Thriving and Surviving: The Counternarratives of Black Women Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Degree in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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Graduate Program in Education: Teaching and Learning

The Ohio State University

2017

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Abstract

Black women have a legacy of excellence as teachers, administrators, colleagues, and community members in the field of English language education. However, their expertise, perspectives, and voices continue to be underappreciated, under-researched, and therefore, too often unheard. Furthermore, given the ongoing impact of racism as a systemic force shaping U.S. society and the world, due to the global reach of U.S. culture and economy, Black women's personal and professional lives are necessarily affected. More specifically, Black women are regularly stereotyped and regarded as intellectually, professionally, and aesthetically inferior to their White and male counterparts. Therefore, this dissertation highlights the experiences of Black women teachers of English to speakers of other languages as counternarratives that can "shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform" (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Researchers have published important work on the experiences of teachers of color who are Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and of Black women in education, but there is scant literature specifically centering the experiences of Black women in TESOL. Therefore, this dissertation attends to the following research questions: How do race, gender, and racism impact the personal and professional lives of Black women educators in TESOL? How can their counternarratives

enrich the existing literature that examines relationships among race, gender, and racism for women of color, generally, and Black women educators, specifically? My research is grounded in Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Epistemology—intellectual traditions that definitively center Black and Black women ways of knowing and coming to know and understand the world, and that are unapologetically oriented toward racial equity and justice for all people. Critical race methodology guided my process of collecting, analyzing, and representing data. I conducted conversational interviews and Internet research during the data collection phase; I spoke with seven women over the course of five months and gathered writings from popular media sources, including Internet blogs, news articles, social media sites, and message boards. I use arts based methods and composite counterstory to analyze and represent the wisdom and experience that my participants shared. Findings indicate that: (a) Black women in TESOL experience gendered racism as a normal aspect of their professional and personal lives, domestically and abroad; (b) Black women in TESOL are highly qualified educators committed to professional excellence; and (c) Black women in TESOL enthusiastically engage in cross cultural work, travel, and lifestyles despite the challenges gendered racism presents.

Acknowledgements

I could not have completed this dissertation study, and my graduate program, without the unwavering support of family, friends, my advisor, Dr. Valerie Kinloch, and my committee members, Dr. Cynthia Tyson, Dr. Candace Stout, and Dr. Timothy San Pedro, To the colleagues who have been down since the beginning, much love. And thank you most especially to the women who shared their time, lives, and stories with me, inspiring me along the way.

Peace and Progress.

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Kinloch, V., Burkhard, T., & Penn, C**.** (2017). Beyond School: Examining the Out-of-School Literacies and Counternarratives of Adolescent Learners. In K.A. Hinchman & D.A. Appleman (Eds.), *Adolescent literacy: A handbook of practice-based research.* NY, Guilford Press.

Penn, C., Kinloch, V., & Burkhard, T. (2016). The Languaging Practices and Counternarrative Production of Black Youth. In S. Nichols (Ed.), *Educational policy and youth in the 21st century: Problems, potential, and progress.* Information Age Publishing.

Fields of Study

Major Field: Education: Teaching and Learning

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Chapter 1: Can I Teach Here?

Black Women, Racism, and English Language Education

It's quite challenging at first to be a black woman teaching ESL.[1]

It sucks, but the prejudice exists.[2]

They assume that there's no way a black person could handle all the discrimination.

Ultimately I decided I'll pass on their advice and come anyway.[3]

The above quotes are drawn from an Internet search using the phrase, "Black woman ESL teacher." Black women (and other people of color) frequently ask a version of the following question on TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and ESL (English as a Second Language) message boards: I am a Black woman. Can I teach here? These teachers express concern that their Black womanhood may act as a barrier to employment, workplace respect, and social acceptance. For example, one teacher asks, "What is teaching like in Seoul for an African American woman?" (Trina, n.d.). On another board, a "Black woman ESL teacher with family" questions, "Does race really matter if you are qualified?" (Greenearth, 2009). Their questions suggest that Black women are cognizant of how their racial and gender identities may work against them

[1] http://www.proteacher.net/discussions/showthread.php?t=83039
[2] http://www.goabroad.com/articles/teach-abroad/5-tips-for-teaching-english-abroad-as-a-person-of-color
[2] http://www.goabroad.com/articles/teach-abroad/5-tips-for-teaching-english-abroad-as-a-person-of-color
[3] http://theblackeslteacher.blogspot.com/2006/11/how-it-all-happened.html

despite their qualifications and credentials. They know that employers and students may presume that Black women are incompetent, and treat them accordingly. This is a concern for Black women in TESOL, internationally and at home.

For example, on a Proteacher.net discussion board, one woman writes, “Are there any black ESL Teachers that will be willing to speak to me about the graduate level program and answer any questions I have in general about ESL? Thanks” (javy83, 2008). A White member (presumably, based on the profile picture and subsequent responses) responds by asking why only a Black teacher can offer advice. This member thinks ‘javy83’ “might get a better response if you open it up to all ESL teachers” (ccteacher, 2008). Another member joins the discussion stating, “I am a black ESL teacher. I would be more than willing to answer any questions that you have. It's quite challenging at first to be a black woman teaching ESL. Once the parents figure out that you actually know what you're doing, everything becomes alot easier” (lenarmc, 2008). “Lenarmc” directs the remainder of her post to ‘ccteacher,’ concluding, “It appears that javy83 wants an African American perspective. Can you give her one?” (lenarmc, 2008).

This tension highlights Black women’s awareness of racism in English language education, and White women’s oftentimes swiftness in attempting to discipline Black women for centering race as a primary factor in their professional lives. This typical colorblind response seeks to silence Black people from speaking about and against racism and its role in oppression. It therefore supports a majoritarian narrative that denies the existence of racism and thereby sustains it. However, race, gender, and racism do shape the professional and social landscape of English language education despite its alleged

reputation as a beacon of diversity. My dissertation research centers Black women educators' voices as counternarratives to all others that seek to dismiss, trivialize, and/or misconstrue our4 knowledges and experiences.

Counternarratives are stories that challenge the majoritarian stories of dominant groups—stories that sustain racial oppression—and members of oppressed groups share counternarratives as a way of "destroying mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings . . . [which make] current social arrangements seem fair and natural" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413). I agree with Richard Delgado (1989) that for oppressed groups, such stories can serve "as means of psychic self-preservation [and] as means of lessening their own subordination" (p. 2436). Given the value of counternarratives in both challenging majoritarian stories and enriching the lives of people oppressed by racial inequality, Black women educators' voices are necessary and should be amplified.

Therefore, in this dissertation research study, I address the following research questions: (1) How do race, gender, and racism impact the personal and professional lives of Black women educators in TESOL? (2) How can their counternarratives enrich the existing literature that examines relationships among race, gender, and racism for women of color, generally, and Black women educators, specifically? Addressing these questions is important because: (a) Too many people still believe that Black women live in a post racial, colorblind society, where those who work hard get ahead and enjoy just rewards—and this simply isn't true; (b) Black women educators are beautiful, astute, compassionate

[4] I identify as a Black woman and therefore use first person plural pronouns to make apparent my membership in the community about which I am writing.

people and we have much to offer in and outside the profession. Our counternarratives can show the world who we really are, and improve conditions in our professional lives; (c) I am committed personally and professionally to social justice, which Lee Anne Bell (2013) defines as "a process and a goal . . . [that requires] full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p.21); and finally (d) Black women continue to work hard to gain equal access to the many wonders this world has to offer, and we seek equity, freedom, and joy for ourselves, our students, and other oppressed people.

The remainder of this chapter provides insight into why this topic is important to me, my coming of age in a "genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized" society (Morrison, 1993, p. 4), and my approach to the research. First, I show that gendered racism begins when Black women are Black girls, which allows me to reflect on my own coming to racial consciousness as a Black girl and young Black woman. I end the chapter by positioning myself along the continuum of Black scholarship and activism in education, and situating this dissertation in critical race theory. In Chapter 2, I establish that Black women have a centuries-long legacy of commitment to education and community uplift—a legacy built despite the master narrative of deviance that historically positioned Black women as intellectually, morally, and physically inferior. I then turn to the ongoing impact of gendered racism in the lives of Black women educators, with a concluding focus on the TESOL context.

In Chapter 3, I explain how I deployed critical race methodology to conduct this dissertation research. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define critical race methodology as "a

theoretically grounded approach to research that foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of the research process" with intentional focus on the experiences of students of color. It should challenge "the traditional research paradigms, texts, and theories" (p. 24) used to study and represent students of color and reframe their voices as valuable and necessary. Drawing on interdisciplinary knowledge, critical race methodology must offer "a liberatory or transformative solution to racial, gender and class subordination" (p. 24). Fundamentally, critical race methodology is research undertaken by scholars and practitioners and guided by the principles of critical race theory, and for the purposes of challenging and transforming racial oppression in education. Although Solórzano and Yosso's conceptualization of critical race methodology focuses on students of color, I center on Black teachers whose professional lives are grossly impacted by "the complex intersections of racism, sexism, and the politics of conservatism" (Davis, 1993, p. xii). Critical race methodology, then, is an appropriate means of gathering and analyzing data by and about Black teachers of English language learners.

At the crux of the fourth chapter, which serves as the data/findings chapter, is a composite counterstory. A counterstory refers to a particular type of counternarrative—one written in the context of qualitative research that is theoretically grounded in Critical Race Theory and methodologically attuned to critical race methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Vaught, 2011). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define the counterstory as a "tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege [in ways that] further the struggle for racial reform [and] strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (p. 32). Critical race counterstories can

take several forms, including personal stories (of the writer), other people's stories (related by the writer), or composite stories (cultivated through research) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 32-33). The composite counterstory seeks to emphasize elements of CRT and experiential realities of people of color, and is informed by a cross-section of sources (empirical data, lived experiences, narratives, etc.). I constructed a composite counterstory based on my analysis of the counternarratives of Black women educators, and it addresses my first research question: How do race, gender, and racism impact the personal and professional lives of Black women educators in TESOL? More specifically, I use dialogue, poetry, and essay formats to recount the collective experiences of Black women teachers of English language learners in order to "challenge the perceived wisdom" of dominant society and "transform established belief systems" (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p.36), particularly those that define the field of TESOL.

In the final chapter, I return to my second research question: How can their counternarratives enrich the existing literature that examines the relationships among race, gender, and racism for women of color generally, and Black women educators, specifically?, in order to consider the larger implications of the dissertation research study. Critical race research should contribute to the struggle to eradicate racial inequality and to the process of radical reform in society, so implications are especially important. I believe counterstories—and other scholarship grounded in a commitment to justice—have the potential to alter the way society at large characterizes, regards, and engages with Black communities. Accounts that celebrate Black identities, thought, knowledge, and experiences, and those that highlight the mechanisms of institutional, legal racism,

and inequity can render illogical the stereotypes that dehumanize and marginalize Black people. They can also invalidate liberal discourses of equality and meritocracy, and add to the documented history of resistance. I offer implications for theory, method, and praxis, with a focus on the potential impact of this research on the lived experiences and material realities (e.g. hire, promotion, pay, access to opportunity in teaching and research, quality of life) of Black women in education, including educators, researchers, and students.

