a reconceptualized curriculum as one part of a movement is part and parcel of one vision in the search of just teaching practices.

The dialog between **Tiffany60** and Sarah, her granddaughter, illustrates how and why the shift came about. It reflects in similar ways "the James and Grace Lee Boggs School, a model of place-based education, where children learn all subject matter through community improvement projects" (Baszile, 2017b, p. 214).

But before the schooling and education would work for Black folks for the sake of Black folks, **Tiffany60** had a crisis of thought, or what Baszile talks about as a Come to Jesus [10] moment. Sometimes, we get in our own way and the Come to Jesus Moment reflects a time for all stakeholders "to reflect, remember, reassess, refocus, and recommit to the struggle for justice" (Baszile, 2017b, p. 206), as we "remember and reconnect with the revolutionary potential of our work as educators, activists, and learners" (Baszile, 2017b, p. 206).

Additionally, **T60**'s vision was homage to historical references of Black schools, Black communities, Black businesses and infrastructure. What troubled **Tiffany60** was that there were already great schools and other edifices dedicated to the health, wellbeing, and social achievement of Black and Brown folks (HBCU, charter schools, etc.), as well as funding and other opportunities for growth using private, government, or non-profit money. For her, the problem arises when the mission and goal of our institutions conflict with the powerful. She

[10] Come to Jesus meeting: A meeting where someone close to you (e.g. friend, family, etc.) is confronted over behavior that's causing consternation that's negatively affecting your relationship.

found out that, if you use their money, you have to play by their rules, no matter how sincere or well-meaning they appear. This is one of the reasons why Hope Academy did not make sense in the end. It was a shell company front for a high-powered cartel. We would still be subjected to obligation and guidelines set forth that were not in our own best interests. Let me just say, I know I am speaking of the (re)imagined academy as real; I am sure you could picture one actual brick and mortar location in your mind that has similar concerns.

*Working on **Tiffany60**: Black Woman as Radical Subject*

At the end to the conversation between the selves, **Tiffany36** asks the question, *how do we become you*? As I reflect on this question, I am drawn to bell hooks' contemplation of how we, as collective Black women, become radical Black female subjects. In the process of naming and defining ourselves as Black and female, working toward self-love and care, and loving Blackness, hooks admonishes that the process does not end there. She urges that the process must seek to transcend self to collective liberation (1992, p. 43). hooks speaks to such transcendence as beyond private to public, eradication of gender roles, and a politics of collective struggle against systems of oppression.

Because it is my hope that **Tiffany60** appears to be liberated, the question still remains, has she transcended self-actualization to become radical subject? To define what it means to be radical subject is to understand the process as collective in nature. The whole is only as free as its parts; the process does not end with **Tiffany60**'s freedom. As Black woman is she subject or radical subject?

bell hooks (1992) interrogates the differences of subject and radical subject. She suggests that, many times, the journey to self-liberation for Black women centers the journey. The Black woman's journey to self-liberation becomes the focus rather than exploring what happens within. More importantly, the journey seems to culminate in some sort of ending without exploring what comes next. In order for her radicalization to take place, the Black woman must move beyond personal and private self-actualization, for which she is only subject, to collective liberation of others. hooks said,

> Sadly, in much of the fiction by contemporary black women writers, the struggle by black female characters for subjectivity, though forged in radical resistance to the status quo (opposition to racist oppression, less frequently to class and gender) usually takes the form of black women breaking free from boundaries imposed by

> others, only to practice their newfound "freedom" by setting limits and boundaries for themselves. Hence though black women may make themselves "subject" they do not become radical subjects. (p. 47)

For me, those differences between "subject" and "radical subject," as hooks suggests, rest in the realm of radical politics of collective struggle against systems of domination, oppression, and control that inform her individual struggle for self-actualization against racism and sexism privately. One example is the assumed gender roles within the community. For **Tiffany60**, her participation in the community comes through as nurturer not because she is female, but she is educator. The folks who fish who are male could be participating in this activity as a past time or hobbies, not as breadwinners. I think the complicated contradiction here is that there has to be detail and descriptions of "characters" for aesthetics and fullness. These characters simply portray roles or have lived experiences within their community that could mirror oppressive, sexist ideologies. I would argue that, on the journey toward self-actualization, **Tiffany60** had to come to a new understanding that the roles she performs in the community (as mother, as nurturer) would not objectify her any longer. Further, the culture of the community sets forth new behaviors, norms, and values that celebrate both feminine and masculine as two necessary part of the divine whole. In this way, **Tiffany60** could find comfort in whether or not she has to act in ways that appear conformist or sexist yet remain radical subject. In the end, the story has to end somewhere. I believe the telling of such a story left room to imagine what would be next for **Tiffany60**, for Sarah, for her community, and for the homestead.