The Legacy of Gendered Racism Against Black Women

Despite being undervalued, underrepresented, underpaid, and underestimated, Black women forge ahead as educators, administrators, and adventurers in the field of English language education. Anyone who questions the significance of this resilience in the face of gendered racism has somehow missed the centuries of abuse visited upon Black people in the United States in general, and Black American women in particular. For example, in November of 2016, Pamela Taylor, then-director of a federally funded charitable organization in Clay, West Virginia, tweeted, "It will be so refreshing to have a classy, beautiful, dignified first lady in the White House. I'm tired of seeing a Ape in heels." The city's mayor, Beverly Whaling, also a White woman, rejoined, "just made my day Pam."5 Taylor's comparison of the African American First Lady of the United States (FLOTUS) Mrs. Michelle Obama to her White European successor, Melania Trump, is representative of the vicious dichotomy of White-as-good and Black-as-evil that Black women continue to face centuries after the institution of white supremacy as a system of

[5] http://www.bbc.com/news/election-us-2016-37985967

oppression. Despite Mrs. Obama's elite educational credentials, and her extensive, important work in areas of health and education before and during her time as a very fashion-forward FLOTUS, her worth was called into question throughout her husband's tenure as the President of the United States of America.6

This racially motivated abuse starts when Black women are Black girls, and too often, schools are hotbeds of violence and discrimination. Studies indicate that implicit bias contributes to Black girls being more frequently disciplined than our white female peers, and largely for abstract offenses such as having attitude or being uncooperative (Crenshaw, Ocen, & Nanda, 2015; Anderson, 2016). However, Black girls are often the victims of racially motivated violence in schools after having shown no verbal or physical aggression at all. Take for instance 12-year-old K.P., whose White male classmates tied a rope around her neck so that an attached swing dragged her across the ground, giving her a severe rope burn (Texas, 2016). The boys and the school denied any racial undertones of the violent incident, but K.P. and her parents sued the school for what they believed to be racially motivated bullying.7 In another example, a South Carolina high school student is shown in a 2015 video sitting quietly at her desk, refusing to leave the classroom before a White male security officer grabbed her by the neck, flipped her backwards in her desk, and dragged her across the classroom floor.8 She was arrested and charged with disturbing the peace, despite the support she received in

[6] http://time.com/4573554/michelle-obama-racism-first-lady

[7] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/texas-girl-rope-burn lawsuit_us_5762db56e4b09c926cfe762d

[8] http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/27/us/officers-classroom-fight-with-student-is-caught-on-video.html

challenging the charges from other Black female students and justice-conscious members of the larger community.

In addition to the threat of physical assault, Black girls are regularly sent the message that our naturally born bodies transgress codes of civil decency. In recent years, a nine year old from Texas, a twelve year old from Florida, Black girls at a charter school in Ohio, and Black girls attending schools in the Bahamas and in South Africa, were all told, through either written or unofficial dress code policies, that their natural hair was unacceptable in a learning environment.[9] In each of the aforementioned examples, Black girls, their parents, and community supporters successfully defended the girls' right to learn wearing their natural hair—but harm to our psychological, educational, and emotional well-being is always done in the moment of racial discrimination and exclusion.

A third area of concern for Black girls who grow up to become Black women is having our intellectual capacities called into question. In a 2016 incident, a Georgia high school student recorded her teacher calling her "the dumbest student I've ever met" in response to a question the student asked about his lesson. While recording the lecture on an iPad used to support her limited vision, she captured her teacher further admonishing, "You know what your purpose is going to be? To have sex and have children because

[9]See: http://www.9news.com/news/education/school-district-tells-black-9-year-old-to-change-her-hair/166547570; http://www.msnbc.com/the-last-word-94; http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/25/ohio-school-afro-puff-horizon-science-academy_n_3498954.html; http://thegrio.com/2016/02/22/high-school-students-threatened-with-suspension-for-wearing-natural-hair/; http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/09/06/492417635/a-ban-on-black-hairstyles-raises-deeper-issues-about-race

you ain't ever gonna be smart."10 This distressing example calls up stereotypes about intellectual inferiority as well as deviant Black female sexuality and motherhood. I should note that in this example, the offender was a Black male teacher, a fact that highlights the embeddedness of racial stereotypes across racial boundaries and emphasizes rather than contradicts the reality that Black girls and women are too often under attack just for being who we are. Moreover, the impact of these stereotypes is not isolated to egregious, overt offenses as exemplified above, but contributes to a national trend of low expectations, hyper-discipline, and the invisibility of Black girls in school (Womack, 2013; Gershensen, et al, 2016).

Unfortunately, some of my own earliest school memories are moments of racial animus or insensitivity from White students and teachers. There was the time when I was in first grade, attending a predominantly White elementary school in a suburb outside of Columbus, OH. On recess one cold, blustery afternoon, I approached several White female classmates one after another, in search of a playmate, and every person turned her back to me. I scanned the playground for a friendly face, somewhere to go, and noticed a group of girls playing in the sandbox doing cheers. I ran to the sandbox and asked to join but they, too, scoffed at me and ran away. When I close my eyes now, I see my child self, standing, alone, in a sandbox, crying. This school was the place I learned that Black isn't beautiful, or even tolerable, to everyone, and I felt an isolation that, while unmatched in degree, has been normalized as I have matured into an adult in the United States of America.

[10] http://www.ajc.com/news/dumb-teacher-resigns-amid-controversial-comments/8Yplz98RTBueD9SeJ0h1yL/

In the third grade, my White female teacher reported to my mother her concern that I was only choosing to read books that featured Black characters. These were the years of Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry, by Mildred D. Taylor, Zeely by Virginia Hamilton, and Honey I Love, by Eloise Greenfield. I loved these Black girl stories, and was outraged that my otherwise dedicated and caring teacher would take issue with my choices. I've always imagined my mother "going off" on the teacher—after-all, wasn't it my mom, a Kindergarten teacher, who introduced me to the enchanting world of Black literature? Although my mother and I get a good laugh from that early indication of my yearning to be steeped in Black stories, the question I've always wanted to ask that teacher, Why are you threatened by my love for the Black experience,? nags at me still.

And yet, those coming of age experiences with racism, and the literature, songs, movies, and discussions about Black life that I was steeped in as I was growing up in the U.S. Midwest, prepared me to deftly navigate the world as a young Black woman. In high school, I attended an elite, private, predominantly White, girls' school. I was an active member of the Black Awareness Club, and the programs we put on for our schoolmates always amplified stories of Black people in America. We performed For Colored Girls by Ntozake Shange, hosted a Kwanzaa dinner each December, and wrote and performed a play about the Black experience with racism from slavery through the 20th century. I was in high school the year that OJ Simpson was found not guilty of murdering his White ex-wife, a decision that sparked days of frank discussions on race and racism in the United States. Spending so much time as a Black girl growing in consciousness in a predominantly White environment left me with no doubt that there is a sharp disconnect

between the White imagination on race in America and the Black experience of it. Coates (2015) captures this disconnect when he explains that White people's world is a "gorgeous" dream that "smells like peppermint but tastes like strawberry shortcake" (p. 11), while Black people have to find a way to "live free in this black body" (p. 12).

Nevertheless, the school culture was also very supportive of Black students' need to have the time, resources, and opportunities to nurture each other and ourselves as Black girls—and all students were encouraged to embody our motto, Forte et Gratum (strength and grace). Therefore, my schooling experience also fortified my resolve to call out racism and sexism and to speak my truth about how racism shapes my life as a Black woman. My undergraduate college years were marked by a developing passion for Black literature and art, and for my own creative voice. I co-founded an Afro-centric poetry group on campus where we celebrated Blackness, talked a lot about racism and global anti-Blackness, and supported each other emotionally, academically, and socially.

By the time I entered the workforce and the "real world" as a young adult, I understood that the stereotype of Black people in the United States as uncivilized, undereducated, and unkind was deeply and widely entrenched (Baldwin, 1963; Coates, 2015; Davis, 1983; Roberts, 1997; Walker, 1830). I was also well versed in the histories of Black excellence across time, in all walks of life, from science, architecture, and arts, to sports, education, and social justice advocacy. Frankly, I felt empowered to navigate a society wherein I was "not expected to aspire to excellence [but to] make peace with mediocrity" (Baldwin, 1963, p. 7). Shortly after graduating, I began teaching English language classes to adults from places like Somalia, Iraq, and Mexico at a community

college. Though I had not previously considered the teaching profession, I was drawn to a teaching position because it involved working with people from around the world, and I thought my love of literature and writing would translate well to teaching people how to use the English language to navigate a new culture. It was an exciting time—generally speaking, the students exuded nervous excitement, were demonstratively respectful, and were fully engaging.

However, I was sometimes confronted with comments reflecting racial stereotypes from my students, leaving me disappointed, but never surprised.

> "*Before we came here, everyone told us to stay away from Black people. They said Black people are dangerous. We didn't think they could be good like you. You are very nice. You are a good teacher."*

My presence as a Black American woman in the position of English teacher challenged some students' ideas of what it can mean to be Black in the United States (i.e. civilized, intelligent, and personable). Too many of my former students, pleased with my relaxed but purposeful teaching style and my knowledge of the English language, and comforted by the care I show to students (Valenzuela, 2005), have been surprised to learn that I am "only" Black. The implication is that my "good" character is the gift of any number of racial heritages, but not the Black American one I embrace.

I use the term "Black" in this case to refer to people whose ancestral lineage traces back to Africans captured by European imperialists and shipped as slaves to the conquered Indigenous territory that would become the United States of America. I embrace this particular shared identity with Black American women since, as Patricia

Hill Collins (2000) explains, "The vast majority of African- American women were brought to the United States to work as slaves in a situation of oppression . . . [and] the convergence of race, class, and gender oppression characteristic of U.S. slavery shaped all subsequent relationships" (p. 4). Similarly, Andrea Smith (2013) contends that the "logic of slavery" is a central pillar of white supremacy, a system that operates differently for different communities of color. According to Smith, the slavery logic deems Black people as "inherently slaveable" and at "the very bottom of the racial hierarchy," and, therefore can encourage other people of color to take comfort in distinguishing themselves from both Black people and Blackness (pp. 87-88).

My point, however, is not to oversimplify the dynamics of race—I agree with Ladson- Billings' (1998) statement, "our notions of race (and its use) are so complex that even when it fails to "make sense" we continue to employ and deploy it" (p. 9). Still, the focus of my dissertation research is not in teasing out the complexities of what it means to be a Black American woman, but in better understanding some of the lived experiences born out of identifying and being identified and positioned as such. Therefore, I want to be clear that while I recognize the value in theorizing the concept of race, since I believe such analyses can help us better understand and therefore work against racial oppression, I also recognize the ongoing importance of race as a defining feature of identity since, according to Crenshaw (1988), "History has shown that the most valuable political asset of the Black community has been its ability to assert a collective identity and to name its collective political reality" (p. 1336).

In this dissertation study, I focus specifically on the experiences of women who identify as Black American and who have experience teaching English language courses either to: (a) People who are immigrants, refugees, or visitors to the United States; or (b) People of other nations learning English outside of the United States. I illuminate some of the ways that Black women teachers experience race and gendered-racism in TESOL contexts. In my dissertation, Black women educators' narratives challenge majoritarian stories (or master narratives), which are scripted according to the "bundle of presuppositions, perceived wisdoms, and shared cultural understandings" of persons in the dominant White race (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, p. 462), and often accepted by people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 28). Master narratives "make current social arrangements [of racial inequality] seem fair and natural" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413). However, the women I connected with in my research adamantly rejected the "current social arrangements," particularly in the United States, that routinely shortchange and disenfranchise Black women—despite our demonstrated prowess across all sectors of society.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), a ubiquitous story within the master narrative on race in the United States places racial oppression in a shameful colonial past that has been overcome due to the hard work of racially harmonious groups who fought for new laws that protect everyone's rights. The redeemed, colorblind society is a neutral one based on merit, where people at the bottom have not taken advantage of the opportunity America offers to the hard working. A related story in this master narrative centers on the inferiority of the Black race. Broadly speaking, this myth casts Black

people as culturally deviant in ways that make us responsible for our still-subordinate status in U.S. society. Black women in particular are characterized as intellectually deficient, morally corrupt, and aesthetically unappealing, or as exceptionally transcending this purported norm (Crenshaw, 2011; Davis, 1983; Roberts, 1997).

Collins (2000) suggests, "these controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (p. 69). Despite the characterization of the U.S. as a colorblind society where all people are valued and treated equally in the above master narrative, oppositional stories from oppressed groups call attention to the ongoing impact of systemic racism in our daily lives, and the legacies of resistance and achievement in spite of it. What follows is one such oppositional account.