Education on the Homestead

> It is imperative that we maintain hope even when the harshness of reality may suggest the opposite.
>
> Paulo Freire as cited by bell hooks (2003)
>
> *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*

bell hooks (2003) said,

> We need mass-based political movements calling citizens of this nation to uphold democracy and the rights of everyone to be educated, and to work on behalf of ending domination in all its forms—to work for justice, changing our educational system so that schooling is not a site where students are indoctrinated to support imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy or any ideology, but rather

> where they learn to open their minds, to engage in rigorous study and to think critically. (p. xiii)

The story illustrates a curriculum that is accessible to the children as individuals and collective members of the community. Using Grace Lee Boggs' place-based education or **T60**'s sustainable community model for curriculum and education, students are engaged in schooling as multisensory and multi-evolutionary beings (Zukav, 2014). The homestead is a place where the curriculum made room for the children's future selves, as well as their present selves.

Additionally, Woodson (1933/2010) posits that the education of the Negro should not be a "means of subjection for the benefit of others" (p. 3) and "should be determined by the Negro" according to "his makeup and what his environment requires of him" (p. 4). When miseducation is interrogated as contextual, there needs to be a study of the Negro and her condition so there is an accurate knowledge of the psycho-social and philosophical-existential nature of the Negro (p. 9). In this manner, interrogating the contextualized way miseducation functions in the life of the Negro works toward critical conscious raising.

Black Feminist disruption and interventions on schooling, education, and curriculum articulates, demonstrates, elevates, and generates states of consciousness that are no longer deficient or inferior to white supremacist, racist, sexist, capitalist ideology embedded in the curriculum. By remembering the wildness in such curricula that name, define, and defend endarkened onto-epistemological and existential knowings, she becomes well.

*Working on **Tiffany60**: Dreaming yet Fulfilled*

The Blueprint

The decree was a blank sheet
A celestial clean slate
Mine to do with as I chose
Given as a gift to a young servant
Willing to travel in hostile territory
Joy in telling my truth captures moments of freedom
Much like self-ownership and agency repositioned from the margins
Writing my own tale reclaiming authorship centering me as the main character
Helped to strip away years-worth of depression, self-hatred, and being angry

The journey, heavy laden and full of toil held times of ease
Although times wrapped in unsustained joy
The more I chose to create my own reality,
Zombies and dream killers
Rose up to attack me.
The difficulty in the journey became apparent
When choosing to deviate from scripts written for me (other muthafuka's scripts)
Cursed with bitter ink and malicious intent, scornful from venomous lips
Disguised as words of wisdom trying to chasten me back into
The fold of the lifelessness and ignorance
Fear and suffering entangles my wings to prohibit flight
Removed from chest in heaven
Now unfit to be worn by such an awful sight
Conformity, assimilation, incessant rejection
Boiled in my veins while recreating earthly lessons
The warm summer wind chapped my skin
Like desert heat and fires raged within
Smoldering heat and molten lava erupt
Transformation in my soul has begun
The landscape now clean of greenery and brush that hindered my stroll
I tread now like a firewalker, emancipated,
Liberated from the things that have taken life's toll
A clean slate, a gift of newness given
The journey of freedom as I pull pieces from within.
Seared with fire
Made like glass
Reflective and pure
No more puzzling pieces
Jig-sawed and jagged edges
Now bound together smoothly
Like a Michelangelo's David or a Mona Lisa
A perfect work created in me
A clean slate, the gift of life given and made free

Part 3-Epilogue: We All Present

Chapter Seven: I am Spirit Who Lives in a Body, and I Possess a Soul

This project was dreamt up as a way to write myself and other Black women and girls into existence (Dillard, 2012; hooks, 2003; Walker, 1983). Initially, it came from a place of resistance, or apprehensiveness, because I was not sure of myself as a writer, as a scholar, a healer, and a person. I did not know from the onset of this project where I would end up. In a way, I was not seeking definitive answers to my question but a deeper understanding of myself in context.