"That Spirit of Independence": Black Intellectuals on Freedom

"At the point that she determined to resist her oppression, she was triumphant."
(Bell, 1992a, p. xii)

I am a Black woman in the United States who was raised to declare and to believe that "I'm Black and I'm proud." From this declaration and the lessons that accompanied it grew a commitment to fighting against racism, inequity, and inequality in my life and in the lives of others, and an interest in how Black people have historically fought for the freedom to live and to learn. My quest for knowledge ultimately brought me to western academia, where I have come to know specialized ways of talking about race, education, and social justice. For me, critical race theory and Black Feminist Thought have offered the most meaningful entry into the Black intellectual tradition. Thus, in what follows I offer an interpretation of the academic philosophies that brought me to where I am today,

as a Black woman scholar, educator, and activist in a still-White academy, seeking justice for Black people in education and society.

In 1831, Maria W. Stewart published a political pamphlet in Boston, MA. Her text is one of the earliest published by a Black woman in America (Richardson, 1987), and in it she makes a moral case for the Black community to engage in social justice activism. Stewart wrote, "I now possess that spirit of independence that, were I called upon, would willingly sacrifice my life for the cause of God and my brethren. All the nations of the earth are crying out for liberty and equality. . . shall Afric's sons be silent any longer?" (p. 29). Later she continues, "Sue for your rights and privileges. Know the reason that you cannot attain them. Weary them with your importunities. You can but die if you make the attempt; and we shall certainly die if you do not" (p. 38). Stewart, who had spent her childhood "bound out" (p. 28) as a servant to a White family, nevertheless learned to read "the word and the world" (Freire, 1987). In the above excerpt from her longer treatise, she critiques the U.S. system of white supremacy and calls for activism—two themes that remain central to Black intellectual thought on race and liberation (Austin, 2006; DuBois, 1940; Giddings, 1984).

During the time of Stewart's writing, many Black people in the United States were enslaved; others, like Stewart, lived under conditions of partial, tenuous freedom, given their exclusion from full and equal participation in society, and the dominant ideology of white supremacy that denied Black humanity (Walker, 1830; Stewart, 1831). Consider, for example, that John Calhoun (1837), who was Vice President of the United States when Stewart published her text, believed that the relationship between Black

slaves and White slave masters was "instead of an evil, a good, a positive good, [since] there never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion did not . . . live upon the labor of the other ("Slavery a positive good," para. 6). Calhoun's words highlight the commonly held belief that the good life for White people in the United States was dependent upon the exploited labor of Black people. However, slavery, disenfranchisement, and exclusion from educational and economic opportunities notwithstanding, Black people, like Stewart, rejected their debased social status and resisted racial oppression in many ways.

One important means of resistance was in how Black people developed a discourse around race, equity, and justice. As early as the 1830s, several Black leaders (e.g. David Walker, Maria Stewart, and Denmark Vesey) had emerged, and they understood that the key motivating factor in legal, political, and cultural developments in the United States was the commitment to white supremacist ideology and wealth acquisition. Furthermore, Black people's lived reality made excruciatingly clear that the degradation of African descended and Indigenous peoples was the fundamental component to building a nation that guaranteed societal and economic power to stakeholders in the system of white supremacy. Although a detailed history of white supremacist ideology in scientific, religious, legal, and social arenas in the western world is beyond the scope of this study, a few examples of the guiding principles that shaped the institutionalization of white supremacist racism are necessary. Take for example the sentiments of David Hume (1748/1854), an eighteenth century philosopher who insisted

upon the inferiority of non-white, non-western people. Hume argued that, by nature, Whites are the most civilized people in the world. He wrote:

> I am apt to suspect the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the Whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the Whites . . . have something still eminent about them, in their valor, form of government, or some other particular. (p. 228)

Similarly, U.S. President Thomas Jefferson (1801) was convinced of the partiality of Black people's humanity. He believed that "blacks . . . are inferior to the whites in the endowments of both body and mind" (p. 150). Given his influential role as a political founder of the U.S. as an independent nation, it is not surprising that white supremacist ideology was embedded into the constitution. I agree with David Walker (1830) who asked, "Do you believe that the assertions of such a man, will pass away into oblivion unobserved by this people and the world? If you do you are much mistaken" (p. 26). On this same point, Tate (1997) writes:

> The framers of the constitution laid the legal groundwork for a White-Black binary opposition by a) counting Blacks as three-fifths a person, b) delaying for 20 years the effective date for outlawing the slave trade and c) obligating the government to uphold fugitive slaves laws and to use its troops to end Black insurrections and violence. (p. 201)

Unarguably, the idea that Black people were inferior to White people was a definitive factor in the development of U.S. government and culture. Moreover, even though White males were the officially empowered founders and philosophers of the nation, White women, on the whole, supported white supremacy. In her essay on racism and feminism, bell hooks (1981) contends, "white women reformers in the 1830s . . . attacked slavery, not racism [and] they remained committed to white racist supremacy despite their

antislavery work" (p. 125). hooks argues that White women benefitted from the subordinated status of Black people, and that this relative power within the otherwise patriarchal society mitigated their potential solidarity with Black women. Therefore, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, and well into the 20th, Black people in the United States were excluded, often by law, from the civil rights that White people in America enjoyed. When laws did not forbid Black people from full participation in free living, social custom assured the tenuous nature of Black liberty in the United States.

Still, Black people like Maria W. Stewart, David Walker, and others—such as Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. Dubois, and Ida B. Wells--lobbied on behalf of Black people and in favor of freedom, equity, and equality. During the first half of the 20th century, Black people continued advocating for equity and justice. For example, Mary McLeod Bethune founded a school (Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, now Bethune Cookman University), Ida B. Wells published news articles (Free Speech), and Billie Holiday sang ballads (Strange Fruit), all working toward the same goal: that the hierarchy of White over Black people and everyone else (Delgado, 1989) be destroyed, because all people deserve freedom from oppression, freedom to thrive. Particularly in the realm of education, scholar-activists like W.E.B. Dubois (1909) and Carter G. Woodson (1933) insisted that education for Black people in the United States is an invaluable, non-negotiable component to equity and freedom. The continuum of Black scholarship and activism, then, has been fortified through years of struggle; however, it is neither one-dimensional nor static. Black intellectual activism is multifaceted, and adjusts alongside changes in how white supremacy functions in society.

An example of the tradition of Black scholarship that came to occupy "a space in the canon of recognized intellectual movements that few other race-oriented formations have achieved" (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1257) is critical race theory (CRT). It offers a lens and a language by which to examine how structural inequality oppresses Black people and other marginalized groups, particularly in the post-Civil Rights era (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). At its core are the analysis of how law and policy institutionalize, maintain, and otherwise support white supremacist racism, and a call to social justice action to destroy it (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). In the next section, I situate CRT in the larger trajectory of intellectual activism focused on educational equity for Black people in the United States.

A Multicultural Education for Black Students

According to Banks (1993), the field of multicultural education is intended to "reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social class groups will experience educational equality" (p. 3). Banks suggests that the multicultural education movement, which took shape during the 1970s, must be understood in light of its historical connection to the ethnic studies movement, which was pioneered by Black American intellectuals like Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Dubois during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During this period, Black people were still denied the same resources and opportunities to learn afforded to their White counterparts based on the longstanding national position that Black people were not equal citizens in the eyes of the law. Du Bois (1909) wrote, "America is not another word for Opportunity to all" (p. 143). Thus, the ethnic studies movement was part of a

larger struggle for equitable and rigorous education for Black people that would promote Black history, knowledge, and perspectives.

In contrast to the ethnic studies movement, led by Black intellectuals concerned with Black history, culture, and community empowerment, predominantly White liberals developed the field of intercultural education in the 1940s, which "promoted a weak form of diversity and the notion that "we are different but the same" (Banks, 1993, p. 16). Banks argues that both the ethnic studies and the intercultural education movements influenced the field of multicultural education as it emerged in the post civil rights era, but that the founding scholars of multicultural education were most directly inspired by the early ethnic studies leaders. With this history in mind, the importance of centering racial justice in multicultural education theory and practice becomes clear.

However, Banks and others (Gaye, 2004; Kinloch, 2010; Nieto, 2010;) are critical of the brand of multicultural education that, like the intercultural education movement, promotes racial harmony and celebration of diverse cultures without consideration of racial justice, or systematic inclusion of cultural diversity, in education. In one such critique, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate (1995) propose that race was under-theorized in education studies, and that critical race theory offers a framework through which to critically examine how racism shapes education for Black students. Their analysis emphasized two major points: (a) How the "property rights of whiteness" works to ensure inequality for Black students in schools; and (b) The need to challenge the reliance on "liberal ideology that offers no radical change in the current order" in multicultural education (p. 62). Several scholars, (including Harper, 2009; Milner, 2008;

Roberts, Bell, & Murphy, 2008; and Williams & Portman, 2014) have since taken up Ladson-Billings and Tate's proposal to deploy CRT in examining the structural inequities that Black people face in education. However, because the origins of the movement remain crucial to understanding its utility in education studies, the following review of Critical Race Theory centers on its origins in legal theory, while including examples of its application in the educational arena.

Theoretical Foundations: Critical Race Theory

My approach to research is grounded in critical race theory (CRT), because it felt right to me when I began formal academic training in education scholarship. I have stuck with it—or it with me—because the idea that the "race card" is always already in play resonates with me, and the call to social justice in research inspires me. Critical race theory is an activist-oriented intellectual tradition focused on the pervasiveness of white supremacist racism in law, policy, and practice throughout every fabric of the United States (Bell, 1973; Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado & Stefancic, 1993). Dramatic changes to law during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, such as Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) and the Civil Rights Act (1964), promised equality for all people across the areas of education, economics, housing, and the workforce. By the 1970s, however, widespread dissatisfaction with the still subordinate status of Black Americans and other racially marginalized groups in the United States mounted (Newton, Hilliard, & Weise, 2002). Alongside the social movements unfolding in neighborhoods across the nation, students and faculty on college and university campuses engaged in social action and scholarly endeavors that critiqued racism and that became canonized as critical race

theory (Delgado, 2009; Crenshaw, 2011). Though many roots and routes (Gilroy, 1993) constitute the historical origins of CRT, Kimberlé Crenshaw's (2011) "sociocultural narrative" of CRT offers one important account of its formation.

According to Crenshaw (2011), the racial climate and student activism at Harvard Law School in the 1980's exemplified both the lack of progress in equity for the Black citizenry following celebrated victories of the Civil Rights Movement, and the resilience of Black persons fighting for justice. Following on the heels of Derrick Bell's departure from Harvard University's Law School in 1982, and the consequential loss of the Constitutional Law and Minority Issues course, young Black law students there protested the absence of Black law faculty. They also protested the lack of courses centered on race, and lobbied in vain for the reinstatement of the class and the appointment of additional Black faculty. Ultimately, Harvard instituted an "Alternative Course," which "reflected—as well as helped to create—the sense that it was meaningful to build an oppositional community of left scholars of color within the mainstream legal academy" (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xxii.) During this same period, students of color across the country demanded racial justice at their respective institutions (Delgado, 2009).

Alongside their battles against systemic racism in academic institutions, some scholars of color (Matsuda, 1987; Cook, 1995; Crenshaw, 1988) also critiqued the predominantly White cadre of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) scholars for their failure to incorporate race as a primary unit of analysis in law (Crenshaw, 2011). The CLS movement "challenged liberalism from the Left, denying that law is neutral, that every

case has a single answer, and that rights are of importance" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 155). However, although CLS was useful in its critique of the neutrality of law, in its interrogation of power, and in its support, in some cases, of Black student activism, racism was not a central topic in the field. Race-conscious scholars (such as Neil Gotanda, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, and bell hooks) challenged this oversight during the 1986 'Sounds of Silence' Critical Legal Studies conference; they publicly discussed race and interrogated racism within and outside of CLS (Crenshaw, 2011). Matsuda's (1987) "minority critique" articulates the dissatisfaction of many scholars of color who were critical of the CLS field. While she acknowledges the attractiveness of the CLS position that "legal ideals are manipulable and that law serves to legitimate existing maldistributions of wealth and power" (p. 327), she suggests that the experiences of people of color lend invaluable insight into the development of critical legal theory.

According to Crenshaw (2011), scholars of color who found themselves both within and outside of the CLS movement built a community in "speakeasy" spaces, where they sought to "discuss and sometimes vent about the politics and dialogues taking place on the public stage" (p. 1298). Their scholarship emphasized the role of racism and sexism in the foundations of American jurisprudence, and uncovered how liberal discourse and associated policies maintain white privilege and power by way of, rather than despite, its ideals of equality, meritocracy, and rights (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1988; Delgado, 1984; Matsuda, 1987). In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, and Stephanie Phillips invited scholars to a convent near Madison, Wisconsin, to develop

CRT as an academic field and social movement (Crenshaw,et al., 1995, p. xxvii). That meeting marked a key moment in the development of a discipline fundamentally concerned with "studying and transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3).

Some of the central tenets include: the normalcy of racism and the intersectionality of identities and forms of oppression, the concept of interest convergence, the critique of liberalism, the construction and use of counterstories, and the call to action (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The aforementioned tenets are interrelated, and although not exhaustive, are representative of a complex, interdisciplinary, and expanding field. For example, beyond education studies, the core themes of CRT have been applied in other areas such as LatCrit and TribalCrit (Castagano & Lee, 2007; Brayboy, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). My review, however, highlights critical race scholarship in education. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), critical race analyses in education remain important because "race is still [the most] significant factor in determining [educational] inequity in the United States" (p. 58).

Defining Tenets of CRT

Normalcy of racism

Race, according to Lee (1995), is a construct "always defined by its social context, and never solely by its content" (p. 447). A person's race can change according to factors as diverse as Supreme Court decisions, census forms, or the perception of others one encounters in public spaces. It is therefore important, in discussions of race

and racism, to clearly define race. Castañeda and Zúñiga's (2013) conception of race is useful:

> Race is a sociopolitical, not a biological construct, one that is created and reinforced by social and institutional norms and practices, as well as individual attitudes and behaviors. . . . [It] emerged historically in the United States to justify the dominance of peoples defined as "white" (colonists/settlers) over other peoples defined as racially different or inferior. (p. 58)

In other words, race is the "child of racism" (Coates, 2015, p. 7), and, in turn, is part of the "cultural heritage" of the United States of America (Lawrence, 1995, p. 237). Critical race conceptions of racism emphasize the intersection of race and power in both producing and maintaining oppression. Wellman's definition of racism as "culturally sanctioned beliefs which, regardless of the intentions involved, defend the advantages Whites have because of the subordinated positions of racial minorities" (cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 55) gets to this notion of power and the exclusive right of White people to call on it. However, Coates' (2015) statement that racism is "the need to ascribe bone-deep features to people and then humiliate, reduce, and destroy them" (p. 7) hits at the felt experience of racism.

Taken together, these definitions highlight how racism is institutionalized and therefore often unseen, but also experienced in ways that regularly hurt (and often kill) its victims. It follows, then, that, racism is normal—"an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (Bell, 1992a, p. ix). Its ubiquity manifests in the cultural fabric of daily life through social customs, institutional policies, media representations, consumer products, and political, business, and education leaders, that

privilege, praise, and reflect White people, and exclude, devalue, or demonize Black and other people of color (Lawrence, 1995a; Lipsitz, 1998; McIntosh, 1990). Because of this entrenchment, "a large part of the behavior that produces racial discrimination is influenced by unconscious racial motivation" (Lawrence, 1995a, p. 237).

Furthermore, the inevitability of racism results from, rather than in spite of, cultural and constitutional discourses of "liberty and justice for all" (Bell, 1992b; Crenshaw, 1988). In fact, the superiority of White identity established in the constitution was predicated upon explicit dehumanization of Black people; the nation's political founders never intended for Black people in the United States to enjoy the freedoms guaranteed to White people (Tate, 1997). On the contrary, as Cheryl Harris (1993) explains, "white identity became the basis of racialized privilege that was ratified and legitimated in law as a type of status property [which evolved in the post-Civil Rights era] through the law's ratification of the settled expectations of relative white privilege as a legitimate and natural baseline" (p. 1714). In other words, because white privilege was legally sanctioned at the nation's outset, White people came to experience racial privilege as a natural condition. Once legalized racial discrimination was overturned during the Civil Rights era, white privilege had already concretized into the nation's "business as usual" behavior. Today, racism is maintained as part of the ongoing "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz, 1998).

As a defining feature of the United States, whiteness, according to Harris (1993), is a form of property that only White people can own, which confers "legal legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline,

while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination" (p. 1715). Therefore, racism can thrive in the absence of overt, violent aggressions by White persons against people of color, and White people can benefit from their embodied privilege while engaging in discourses of equality (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 2011). Therefore, critical race analyses of legal decisions uncover how law is utilized to protect white power (Bell, 1980; Freeman, 1978; Matsuda, 1987).

Furthermore, as the "central ideological underpinning of American society" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1336), racism is not easily reigned in and racists are not easily disciplined by civil rights law, since, as Derrick Bell (1992a) contends, "[r]acism is more than a group of bad white folks whose discriminatory predilections can be controlled by well-formed laws, vigorously enforced" (p. 55). Critical race scholarship insists upon a revisiting of civil rights law to better understand how White people as a group continue to experience social, educational, political, and economic advantages while Black people and other racial groups remain marginalized and experience discrimination (Bell, 1976; 1980; Crenshaw, 1988).

In the education arena, institutionalized racism accounts for inequities in graduation rates, suspension, differential treatment and achievement, and other phenomena for Black students "in more detailed ways" (as cited in Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 52). For example, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) link an analysis of property rights and race to explain how institutionalized racism manifests in education. They argue that property value is directly connected to quality of education through per pupil expenditures, curriculum, facilities, and personnel; the more access a student or her

family has to property, the better learning opportunities she will be afforded (p. 54). In other words, because property rights intersect with whiteness, and because Black people were historically excluded from rights to property, Black students continue to experience subpar schooling conditions, hostile learning environments, and strained relationships with peers and educators (Berry & Stovall, 2013; Caton, 2012; Kynard, 2011; Williams & Portman, 2014).

Nevertheless, because racism is so seamlessly integrated throughout the educational system, Black students' experiences of racial oppression in schools is often ignored or even justified (Castagano, 2009; De-Cuir-Gunby, 2007; Harper, 2009). For instance, Duncan (2002) found that a high school lauded for its racial diversity and culture of care had low rates of enrollment and retention for Black male students. Moreover, the placement of Black male students "beyond love," or outside the possibility of positive inclusion in a community, happened as a result of school's social climate, rather than in spite of it. Furthermore, Black male students were aware and critical of the ways students, teachers, and administrators at the school often regarded Black males as "strange" and therefore responsible for their own exclusion and marginalization. Duncan concludes that to change inequitable conditions, we must invite Black youth to tell their stories and be willing "to see the world through their eyes" (p.141).

Another concept that scholars take up to demonstrate the everyday nature of racism in education is microaggressions. According to Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2001), the term is taken from the field of psychiatry, where Chester Pierce initially emphasized that contemporary racism is typified by the "cumulative miniassault" (p. 60).

Offenders typically do not recognize the subtle, everyday expressions of racism (such as a White person complimenting a Black person's eloquent speech, or asking a Latina what country she is from), or they assume the miniassaults to be isolated, insignificant, and irrelevant.

However, members of groups subjugated by racial and other oppressions insist that these "thousand tiny cuts" (Ladson-Billings, 2006b, p. 586) are deeply felt and impact their lives significantly. For example, Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso, (2001) found that collegiate microaggressions, which are "filtered through layers of racial stereotypes" (p. 68) of Black students, can manifest as students' feelings of invisibility and being out of place, racist and sexist comments, low expectations from professors, double-standards in treatment by police and college personnel, and assumptions about the role of affirmative action in the students' presence on campus. Similarly, research into microaggressions experienced by Chicana/o students in academia reveals that "even at high levels of accomplishment [. . .] where educational conditions might on the surface appear to be equal, the forms of inequality and discrimination can be more subtle and harder to see" (Solórzano, 1998, p. 132). Effects on students included feelings of intellectual inadequacy, mental fatigue, and changing classes, majors, and schools (Solórzano, 1998).

Intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality draws attention to the role of multiple identities and contexts in how people experience marginalization or privilege. Since, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), "no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity (p.

11), societal conditions impact individuals and groups differently. Therefore, narrowly conceived definitions of equality and discrimination can render some people's experiences invisible and thereby perpetuate inequality (Crenshaw, 1991, 1992). In Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) argues for a more complex analysis of how racism and sexism shape Black women's experiences in male-dominated antiracist scholarship, white-centered feminist politics, and in law. She writes, "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, [and] any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (p. 58). Her analysis of antidiscrimination cases demonstrates how Black women were denied the protections of antidiscrimination law because their experiences with sex discrimination were impacted by their race, and their experiences of racial discrimination were impacted by their sex. Nonetheless, the courts did not view Black women as representative of all women, or all Black people. Black women's experiences were therefore rendered invisible and irrelevant. Crenshaw concludes that it is important to consider how "Black women are caught between ideological and political currents that combine first to create and then to bury Black women's experiences" (p. 69).

Educational research that accounts for intersectionality emphasizes the importance of always looking to uncover those student voices that are not being heard, particularly when working to improve learning conditions with respect to racial equality (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante 2009; Covarrubias, 2011; Gillborn, 2015).

Oftentimes, a singular framework for understanding racial discrimination becomes so ubiquitous that outlier experiences go unnoticed. For example, Buenavista, et al., (2009) argue that the model minority myth inaccurately portrays the Asian community as a relatively privileged monolithic group whose lived conditions do not warrant investigation in educational research centered on racial equality. The concept of the model minority suggests because some racial or ethnic groups, in this case, Asian Americans and/or Asians in America, experience educational and economic success, those racial or ethnic groups that do not demonstrate comparable levels of achievement have poor cultural values and work ethic (Buenavista et al, 2009). The myth assumes that people of Asian descent are a monolith who universally enjoy the access to education and high rates of achievement that some subgroups, such as Korean and Chinese, experience. However, given the "diverse histories, immigration patterns, and cultures" (p. 71) of the ethnic groups that constitute the Asian American community, the model minority construct "obscures the racial and ethnic disparities in socioeconomic status and educational attainment from which some Asian American subpopulations [such as Pilipino, Vietnamese, and Cambodian] suffer" (p. 71).

Interest Convergence

In 1980, Derrick Bell posited that a majority of Black children in the country were still attending schools inferior to and segregated from those attended by White children. This despite the celebrated Brown vs. Board of Education (1954) decision that required desegregation and equality in schooling opportunities. He attributed the ongoing disparity in educational equity amongst White and Black children to the courts' fundamental

disinterest in addressing racial harm against people of color. Instead of demonstrating ethical progress in the courts or in mainstream culture, Brown and other civil rights advancements represent what Bell refers to as interest convergence, or "the outward manifestations of unspoken and perhaps subconscious judicial conclusions that the remedies, if granted, will secure, advance, or at least not harm societal interests deemed important by middle and upper class whites" (p. 523).

In other words, Black people will only win battles in the racial justice war when the victory proves in some way beneficial for the dominant White community. With respect to the Brown decision, Bell argues that multiple sociopolitical factors, including the international community's perception of the United States, led to legal decisions favoring the Black community, which had been terrorized for decades, but denied redress in the courts. A sudden surge of goodwill amongst the White establishment, however, was not primary (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Bell's proposition does not invalidate the honorable, tireless work of activists who fought for the decision, or its utility for demanding civil rights in education. However, Bell urges the Black community to be cautious in celebrating Brown as a final, definitive victory. With this cautiousness in mind, interest convergence proves to be a helpful analytical tool that allows people to pull back superficial civil rights rhetoric in order to look closely at the experiential impact of equality policies for marginalized communities.

For example, Delgado (2006) utilized the principle of interest convergence to examine the 1952 Hernandez decision, in which the courts classified Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as a locally stigmatized group, citing a history of intense

discrimination in the region. The defendant in the case, who was found guilty of murder by an all-White jury, was given a new trial "in front of a jury from which Mexicans had not been systematically excluded" (p. 35). Despite this momentary acknowledgment of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans as a group deserving protection from civil rights abuses, the decision was not widely cited by future courts in defense of Latina/os who challenged discrimination. Delgado suggests that the Hernandez ruling, like Brown, was strongly influenced by sociopolitical factors related to the Cold War, including the threat of Latin American communism, domestic unrest amongst Latina/os, and the nation's desire to demonstrate concern for Latino/a people. Delgado's analysis of interest convergence in Latina/o civil rights history leads him to conclude that while White people can afford to remain hopeful in the promises of equality, people of color should rely on "knowledge of their own histories" as a means of healing that leads to continued struggle (p. 62).