Most of my time as a doctoral student I spent writing about my life as I sought to understand how and what I felt about my own mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual states. Turns out, as I read and reflect on other scholars' work, we were all in the similar states of trauma, transition, and liberation (Brown, 2009; Cooper, 2017, 2018; Crenshaw, 1991; Gay, 2017; Love, 2012). One important factor here was a disassociation from spirit and the mind-body connection, because we, Black women and girls, were being conditioned- conformed- to believe our own ways of knowing and understanding ourselves were false or misleading. As a result, many of us are disarticulated (Freire, 1998). Freire talks about how disarticulation between the interpretive discourse and the interests of the interpreter are often hidden in the false call for an objectivity that denies the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity (p. xx). In this work, it was my desire to reconnect and reimagine myself whole, which has given space for such dialogue through counter-storytelling.

It was when I turned within and started to listen to my own voice, the curriculum from within, that I started to shake the confines of white supremacist, patriarchal, racist, and sexist constrictions (hooks, 1984, 1989, 2000a). I began to understand how fragmented and disconnected I was from my own onto-epistemological voice (Dillard, 2012). There had to be a process of decolonization in my mind (Baszile, 2015; Oliver, 2004) before my spirit and body could be free. This project sheds light into the first steps of this intuitive, psychic, and spiritual journey.

The selves, **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60** had to show up before I could move beyond conformity. It is through their curriculum stories that love, healing, and critical self-reflection began. For me, colonization and subjugation began in a child's mind—**T6**—as she sought to make sense of a world not always kind to her. Although **T60** seems to have things all

figured out, she knew love—self-love—was to key to unlocking the door to the spirit. She knew she could not share her wisdom with herself before she acknowledged the origins of her own trauma to make room for critical healing. As **T36** sought meaning and resolution, she had to understand patience and persistence with herself and for herself before she would recognize liberation, which she always had. In the end, all three selves, **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60**, had to be present before they could begin the "difficult work of self-love, loving others, and loving the world" (Baszile, 2015, p. 124).

Lesson Learned: Returning to the Question

Returning to the question, *how does an educator educate in the midst of her own miseducation?*, I reflect on how I would answer or resolve such a question in this work. As a Black woman-scholar-servant-teacher-activist, living fully in my own self-love, critical consciousness, and liberation, I make such an attempt. At the onset of my own discovery of wholeness, I relied on the notion of decolonization as a way toward (1) critical healing, (2) radical love, and (3) developing radical Black female subjectivity. Oliver (2004) suggests decolonizing the psyche by examining "its interconnectedness with the social…to understand the relationship between oppression, social context, and affect" (p. xxii). Critical Race Feminist *currere* (Baszile, 2017), as a methodological framework, works to decolonize the narratives often told by people of color to themselves, about themselves. This autobiographical method of inquiry, with origins in curriculum studies, Black Feminist theory, and critical race theory, honors history as it finds multiple ways for people of color to write a different narrative. Additionally, Critical Race Feminist *currere* moves away from traditional notions of Eurocentric, patriarchal knowing to onto-epistemological warfare situated in endarkened, feminist, indigenous, and spiritual knowledges (Baszile, 2015; Dillard, 2006b, 2012; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2015; hooks, 1984, 1989). For this reason, decolonization for self and collective liberation can be facilitated by the use of Critical Race Feminist *currere*.

The Value in the Telling: Speaking to Myself about Myself with Myself in Context

There can be not critical healing without anger, rage, trauma, love, and hope. Affective knowing, as with proprioception, is the kind of knowing that exists in the soul, spirit, and body of Black women and girls. The process of *currere* makes room for knowledge that is produced and expressed in and through the body (Baszile, 2015). Critical Race Feminist *currere* expands on *currere* in such a way that the study of educational experiences, both schooling and non-

schooling educational experiences, can be explored as a means of self-study and understanding as a "critical social justice project in and of itself" (Baszile, 2015, p. 122). In this work, I was able to use Critical Race Feminist *currere* as a tool for critical educational study as I moved through and among critical moments as "reflection and internal dialogue" in a free flowing in and out of stages sort of way (Baszile, 2015, p. 119). Through the process of storytelling, this work of critical healing becomes a model of working through the self on a journey toward radical love and radical Black female subjectivity.

Additionally, the process of reading Black women's work and critical autobiography can open up critical healing spaces. Critical autobiography is necessary to understand Black radical subjectivity. Baszile (2010) said

> All work is autobiographical. That is, we all bring our sorted histories, hopes, and desires to the project of curriculum theory, hooking onto familiar stories and creating new ones. And to the extent we are in dialogue, in conversation about these stories and the histories in which they are forever entangled, we produce, perform, and engage the "complicated conversations" that is curriculum theory. (p. 483)

In this way, critical healing provides for an in-depth analysis for understanding the complicated conversations that I lived, in my mind and that are mapped onto my body. It is more than the story; it is in the telling of the story where critical healing becomes possible. Retelling can revive bitterness, sadness, anger, and resentment. Truth telling (telling one's truth) and power of narration can diminish the power of trauma as the end of the story. In this power of authorship—telling one's own story—the possibility of trauma is not relived. Authorship allows for narration of truth as lived, as victor, as overcomer, not as victim. Authorship makes room for critical questions such as: Now what? What is next? What was the lesson learned in the process? What do you know now about yourself and the world around you? How have you put those lessons into practice? In asking critical questions, I was able to reimagine—thus, lose sight of—pain, trauma, and sadness as a part of the critical healing process, not just the end of it.

Radical Love as a Practice of Healing: Knowing Oneself to Become Whole

Radical love as Black feminine politics foregrounds the self in the struggle for liberation as a way toward collective healing. Nash (2011) defines love politics as a way "of reclaiming, embracing, and restoring the wounded Black female self" (p. 3) as both "a practice of the self"

and “for constructing political communities…into a theory of justice” (p. 2). Additionally, hooks (2000b) asserts “all great movements for social justice in our society have strongly emphasized a love ethic (p. xvii). When we consider radical self-love and care as acts of resistance on the way toward collective liberation, then the education and decolonization of self becomes a larger complicated conversation (Baszile, 2015). Yet, there is pain and rage in the midst of our self-discovery. Hanh (2001) suggests, “We should not fight anger, because anger is our self, a part of our self. Anger is of an organic nature, like love. We have to take good care of anger” (p. 127). Trauma, pain, and rage can become all-consuming when it is not processed as a part of the critical healing process. Just as the self is a part of the revolutionary process, hope, resistance, love, and joy, she must partake in her own anger to get to the other side. It is in the evolution of the self that we undo, overthrow, and transform subjugation.

The practice of self-love is not your grandparent’s idea of love or the image of a bourgeois couple of the social imagination. It is not limited to eros (love of sexual pleasure and desire towards oneself or another) or agape (love for the divine in connection with self), but it is a practice that is deliberate for the formation of truth-telling (telling one’s truth), critical healing, and self-discovery. bell hooks (2000b) creates a foundation for a radical love, or what she calls a love ethic, using the work of many scholars in the field of psychoanalysis, as well as others who discuss the dimensions of the mind, body, and spirit. She does so for the purpose of giving clarity to what love can be and how other’s collective definitions of love can be used to demystify the subject of love, how love is practiced, and the possibilities of love in healing oneself and others. hooks suggested that a love ethic is possible when there is a definitive meaning of what love is, as well as elements attached to love and how love is practiced as self-love, self-care, and communal love are made manifest in our daily lives. She said,

> A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well. To bring a love ethic to every dimension of our lives, our society would need to embrace change. (p. 87)

Further she said,

> Awakening to love can only happen when we let go of our obsession with power and domination...individuals who choose to love can and do alter our lives in ways that honor the primacy of a love ethic. We do this by choosing to work with individuals we admire and respect; by committing to give all to relationships; by

> embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet. (p. 87-88)

Finally, she suggests,

> Commitment to a love ethic transforms our lives by offering us a different set of values to live by. In large and small ways, we make choices based on a belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions. (p. 88)

The Revolution Has Begun: Currerian Praxis as a Way Toward Radical Black Female Subjectivity

Critical consciousness causes us to interrogate previous ontological and epistemological sensibilities. When we become critically conscious, we interrogate what it is we think we know, where this knowledge came from, who was the source of this knowledge, and how this information is relevant to our realities [and our scholarship]. In this *currerian* project, the "cacophony of voices engaging in curriculum" (Baszile, 2006), namely **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60**, expands on traditional expressions of curriculum theorizing as a "multilayered production of understanding and overstanding curriculum" (p. 90).