Educational researchers Castagano and Lee (2007) emphasize the importance of history in considering the material circumstances of Indigenous American students. They utilize the concept of interest convergence to explain how the needs of Indigenous university students went unmet despite official policies that implied cultural sensitivity. Their work highlights how the culture of whiteness at selected universities isolated Native American students, and how one university's diversity mission operated as a public representation of excellence and competence and not as a commitment to social justice. In a related study, Milner (2008) examined how policy decisions that appeared to

promote justice or racial diversity in K-12 education were, in reality, meant to protect White property interests and serve White students and teachers.

This happens, for example, when racial diversity is promoted in teacher education programs in hopes that White students will experience personal and professional development as a result of taking courses with students of color (p. 338). Unfortunately, civil rights law and equality discourse are not typically undergirded with a "satisfaction guarantee." Therefore, as the aforementioned studies demonstrate, the principle of interest convergence can be useful in explaining why racially marginalized groups may continue to experience subpar educational conditions as well as feelings of isolation, frustration, and dismissal, despite official proclamations that support diversity and equality.

Critique of Liberalism

Liberalism in CRT refers to a civil rights philosophy that favors "formal equality in treatment," especially in the law (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 166). From this perspective, formal equality means that people from all racial groups are evaluated according to the same criteria in the present, despite the history of racially discriminatory law and practices in the past that created the very conditions of social inequality people of color seek to remedy. Critical race theorists challenge liberalism, reasoning that the U.S. mantra of "liberty and justice for all" was never intended to apply to Black people or other communities of color. For example, the Constitution was initially predicated "on the protection of individual rights of white men, yet [condoned] the slavery of blacks," despite later amendments correcting the formal dehumanization of Black persons (Bell,

1973, p.190). Therefore, its language and ideology necessarily work against equality for people of color (Harris, 1993). Recognizing the need to fight for equal citizenship under the existing order (Crenshaw, 1988), CRT scholarship highlights the inevitability of inequality within the system as we know it, if we waver in challenging its contradictions. Failing to address the racism inherent in the Constitution and the laws that extend from it masks the historical and ongoing effects of the economic and social divisions set in place by the political founders of the nation (Bell, 1973; Freeman, 1995).

Critical race theorists contend that policies and practices that perpetuate inequality in the post-civil rights era are typically couched in the liberalist rhetoric of equality, colorblindness, neutrality, and meritocracy, and thereby serve and protect White people while masking inequality for others (Harris, 1993; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Crenshaw (1988) explains this disconnect as a difference in how one "[specifies] the world" (p. 1353). From the restrictive interpretation of civil rights, equality is a matter of due process of civil rights law, irrespective of outcomes. This perspective relies on a vision of the world wherein equality has always reigned with sincerity. However, from the expansive, or results-focused view of civil rights discourse, the "belief in colorblindness and equal process . . . would make no sense at all" if various groups experienced historically different treatment and the effects of the disparate treatment were ongoing in the present (p. 1345).

Therefore, the widespread commitment of people in power to formal equality (or equality according to civil rights law, and is focused on fair process rather than equitable results) results in ongoing discrimination against people of color "under a myriad of

guises, most of them either not covered or not easily ascertainable under existing laws (Bell, 1992a, p. 101). This point is illustrated in Castagano's (2009) research at Spruce Middle School, where a liberal discourse of colorblindness, equal opportunity, and individual rights maintained inequitable conditions wherein White students' needs were privileged at the expense of English Language Learners who were non-white, immigrant, and poor. The formal, restrictive approach to equality at Spruce, with its focus on sameness rather than outcomes or results, limited both access and opportunity for transformative learning for students alienated by the dominant culture. Similarly, Buenavista (2010) suggests that colorblind policies of equality earmarked for "non-traditional" students avoid race-consciousness and therefore exclude students Filipino students, who are made vulnerable by complex circumstances related to immigration, racism, and US colonialism. More specifically, many Filipino students face barriers to educational success because their families face linguistic and socioeconomic challenges in the workforce, and students are negatively racialized in their schools and communities. However, "color-blind approaches that deemphasize the significance of examining the educational experiences of youth from specific ethnic and racial communities" (p. 123) ignore, rather than support, Filipino students.

Counterstories

Popular notions of Black inferiority, coupled with liberal discourses that promote formal equality, colorblindness, and meritocracy, support the ubiquity and institutionalization of racism. Critical race theorists maintain that the knowledges and perspectives of Black persons and others marginalized by oppression are valid and

advance the movement toward social justice by challenging mainstream narratives on race, equal opportunity, and responsibility in the United States (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1984; 1989; Matsuda, 1987). This "looking to the bottom," that is, looking to "the actual experience, culture, and intellectual tradition of people of color in America" (Matsuda, 1987, p. 325), is the norm in Critical Race Theory. From a critical race perspective, stories are powerful, since they can shape or destroy "mindset—the bundle of presuppositions, received wisdoms, and shared understandings against which legal [social] and political discourse takes place" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413). In other words, although the dominant group mindset in society justifies "the world as it is, with whites on top and browns and blacks at the bottom" (p. 2413), experiential knowledge from people of color can "open new windows into reality" (p. 2414). In these new realities, storytellers challenge the status quo established by the dominant group. But just as important, sharing stories can "build consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and deeper, more vital ethics" (Delgado, 1989, p. 2413) amongst people in marginalized communities. In critical race scholarship, this "method of telling the stories of people whose experiences are not often told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32) is known as the counterstory.

Counterstories typically take the form of personal story, other people's stories, or composite stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Sharing personal or other people's stories allows researchers to connect theory to real life experiences, and thereby "make it plain" without compromising complexity (Crenshaw, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For example, Cheryl Harris (1993) introduces the concept of whiteness as property with a

narrative about her grandmother, who was born to Black parents but chose to "pass" as a White woman in order to receive social, economic, and educational benefits for her family and herself. By putting a face to an otherwise abstract concept, Harris assists the reader in understanding the material value of the "treasured" rights (e.g. job opportunities, financial reward, protection from racially motivated violence) afforded to those people who "own" a white identity.

In another example, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) include a personal counterstory to demonstrate the concept of curriculum as intellectual property, which they argue accrues disproportionately to White students. Their story explains how one child, attending an affluent, predominantly White high school, had rights to higher quantity and quality courses, as compared to another child, enrolled in a mostly African American district with few options. In both examples, the authors use the experiences of people of color and the form of story to emphasize the role of race and racism in perpetuating social inequality.

Composite counterstories are based on qualitative and quantitative data, as well as personal experiences, and bring to life the central themes of CRT in a story format. For example, in one of Richard Delgado's (2006) composite stories, his "interlocuter and alter ego" named Rodriguez has coffee with a law professor and mentor, during which he shares his dissertation topic, which suggests that interest convergence explains the 1954 Hernandez decision. Rodriguez also critiques celebratory jurisprudence by suggesting that celebration, with its attention to the partial comforts marginalized people understandably begin to enjoy, can become a distraction from the yet to be conquered

monster that is institutional oppression. In their use of dialogue, setting, and character development, the Rodriguez chronicles, like other composite counterstories (Bell, 1987; 1992), provide a richly detailed and nuanced picture of life in U.S. society as experienced by people of color, from the perspective of Critical Race Theory (see Delgado's, 2006, footnote, p. 23).

In the context of education, scholars use the counterstory as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege" and for strengthening "traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). For example, Barbara Love's (2004) composite counterstory challenges the majoritarian narrative on the achievement gap—which emphasizes the failure of Black students to achieve at levels equal to their White counterparts. In her story, a community meeting full of Black leaders from across time discuss the ways white supremacist racism historically disenfranchised Black communities from educational opportunities, despite the tireless, continuous efforts of Black people to acquire education. This imaginary, intergenerational meeting of the minds is filled with the voices that offer differing viewpoints on how to tackle racism in education. Therefore, Love challenges the masternarrative, demonstrates the diversity of thought within the Black community, and celebrates the lives of Black freedom fighters. Other counterstories in education highlight both the challenges people of color face with racism in education, and the ways they demonstrate resilience and resistance as they negotiate it (Duncan, 2010; Harper, 2009; Kohli, 2009; Roberts, Bell, & Murphy, 2008; Smith, Solórzano, & Yosso, 2007;).

Call to Action

According to Lee Anne Bell (2013), social justice is "a process and a goal . . . [that requires] full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs" (p.21). For Derrick Bell (1992a), fighting for social justice within and outside of academia requires a "commitment to courageous struggle whatever the circumstances or the odds" (p. xi). This commitment to social justice is an inseparable component of Critical race theory in part because critical race scholars as well as many people of color outside the academy recognize that the odds, in many ways, continue to favor the status quo of structural and institutional forms of racism that privilege White people (Bell, 1973; 1995; Coates, 2015; Delgado, 2006;). Therefore, critical race theorists in education call for changes to policy, procedure, pedagogy, and perspective in schools and communities that foster social justice (Berry & Stovall, 2013; Harper, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2006a). Furthermore, the commitment to social justice is reflected in the lives of critical race scholars. Recall that the movement was thrust into development when student-activist-scholars demanded racial justice from educational institutions and built community through ongoing meetings where they thought together and supported one another.

A detailing of the advocacy work of scholars who rely on critical race theory is not possible here; however the movement could not advance if they did not continue to demonstrate a commitment to advocating for change within and outside of their academic research. My personal example of a CRT scholar-activist is Cynthia Tyson (2003), professor at The Ohio State University, who encourages students to follow her lead in

keeping social justice at the center of their personal and professional lives. She reminds us, "the time for change is now, and the time for educational research to lead such a change is at hand" (p. 26).

Critiques of Critical Race Theory

There are moments when I am so enveloped in the work of critical race scholars who share my exasperation with racism and my resolve to keep talking about it, that I forget how unpopular the critical race perspective is to many people in and outside of the academy. For example, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1998) recalled that when she and William Tate initially shared their emerging formulation of CRT in education, they were met with "outright hostility" from people who demanded, "What about gender? What about class?" (p. 7). Four years after publishing her article that asked what Critical Race Theory was doing "in a nice field like education" (1998), Kubota (2002) lamented, "discussing racism is often uncomfortable, particularly in TESOL and applied linguistics" (p. 86).

Why do the emphasis on race and challenges to racism make some people so uncomfortable, and so angry? The opposition to focusing on the intersection of race, racism, and power in education is reminiscent of the objection to the Black Lives Matter movement, with the rejoinder that "All Lives Matter." The attempt to move the conversation away from the particular experience of racially oppressed groups, such as Black people, is a denial of what Tyson (2003) calls "the specificity of oppression" (p.19). Despite naysayers, critical race theorists continue to "expose racism in education

and propose radical solutions for addressing it" [by taking] "bold and sometimes unpopular positions" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 22).

In addition to challenges from outside of the discipline, CRT also faces internal critiques by proponents who seek to improve upon its usefulness in effecting change. Areas of concern include the gap between theory and practice, the need to refocus efforts to address the material realities of the most impoverished people of color, a greater focus on the intersection of racism and hypercapitalism, and a return to "hard-nosed social analysis," as opposed to analyses of identity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.107). Delgado and Stefancic contend that the internal debates indicate the growth and development of the discipline, and "do not threaten its solidarity, vitality, or ability to generate vital insights into America's racial predicament" (p. 108). Similarly, I believe that there is no perfect path to liberty, and although it remains important to be critical of the work we do, critical race theory, with its opportunities for expanded vision, offers rigorous and meaningful ways to address and resist white supremacist ideology and systemic racial oppression.