On one layer, the journey I describe here as a way into curriculum theorizing signifies the tension between the self in all its emerging (and submerged) states as I struggle with/in/through to make sense of my critical curricular encounters. Yet another layer is experiencing curriculum theorizing as spiritual and epistemological, representing returning and (re)memory Dillard (2012), as a way into recognizing its absence in knowledge and curriculum production (Baszile, 2006). Oliver (2004) suggests that subjectivity is developed in relation to subject position, which can determine one's subject formation or ideas of self. She postulated that subjectivity, or "one's sense of oneself as subject and as agent" (p. xxii), is developed through one's ability to recognize one's own position as an idealized subject within society.

In order to be subject, Black women and girls must develop radical Black female subjectivity as a means to their very survival. Radical Black female subjectivity is having the power of self-identification, self-definition, and self-expression that leads to self-liberation. Additionally, the three fundamental elements for developing, maintaining, and sustaining radical Black female subjectivity in one's daily life and in one's scholarship—naming, defining, and defending our work—call for us [Black female scholars] to make use of teaching and learning as

a way to make space for their own voices by filtering this learning through socio-political, economic, and cultural realities. In this way, these processes of carving out a space for one's voice, while operating as radical Black female subjects, Black female scholars carry out naming and cultivating Black female scholarship.

As I dig into my own memory for these artifacts, I understand this knowing is incomplete (Collins 1990; Dillard 2012; hooks 1992). Also, as I continue to work through, re-read, and reflect on these stories, new points of discussion emerge. Being aware of their "un-finished-ness," as a young emergent Black female scholar, I plan to constantly work toward methodological and academic *clarity* while sustaining a passionate desire for searching and knowing about the self to add to this inaugural work. Being aware of my own socio-cultural psychic process, as I have come to understand it, a dialogue between the selves, helps to advance curriculum theorizing in a way that values and acknowledges the self as integral to the process of education and schooling. Baszile (2006) said,

> To come to the point where one understands the significance of education as a process of self-actualization, as a practice of freedom is to come also into the realm of dangerous knowledge. To continuously know yourself and its relation to the world around you is to understand the imminent danger that such knowledge always evokes, the threat of insanity that lurks as you must figure how to function in a place that must deny your existence for its own sake. Curriculum theorizing toward dangerous knowledge, then, is absolutely connected in fundamental ways to resisting or negotiating the everyday practices of school reform. Granted it is not a revolution, but an evolution of the way we think about the purpose of education. (p. 98)

Implications for Future Research and Limitations

How does this work influence the work of teachers and/or educators? This study is significant because it examines how an educator's implicit and explicit biases, perspectives, and beliefs about the process of public education and schooling impact teaching and learning. Because teaching and research are political acts that can be also acts of revolution and resistance, teachers must examine their own relationships with curriculum, schooling, and education as a way toward understanding their own curriculum stories. Educators who examine the roles

between schooling, education, and the curriculum in their own lived experiences would also be able to understand how these forces impact, inform, and reform students in the classroom.

Aoki (1993) talks about planned versus lived curriculum. He suggested that the lived curriculum "is not the curriculum as laid out in a plan, but a plan more or less lived out" (p. 257). He stated, "it deserves the label 'curriculum' as much as the plan deserves the label 'curriculum-as-plan'" (p. 257). By expanding our understanding of curriculum to encompass more than schooling, social forces and institutions can enter the discussion of how curriculum gets defined. The curriculum stories give testimony of my lived experiences in schooling and non-schooling spaces at the intersections of race, gender, and the curriculum. These curriculum stories can be described as "a continual negotiation of [one's] lived experiences within and against multiple ideologies/discourses of education" for which "this complexity provided not only a counter-narrative to the dominant curriculum histories…but disrupted the very category of 'history'" (Hendry, 2011, p. 2). In this way, this work can be not only for teachers/educators but everyone, *for the love of Black girls*.

For the Love of Black Girls: Be Wild, Be Well, Be Free

> "Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?… Just so's you're sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well."
>
> -Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters*

Critical healing is no trifling task. Critical healing takes work. It also awakens you to your own truth. Critical healing can also be lonely at times. It is truly rewarding in the end, because it allows you to stand in the sun, fully embracing all of its light. It also allows you to stand in the dark and not be afraid. It allows you to embrace it, both light and darkness, and marvel at its wonder. It makes you no longer afraid to dive in, because you know what wellness feels like—what it looks like for you. I am enough because I am wild. This wildness makes me well.

Every woman has a little girl inside of her. Whether her little girl is happy, healthy, and whole or in need of healing, she longs to be seen, heard, and acknowledged. She desires to participate in her own practice of wholeness. This is who I sought to become reconnected to. She is **Tiffany6**. This work expresses a deep love and appreciation for my own little Black girl. By telling her stories, we, **Tiffany6**, **Tiffany36**, and **Tiffany60**, work towards critical healing.

Additionally, through the power of narration, this work demonstrates one way to self-love and care, on the way to collective liberation, particularly for Black women and girls. This is their love story.

Final Thoughts: Dreaming Big, Being Free

11/9/14: Collecting the Broken Pieces of Me Starts Within

Broken shards that cut have caused her pain in the past. She grabs hold to a few and, with bleeding hands, places them in alignment. She places the shards corner to corner and edge to edge, as if working a puzzle, reliving those moments that caused her pain and left the image of wholeness scattered. Abandonment, abuse, feeling neglected, all alone and confused. The agony of feeling forgotten and the longing for love and acceptance that always seemed to be estranged. She continues to collect the shards while fighting through her pain. The blood from her hands and the tears from her eyes somehow turn the red droplet another shade. As she wipes the red smudges from the glass and holds them to her face, the shards begin to shine like a prism as a light comes over her body. She wonders where the light is coming from, since she is still in such a dark place. She does not see the light as some part of her being or the luminescence from within her soul. As the warmth of love and the glory of the Goddess envelops her in grace and peace, she is mesmerized by its presence and contemplates her own dreadful release. She gathers her heart and feels for her soul, as goodness and joy reverberate from her womb, the tips of her toes, and her head full of curls. She recalls her spirit from the universe. She speaks life into her pulse. This mirror, my mirror, piece of glass come forth!

In a moment of excitement, she works frantically to find those missing parts so that she can finally behold the image of wholeness that she hoped to be a reflection of herself. She realizes that the glass only holds a reflection of what it beholds. She wipes her blood from the surface and stares back at herself. Although there are still more shards to recover and there are holes in the reflection, she gazes upon her strength and beauty through the blood stains and red droplets.

Wholeness begin to reflect from her soul and pierces her being. No longer will she live in pieces, but revel in her new-found completeness. I will reconcile and gather again all the pieces of my life that I have buried. I will piece them together moment by moment so that I lived a whole and happy life of freedom. It is only through this reckoning that I

will truly become free. My liberation is for me. It stands for others as an example of what liberation could look like. For they too can be free. Even as I share my truth, I will caution others about healing, as Toni Cade Bambara wrote, and as many Black women have grown to understand, critical healing rips you from the inside. Destructive and devastating, like fire, like the whirlwind. It is also rejuvenating and replenishing, like water, like earth. But, it is in the power of letting go, doing the work of critical healing, that I came into being. That I came to my own rescue.

Selah…

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Appendix A: Critical Questions for Story Selections

Tiffany6

Why did you need to ask “Who am I?” When did you start?

When did you know you were a God being? Where did you learn this?

When did you realize who you were did not line up with the answer to “Who Am I”?

How did you change it/fix it/make the two align?

Tiffany36

Why it is important for other perspectives to enter the space of teaching?

How do you allow spirit to flourish in the classroom? Yourself? The student? The curriculum?

Why is it important for you to examine your why to teaching (after breakdown) and why is it important for those in teaching professions to do the same in Teacher Education (programs)?

Tiffany60

What will be your legacy?

Why is environment important? Teaching environment? Spiritual environment? Social environment? In the realm of the curriculum?

How does love show up in the curriculum?