In this dissertation study, critical race theory encouraged my unapologetic focus on Black women's experiences and perspectives as a way to challenge racial inequality and change the biased and inequitable professional milieu we negotiate. When I consider the "why" of this work, Margaret Walker's (1989/2013) poem, For My People, comes to mind. In part, it reads:

> For my people standing staring trying to fashion a better way
> from confusion, from hypocrisy and misunderstanding,
> trying to fashion a world that will hold all the people

(p. 6)

My people are Black women educators who, as I highlight in the chapters to come, regularly deal with "confusion, hypocrisy, and misunderstanding" of who we are and what we can contribute to our schools, communities, and society at large. The next chapter delves more deeply into the historical and ongoing degradation of our personhood, as well as our growing legacy of "fashion[ing] a world" that will hold us, and "all the people" in equal, high regard.

Let a new earth rise.[11]

[11] Walker, M. "For My People."

Chapter 2: Bridges of Triumph:

Black Women Educators Defy the Master Narrative of Deviance

"It's Complicated": A Disclaimer on the Limits of Exploring Black Womanhood

In "Routed Sisterhood," my Master's thesis (2009), I make argue that it is beneficial for Black women in the United States to possess self-agency and a collective identity. Using Paul Gilroy's (1993) concept of the "routes vs. roots" of global Black culture, I explore the shared and divergent characteristics of identity among Black women in the U.S. As I explain there, "In Black Atlantic, Gilroy is concerned with the foundational nature of hybridity in black Diasporic culture. He imagines the global black community as a collection of fractured subjectivities that share political grievances and what he calls "structures of feeling," rather than racial or ethnic sameness. Focusing on the "routes" black life has taken across the Diaspora, he rejects notions of "rootedness."" (p.13). The early 21st century sit-com, "Girlfriends," is the primary data source in my Master's thesis. Characters Joan, Maya, Toni and Lynn are Black women friends who represent different skin tones and hair textures, professions and personalities, backgrounds and lifestyles. Their relationships, often upended but never undone, help me to make the case that

> Black women must construct communities that share a resolve to contest systems of oppression and refute discourses that mark black bodies as inherently inferior,

> and simultaneously acknowledge the disjunctures of experience and identity within those communities. Because black women continue to live in the United States under threat of violence and discrimination, validating the reality of fractured subjectivities within our community, and recognizing the need to collectively contest lasting systems of oppression, remains crucial. (p.14)

Interestingly, in my thesis, I rely heavily on Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) Black Feminist Thought, but I do not take up critical race theory (CRT) or Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989; 1991; 1992) work on intersectionality. And yet, as a Black woman in America, I had lived out the normalcy of institutionalized racism and the reality that for Black women, racism is sexist and sexism is racist. Therefore, the theoretical concepts central to CRT were already present in my worldview. More than a decade later, I have a deeper intellectual understanding of institutionalized racism and intersectionality, but I am still living out and learning critical theories. I share this review of my Master's thesis for a few reasons. First of all, I love being a Black American woman, and I enthusiastically study and celebrate this identity! That is why it is significant to me that I have been "officially" thinking about the implications of being a Black woman in the oppressive (un)United States of America—and arguing for our liberation—for at least a decade. Second, that 2009 study is evidence of the importance of race, racism, and justice in my life—that I am intrinsically motivated to study and practice strategies of resistance to oppression. Finally, I want to highlight my awareness of the complexity in researching, studying, and writing about topics as convoluted as identity, racism, sexism, and educational justice. Such work often requires a narrowing down and zeroing in on a piece of the puzzle such that much gets left out.

In this case of this dissertation study, my look into the legacy of Black women educators is merely a peek, rather than an exhaustive historiography. Moreover, this review of the ways that Black women have been negatively constructed, represented, and treated in this country is simplified. I do not account for all of the misrepresentations of Black women. I do not explore all the ways that stereotypes are deployed and reified. I do not detail how sexualities can serve as a buffer of privilege or a cause for heightened exclusion, isolation, and/or exploitation. Finally, there are far more data and stories to consider regarding the topic of Black women's contributions to and exploitation in the education workforce. All of the aforementioned topics, and more, are important, relevant, and real. However, I hope that this literature review serves as a brief summary best suited for this piece of the puzzle, and as a useful foundation from which to engage more complexity.

I begin with a look into the lives of pioneering Black women educators, and our impressive history of excellence as educators committed to community service and uplift. Then, I turn to a review of the stereotypes that have been assigned to Black women, and how these misrepresentations are used to terrorize and limit our lives. That discussion leads me to a focus on how stereotypes lead to biases harmful to Black women's quality of work-life in the educational sphere, generally, and in TESOL, specifically. Taken together, the various section of this review demonstrate that although the battleground on which Black women have lived, learned, worked, and served is racist, sexist, inequitable and even deadly, we persevere. In fact, we cultivate lives of excellence in education and service, and we triumph in society at large.

The Legacy of Highly Qualified Black Women Educators

The history of Black excellence and achievement in Africa before the dawn of chattel slavery, and throughout the world where Black communities developed during and after forced migration—including the United States—is not well or widely enough known and appreciated. That is why it is important for me to begin this chapter with a quick trip down a memory lane of pioneering Black women educators. I want to be clear that fighting for the educational and social rights of Black people in the United States is a foundational aspect of Black women's work. This battlefield is not new territory that I have discovered, and there is much for me to learn from my foremothers in terms of teaching practice, activism, and resisting racism. I stand on solid ground. This history is also encouragement for Black women faced with the ongoing realities of gendered racism, since it proves wrong every justification for the abuses lodged against us. Despite white supremacist laws and practices dating back to the 19th century that denied Black people the right to read, learn, and work freely, Black women in the United States are tried and true education practitioners. We have been at the forefront of educational advancement in the Black community, demonstrating perseverance, resilience, and rigor in the face of disenfranchisement, poverty, and violence. Consider this abbreviated list:

> Katy Ferguson (1774-1854) was born into slavery but became free when she was 18 years old. Although she never became proficient in reading or writing, she was a Bible scholar and humanitarian. She opened a Sunday school in her home and taught poor children scripture and life skills. She also took care of children in need and helped place orphans in permanent homes. With the assistance of others,

she later offered academic lessons. Her Sabbath school eventually moved to a church and became the first Sunday school in New York.[12]

Lucy Craft Laney (1854-1933) founded and directed the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute for Black children in 1883 in Georgia. She saw "no separation between the home, the school, and the community, nor between the church and the school. . . . [and she believed] they should work together for mutual progress" (McCluskey, 2014, p. 68). In addition to her determined efforts to start, support, and grow the Haines school, Laney founded the Augusta NAACP and was heavily involved in the Southern Black Women's Network, among other organizations and activities (McCluskey, 2014).

Mary McCleod Bethune (1875-1955) studied at a religious institution in hopes of being a missionary but eventually became a teacher. In 1904, she founded the Daytona Literary and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, which became Bethune-Cookman College in 1931. McCleod Bethune was also an active champion of human rights, particularly for education and social equality. Her Last Will and Testament (1955) encourages Black people to love one another, serve others, and work toward a world where all people live harmoniously.[13]

[12] http://onehistory.org/katy.htm

[13] See the Bethune-Cookman University website for more: http://www.cookman.edu/about_bcu/history/our_founder.html

> Septima Clark (1898-1987) attended Normal school and was certified to teach but Charleston, South Carolina did not hire Black teachers to work in public schools. She persevered, and taught on John's Island, SC and at the Avery Normal School, and, having spent several years organizing with civil rights organizations, eventually directed Highlander's Citizenship School. She wrote, "I want people to see children as human beings and not to think of the money that is costs nor to think of the amount of time that it will take, but to think of the lives that can be developed into Americans who will redeem the soul of America" (Clark, 1986, p. 121).

The examples of Ferguson, Laney, Bethune, and Clark demonstrate the Black woman's tradition of connecting education and justice work, but they are just a few of the educational pioneers who served the Black community and society at large. Despite the challenges to both receiving formal education and entering the teaching profession, there are many lesser-known teacher-advocates, some of whose stories researchers have more recently uncovered. For example, in her study of three Black women educators from the upper Ohio River valley between 1875 and 1915, Hancock (2014) describes Elizabeth Jennie Adams Carter, Anna Stevens Posey, and Mary Peyton Dyson as "highly qualified teachers" (p. 3). Hancock defines a highly qualified teacher "as someone who has more training than the average teacher of the period, whose service is sought after, who is publicly recognized for excellent work, and who is committed to the profession" (p. 3). In addition to being recognized in various ways for their exemplary talents, Carter, Posey, and Dyson all pursued educational credentials beyond grade school, and remained

involved in education and service for more than the average 2.5 years—even after being married—both uncommon practices at the time.

More specifically, Carter was the first Black student to graduate with a teaching certificate from South Western State Normal School in California, where she was publically recognized as an exemplary orator, student, and teacher. She also worked as a school administrator and college instructor, positions even more challenging to secure than grade school teacher. For her part, Posey regularly attended teacher training institutes after obtaining her teaching license, and despite living and working in predominantly White Athens County, Ohio, was honored for demonstrating "rare tact and efficiency" as a teacher at the public school for White children (p. 9). She also founded a transitional living space for young Black women after moving from Ohio to Philadelphia, and was an active member in a socially conscious Black women's reading club (Hancock, 2014, p. 10). Finally, the "highly qualified" Dyson, in addition to classroom teaching and working as a librarian at Howard University, demonstrated commitment by investing much of her life savings into an unsuccessful battle to save her alma mater, Storer College, from closing.

Another study centers on Fannie Richards and Gladys Pelham Roscoe, Detroit-based educators who "were active participants in a range of professional, religious, social, and community-based organizations . . . [and whose] professional practice existed within public school classrooms . . . [with] extended … efficacy far beyond the classroom" (Williams, 2014, p. 46). For example, Richards opened a private school for Black children in Detroit in order to offer a higher quality of education than that offered

by the public school. However, after two years, she became the first Black person to be hired by the public school system, and brought her students with her to join "Colored School No. 2", which was under resourced and under staffed. She played a central role in advocating for the integration of the school system, a lawsuit that was ultimately successful. Richards went on to teach for 40 years at an integrated school, and piloted a Kindergarten program. Demonstrating commitment to service outside of the classroom, Richard was active in her church's Sunday school, represented Michigan at the Negro National Educational Congress, and founded a home for older, poor, Black women (Williams, 2014).

A generation later, Roscoe was educated in this same public school system, before receiving a Bachelor's degree from Detroit Teachers College. She began teaching in 1914, obtained a Master's degree some years later and despite societal norms, was eventually appointed as a "critic teacher" (a title indicating expertise) specializing in music education. She earned a higher than average salary during her two decades in education, until giving birth to her daughter in 1934. Roscoe applied her musical talents outside of the classroom, serving in her church and community to arrange choirs, concerts, and performances. She also served in various organizations committed to helping poor, ill, and elderly people (Williams, 2014). Like Carter, Posey, and Dyson, Richards and Roscoe defied the limits of the times and dedicated their lives to personal and professional development, as well as to educational and societal justice for the Black community. Their stories may not be as widely known as those of more prominent pioneers, but their contributions are as meaningful and worthy to note.

In fact, this legacy of Black women as community educators and advocates resonates with Black women educators in contemporary times. Studies demonstrate that typically, Black women teachers enter and practice the profession not only to teach academics, but also as a way to fight against the multiple injustices that Black people face (Dixon, 2003; Dixon & Dingus, 2008; Haddix, et.al, 2016). For example, in their study of five African American women educators, Dixon and Dingus (2008) found that teaching is, for many Black women, a cultural and spiritual calling by which to affect positive change in the community. Those who enter the profession are often following in the footsteps of their family members or Black women teachers, who showed dedication and care to their students and community. Dixon and Dingus describe this tradition as a "legacy of Black feminist activism" focused on cultural preservation, social justice, and developing young people (p. 832).

Unsurprisingly, these research findings resonate with my lived experiences. My mother told me that she became a teacher because she refused to be a secretary—largely because she was made to feel it was one of the few choices open to her as a Black woman. She liked the other two options, teacher and nurse, better, and since she could not stomach the sight of blood, she decided to be a teacher. This choice was a political act in that my mother intentionally defied the limitations that gendered racism sought to place in her career path and life. She wanted to prove that she could succeed in college and excel as an educator despite being a first generation college student and degreed professional. Once in the classroom, she regularly supported her students and their families, academically and otherwise. In fact, she and my father initially became foster

parents in order to take in one of her students who she learned was being placed into foster care. They went on to foster for more than a decade.

My mother's legacy influenced my eventual entry into the education field. Even though I did not initially intend to become an educator, I spent many days in my mother's classrooms growing up, and she inspired me. I recognized the impact of her presence and practice on the children and families she worked with and I learned to teach by watching her do it so well. When I decided to teach, it was because I wanted to help people get the knowledge and resources they need to be successful both in the ways that society requires, and in the ways they define success. I chose to work with adult students, and, carrying on the torch of "highly qualified," service-oriented teaching and advocacy, worked with my students outside of the classroom to secure resources and supplemental education, often becoming friends in the process. This ongoing legacy of excellence should not be taken for granted. Although race relations, and societal policies and practices have changed greatly since the 18th Century, the United States is still a society hostile to Black women, who are regularly cast as morally, intellectually, and socially inferior, and therefore undeserving of equality in the professional realm and otherwise.

"Here On This Bridge": Black Women and the Master Narrative of Deviance

won't you celebrate with me
what I have shaped into
a kind of life? I had no model
born in Babylon
both non-white and woman
what did I see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,

my one hand holding tight
my other hand; Come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed. (Clifton, 1993, p. 5)

Clifton's (1993) poem is a celebration of Black women's resilience. The "bridge" is one that Black women have historically constructed between our objectified position in society and spaces of wholeness and self-actualization (hooks, 1984; Giddings, 1984; Shakur, 1987). Heroic examples of Black women creating a bridge include activist-journalist Ida B Wells, and founders of the Black Lives Matter movement, Alicia Garcia, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullers.14 Such bridge building is public, conspicuously political, and wide reaching. However, there are also the millions of women who, in the words of Giddings (1984), "in the course of defying the imposed limitations on race and sex . . . loosened the chains around both" (p. 7). Their lives, though often uncelebrated, reflect the belief that "The bridge I must be/Is the bridge to my own power" (Rushin, 1981/2015, p. xxxiv).

Additionally, as Roberts (1997) contends, "from the moment they set foot in this country as slaves, Black women have fallen outside the American ideal of womanhood" (p.10); thus, the inconspicuous bridge building of the everyday Black woman makes evident the importance of agency, self definition, and resistance. As early as the 19th century, White women were propped up as the ideal woman—the embodiment of morality and femininity, exclusively qualified to be wives and mothers. On the contrary, Black women were characterized as the erotic and manipulating Jezebel, the deferent and

[14] http://blacklivesmatter.com/

long-suffering Mammy, or the domineering and angry Matriarch (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1983; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 1981; White, 1999; Roberts, 1997). These constructions justified White men's sexual and physical abuse of Black women and the subservient position of Black women in White families, while locating the so-called ills of the Black family with the irresponsible Black mother (Roberts, 1997). Toward the end of the 20th century and into the 21st, the Welfare Queen, the Baby Mama, the Angry Black Woman, and the Ratchet Chick (Collins, 2000; Walton, 2013) became the dominant "controlling images" that "manipulate ideas about Black womanhood" (Collins, 2000, p. 69).

There is an extensive body of literature detailing the uses of these tropes over the past 200 years in the abuses of Black women's rights to define the possibilities of our own lives, and to enjoy life free of violence, exclusion, and exploitation (Collins, 2000; Davis, 1983; Giddings, 1984; hooks, 1981; White, 1999). The brief overview of these stereotypes that follows is by no means exhaustive, and for the purpose of clarity and brevity, does not account for all of the intersections and variations that help keep such archetypes ever-present. Additionally, my inclusion of certain film and TV characters or media figures as examples of stereotypes is not intended to create a right vs. wrong dichotomy of acceptable representations of Blackness. Instead, I agree with Chimamanda Adichie (2009) that "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."[15] In the case of the following "controlling images" (Collins, 2001), the lack of diversity in representations of

[15]See Adichie's Ted Talk, The Danger of a Single Story
https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en

Black women and the simultaneous emphasis of limiting stereotypes in our professional and personal lives have proven dangerous and deadly.

The Jezebel In doing a Google search for "Jezebel," the images that appear are mostly white-skinned women costumed in prototypical Middle Eastern attire, often holding a golden goblet and lying seductively in a dark room. Type in "the Jezebel stereotype," and images of Sara Bartmann, Nikki Minaj, Foxxy Brown, and Olivia Pope are common images among the hundreds of almost exclusively Black women that appear.[16] This is because the Jezebel stereotype is born out of Biblical stories of a deceitful, godless woman of influence, and this image came to stigmatize Black women during the slave era as sexually manipulative and immoral. As Collins (2001) explains, the "Jezebel's function was to relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing a powerful rationale for the widespread sexual assaults by White men typically reported by Black slave women" (p. 81). As the Google image search indicates, this stereotype has been so routinely popularized across time in film, music, and television, that deviant Black female heterosexuality has become part of the "common sense" of U.S. society. The "hoochie," "video vixen," and "stripper" are contemporary variations of Jezebel popular in rap, music songs and videos, and in reality TV shows.

The Mammy and the Matriarch Hattie McDaniel as Mammy in Gone With the Wind (1939) is a most familiar image of the Mammy archetype. The film character

[16] An 18th Century South African woman who was exhibited and exploited across Europe for her physical appearance, especially her buttocks; 21st Century rap/pop artist known for her sexually explicit lyrics and persona; Fictional character played by Pam Grier; Fictional character played by Kerry Washington.

personifies the stereotype—an older, round-figured, dark-skinned woman whose most important life purpose is to care for White children and their families. Mammy, a tireless domestic servant, is an obedient, self-less nurturer who "symbolizes the dominant group's perceptions of the ideal Black female relationship to elite White male power" (Collins, 2001, p. 72). Importantly, Mammy is content with her status and is therefore unlikely to contest unjust working or social conditions. According to Collins, in the modern workforce, the Mammy persona is expected of working Black women across the professional sphere, who, in maintaining secondary positions to White men and women despite tireless work, continue to be economically exploited.

The Matriarch is the counterpart to Mammy. She dominates the Black family home but is commonly constructed as a substandard mother and/or wife, and is therefore responsible for the failing educational, economic, and social status of the Black community (Collins, 2001). The Matriarch is also an aggressor who emasculates the men in her life and thus creates "broken homes" that result in high crime rates and low graduation rates. Although the trope of the domineering Black mother existed prior to its publication, The Moynihan Report (1965) legitimated the belief that Black mothers were in large part responsible for the "pathology" of the Black community.17 A fused version of the Mammy-Matriarch tropes is the Black mother who is hardworking, if still struggling financially. She plays a dominant and nurturing role to her family members,

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17 "In essence, the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is to out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well."- See more at: http://www.blackpast.org/primary/moynihan-report-1965#chapter3

but does not necessarily receive care in return. Both Mammy and Matriarch are constructed as having deviant heterosexuality, but unlike Jezebel, the apparently sexless mothers are starkly unfeminine, and therefore undesirable as sexual or romantic partners.

The Welfare Queen Simply put, the Welfare Queen is a poor Black mother of multiple children who takes advantage of government assistance, getting more than what she needs or deserves, while refusing to work or take care of her family. Ronald Reagan popularized the stereotype of the Welfare Queen—a phrase coined by the Chicago Tribune in describing a scam artist[18]—during his 1976 presidential campaign. As Cammett (2014) explains, Reagan used the following description of a real criminal as a metaphor for all Black women on public assistance—and by extension, potentially all Black women—even though White people make up the majority of benefactors of welfare:

> She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she's collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income alone is over $150,000. (qtd in Cammett, 2014, p. 244)

Cammett notes that Reagan did not need to state the woman's race as Black, since the description reified the already well-understood trope of the good-for-nothing, slothful Black person, and the myth that Black people rely on welfare more than any other group. The trope of the Welfare Queen thus took off and remains a useful tool for both

[18] Linda Taylor was a Black woman from Chicago who regularly defrauded the government and others. She was jailed numerous times. For more see: http://archives.chicagotribune.com/1974/10/12/page/175/article/welfare-queen-jailed-in-tucson; http://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=255819681

disparaging Black women and justifying the scaling back of government programs that assist people in need (from all racial backgrounds).

The Baby Mama The Baby Mama is typically represented as a young Black woman who likely became pregnant by a man in order to keep him involved in her life, even as she uses him and makes his life miserable. Although she is often assumed to be poor and jobless, she may also be financially stable and highly educated—key characteristics are her irrational behavior and inability to keep a "nuclear family" in tact. As Tyree (2009) explains, the Baby Mama in rap music is commonly degraded even as Black mothers (of the rap artists) are revered. She notes that rap lyrics centering on the Baby Mama often refer to them with terms like "bitch, gold-digging bitch, and weekend pussy" (p. 54), and describe interactions like fighting, scratching the man's car with keys, and serving child support papers. One "Black mother of five children by three men" describes, in part, what it is like to be identified as a "Baby Mama." In a Jet Magazine (2014) feature, she recounts, in part, the following:

> Many wonder why I'd keep having children if my first relationship failed and I didn't have the safety of marriage. While many subscribe to the "respectability" of a two-parent, married household, it isn't the only way to raise children and doesn't guarantee a healthy family. Married or not, irresponsible partners will shirk their duties. Sadly, there is also the false assumption that my exes are deadbeats. They aren't perfect, but they help in varying ways, from homework to finances. My kids aren't mistakes. They are the products of loving, longterm relationships. (Fields, 2014, p. 24)

The Welfare Queen and Baby Mama tropes are closely linked—if a woman is a Welfare Queen, the assumption is that she is likely a Baby Mama. Both place the blame for the social problems in Black communities on Black women in the same way that the

Mammy-Matriarch stereotypes do. In this way, institutional racism and sexism, and the people and policies that perpetuate them, are scapegoated for the victims thereof.

The Angry Black Woman The Angry Black Woman (ABW) is unjustifiably hot-tempered and ever ready to let emotions, rather than reason, dictate her interactions with those around her. The "reality TV wife" is a current figure that turns on this stereotype—she is always ready to fight and is therefore a liability to her family members, colleagues, and friends. 19 The educated or professional version of the ABW is too aggressive, quick to "pull the race card," and brings an overall feeling of unease to her work or social environments. Black women in the national spotlight, including First Lady Michelle Obama and television writer Shonda Rhimes have been labeled ABW, but so are women from all walks of life, including the field of education.20 The trope of the ABW denies the normalcy of institutionalized racism in society, in general, and its impact on Black women's lives, in particular. It suggests that Black women are irrational and do not have good reason to take offense, get angry, or voice opposition in the face of race-gendered discrimination. Moreover, the stereotype leads to biases that read Black women as angry simply because we disagree with colleagues, even though women or men of other racial backgrounds are granted the right to voice their opinions and perspectives, however oppositional (Griffin, 2012; Hayes, 2012).

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[19] There are many variations of this show, including "Love & Hip Hop" and "Real Housewives of Atlanta."

[20] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/19/shonda-rhimes-ny-times-angry-black-woman_n_5849720.html;
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/michelle-obama-angry-black-woman-label_us_5852cea0e4b0c05ff31ff57d

Even though the trope of the Angry Black Woman is offensive inasmuch as it supports quick dismissal and disrespect of Black women, the important distinction between the stereotype and how many Black women view ourselves is our assertion of righteous indignation. The anger Black women publically display is in response to racism and sexism and is therefore justified and necessary. As scholar Rachel Griffin (2012) writes, "I AM an Angry Black Woman. Unapologetically, rationally, and rightfully so" (p. 138). And the blogger whose penname is The Angry Black Woman states, "We sometimes need to get angry to propel us toward positive change or to stop injustice and oppression. We can't stop being angry until the fight is over. And the fight is far from over" (www.theangryblackwoman.com).

Media and the Real Life Consequences of the Master Narrative

The media plays a leading role in this fight by promulgating the damaging images described above and ingraining the associated messages into the psyche of White American viewers in particular, since they are far less likely than Black viewers to encounter any positive counter messaging (Walton, 2013). To begin with, mainstream media representations since the outset of the industry—from film stars and news anchors to cartoons and print models—privileged White people and physical attributes common to them. At the same time, images of Black people have historically been grotesque or nearly absent. Moreover, studies indicate that in the present era, this mainstream media tradition continues. For example, according to a 2013 Essence magazine study, "the images [of Black women] we encounter regularly on TV, in social media, in music videos and from other outlets are overwhelmingly negative" (Walton, 2013). Black female

respondents suggested that they see negative images nearly twice as often as positive ones, that the Black women they know personally represent positive typologies not widely reflected in media, and that the negative tropes are embarrassing (Walton, 2013). However, White female respondents reported that the Black women they encounter in real life more closely resemble the disparaging figures—"namely, Baby Mamas, Angry Black Women, Unhealthy Black Women and Uneducated Sisters" (Walton, 2013).

These findings illuminate the discrepancy between how Black women typically view ourselves, despite negative imagery, and how White women often view us, likely due to these pejorative typologies. A study centered on the impact of media socialization on Black adolescents' real life perceptions of Black women confirms the findings above. The authors, Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards, and Stevenson (2014), found that the common interpretations of Black female imagery were that "black women are unusually sexual, black women take care of others, black women are strong, and black women are angry" (p. 87). However, the youth recognized the overrepresentation of negative images and according to authors, "many recognize, contest, and oppose stereotypes that they perceive demean themselves, their mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and other members of the black community" (p. 94). While it is important that Black women and youth reject the negative images of Black women, the ongoing promotion of these stereotypes in media and society at large—and the common assumption of their veracity—provide "ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression (Collins, 2000). In other words, the "en mass devaluation of Black women's lives" results in heartbreaking realities for Black women's lives. According to Jones-DeWeever:

> [N]o woman in America today is more likely to be murdered than a Black woman. No woman is more likely to be raped than a Black woman. And no woman is more likely to be beaten, either by a stranger or by someone she loves and trusts than a Black woman. Living life at the intersection of both racist and sexist cultural pathologies, seemingly places the lives of Black women in particular peril; a threat she faces early in life, and quite frankly, never outgrows. (p. 45)

In the summer of 2015, for example, Sandra Bland, an outspoken advocate for racial justice from Illinois who had recently been hired to work at a Texas university, was pulled over by a White police officer for failing to signal a lane change. A disturbing cell phone video shows her violent arrest after the officer sensed an "attitude," in part because Bland refused to put out a cigarette. Within days, Bland was found dead in her jail cell, and while her family members and others suspected foul play and demanded justice on her behalf, a popular narrative insisted that she was partly responsible and would never have been arrested were it not for her "arrogant" attitude (see Color of Change petition for videos of Bland's arrest, and commentator responses). A less tragic story involves journalist Rhonda Lee, who was fired from her Louisiana meteorology position in 2012 after posting comments on a social media website. Lee responded to an online post that suggested she should "wear a wig or grow some more hair" since the viewer found her short Afro unattractive. Lee responded:

> I am very proud of my African-American ancestry which includes my hair. For your edification: traditionally our hair doesn't grow downward. It grows upward. Many Black women use strong straightening agents in order to achieve a more European grade of hair and that is their choice. However in my case I don't find it necessary. I'm very proud of who I am and the standard of beauty I display. Women come in all shapes, sizes, nationalities, and levels of beauty. Showing l ittle girls that being comfortable in the skin and HAIR God gave me is my

> contribution to society. Little girls (and boys for that matter) need to see that what you look like isn't a reason to not achieve their goals. (qtd in Roberts, 2012)

Station management stated that Lee was fired for violating a company policy on Internet etiquette, but Lee disputes being advised of such a policy. However, Lee believed that the station management should have supported her in speaking back to racially insensitive comments. A key similarity between the two incidents is that Bland and Lee were regarded as out of line simply for defending their dignity with words. However, stereotypes about Black women as unfeminine, quick tempered, and inferior influenced how they were perceived (unattractive, angry, irresponsible) and disciplined (physical violence, economic sanction).

It is important to note that the examples provided here do not point to isolated incidents, but illustrate the cultural climate that Black women encounter in U.S. society daily. Roberts (1997) reminds us that, "Myths are more than made-up stories. They are also firmly held beliefs that represent and attempt to explain what we perceive to be the truth" (p. 8). These "firmly held" biases shape how Black women's behaviors are interpreted in career environments (Farmer, 1993), including the education arena. The next section sheds some light onto how racial discrimination manifests for Black women educators.

Black Women and Presumed Incompetence

My mother taught elementary school for 32 years, and her specialty was reading instruction for young learners. I remember a time early in her career when she applied for a reading specialist position at the predominantly Black public school where she had

taught Kindergarten and first grade for a few years. She had great relationships with her principal, a Black woman, and the other teachers on the interview committee. Although her colleagues had praised her excellence in reading instruction (and her students' reading proficiency and growth were exemplary), the committee selected an outside hire—a White woman who ultimately declined the position. I will never forget my mother's shock and disappointment; her colleagues had seen her flex strong reading instruction skills and many relied on her expertise in their own practice. Yet they assumed a White woman with no relationship to students or staff would be a better fit.

This was my first experience with the well-worn mantra that Black folks have to work twice as hard to get half as much in the workplace. As a young Black girl, the incident was especially impactful because I admired my mother's teaching style and the care and commitment she showed to her students, and I was hurt to see her so disrespected. That her principal and others on the committee were Black women was salt in the wound. The hurt from that blow is with me today, especially because more than two decades later, I do not see significant change. Despite our proven talents, Black women continue to be underestimated and underrated in the professional sphere.

Therefore it comes as no surprise that a 2015 study by the National Bureau of Economic Research concluded, "blacks are subject to more scrutiny or to a higher standard than white workers" (Cavounidis & Lang, p. 37) although they still receive lower rates of compensation comparatively, despite investing more in education (p. 2). According to the researchers' model, employers use race as an indicator of job worthiness and readiness, with Blackness serving as a red flag of sorts for low skills and

productivity. Therefore, Black workers have longer periods of unemployment, shorter periods of employment, and lower earnings than White workers. In terms of Black women, specifically, the 2014 and 2016 Black Women's Roundtable summaries report that Black women pursue higher education, entrepreneurship, and work outside the home at equal or higher rates than other demographic groups—including Black and White men and White women—but they are often relegated to comparatively less prestigious professional positions and lower pay.[21]

For example, Black women are leaders in workforce participation but are also more likely than other groups to work for the lowest wagers. (Hardy, C. & Jones-DeWeever, 2014). We also "are the most likely demographic group in America" to start our own business, but average between $20,000-$150,000 less in revenue than Latina, Asian-American, and White women entrepreneurs (2016, p. 7). These empirically based findings confirm the experiential advice and warning captured in the "twice as hard" mantra. It is frustrating to feel in one's soul how the derogatory stereotypes about Black womanhood—alongside other forms of exploitation—have such limiting impacts on overall quality of life for Black women. A focus on the educational sphere further illuminates this sad reality.

Despite comparative credentials, Black women are underrepresented in academia, particularly in higher-level faculty and administration positions (James & Farmer, 1993; Myers, 2002; Gutiérrez y Muhs & Niemann, et al., 2012). In other words, even with the

[21] For example, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/BWR.Final_Black_Women_in_the_US_2014Report.pdf; http://www.ncbcp.org/news/releases/5Black_Women_in_the_US_2016.pdf

minuscule numbers of Black women hired at institutions of higher education, most are concentrated at the bottom. We are also overrepresented at community colleges where compensation and prestige are generally lower (Harris, A., & Gonzaléz, C., 2012, p. 3). These statistics represent my own reality. I worked at a community college for just over ten years, beginning when I had a Bachelor's degree and continuing after I obtained a Master's. Even at the community college, I worked in a department with comparatively lower pay and less prestige—the non-credit language-learning program. I received consistently high evaluations from my supervisor and students, and had healthy professional relationships with colleagues. However, once I received my Master's degree, I tried for years to get a position in the credit bearing English department (which also has English language courses) with no success. I got the message that I was good enough to teach the same students and similar material but only for half the pay.

Once on the job, Black women in academia irrespective of position—but especially those of higher rank— are often "presumed incompetent." In other words, "they are viewed as the product of targeted initiatives, which generate unworthy, handout attitudes" and are thus perceived as "lacking ability, unskilled, amateurish, and/or inept—by students, staff, colleagues, and administration in the academy" (Wallace, Moore, Wilson, & Hart, 2012, p. 426). They may therefore "spend a good deal of their time and creative energy planning for and countering the expectations others hold for them" (p. 422) and feel isolated in hostile working environments. For example, in Wallace, Moore, Wilson, and Hart's (2012) collection of testimonies from Black women academics, one

participant recalls her time as a doctoral student and instructor at a predominantly white institution:

> Even though my job opportunity grew out of meeting state-mandated affirmative action goals, I entered the position as a competent, well-prepared professional person . . .One white male doctoral candidate who had been teaching part-time in the department for a few years asserted, "I'm really upset because you got the position that I wanted [and] You only got the position because you are a black female and the department gets to count you twice." . . . Was I perceived as incompetent? Were they not aware of my credentials? (p. 430-431)

In another example, five Black women professors who, despite being part of an uncharacteristic "critical mass" of Black faculty in an education department, experienced overt and subtle forms of gendered racism, including dramatically low faculty evaluation ratings from a White male department chair (Dade, Tartakov, Hargrave, &Leigh, 2015). One of their experiences with "presumed incompetence" echoes the account above. "Mahalia," for instance, recalls:

> In my first week at the college a senior faculty member told me I was an a ffirmative action candidate. He was at pains to assure me that he had nothing against, me, but he said he just thought I "should know." Why this man felt the need to tell me I was an affirmative action hire had more to do with his resentment of my presence and his racist attitude than any need I had for helpful information. He said what other probably thought, but didn't say to my face. (p. 138)

In both examples above, White male educators demonstrate an assumption of belonging, entitlement to professional success, and an "if I want it, it's mine" mentality. Simultaneously, they expose their biases about Black women as outsiders, professionally inept, and undeserving of even moderate success.

Gendered racism is also prevalent in the K-12 educational sphere, an overwhelmingly White, structurally racist professional environment.[22] For example, New York teacher Heather Hightower is one of three Black educators who say their principal, who is a White woman, created a racially hostile work environment, inclusive of verbal insults, inaccurately low evaluations, and cuts to programming specific to Black teachers. During the 2012-2013 school year, the principal, Minerva Zanca, taunted that Hightower "looked like a gorilla in a sweater" had "f-king nappy hair." Despite the complaints Hightower and her colleagues filed with the Department of Education, Zanca was never disciplined, and has since retired.[23]

In another example, high school English teacher Cicely Cobb sued an Arizona school district in 2014 for failing to address the racially hostile climate students and administrators created. She stated, "regardless of my talents, I'm still the Black person it's okay to make fun of."[24] According to one source, Cobb's complaint alleges

> discrimination in the form of a double standard, lack of support and a lack of action with regard to racial slurs against a Black student. She alleges retaliation for having complained about discrimination and harassment in various ways, including the manner and method in which she has been evaluated and in the discipline of students within the classroom."[25]

For example, a White male student taunted Cobb by repeatedly tapping her on the head with a bathroom pass, but despite Cobb's complaint, his actions went unaddressed by administration. Other examples include White students making racially offensive

[22] See National Center for Education Statistics https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_209.10.asp
[23] See http://nypost.com/2016/06/09/principal-who-said-black-teacher-looked-like-a-gorilla-sued-for-discrimination/
[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m26G8ykxubE
[25] See http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/ahwatukee/2014/05/01/teacher-claims-racial-bias-desert-vista-abrk/8577901/

comments to Black students without reprimand, and students engaging in cyber bullying against Cobb online. In one incident, a student posted a photo of Cobb on the sidewalk with the caption "Dr. Cobb sighted working the corner" (quoted in newscast). Cobb says some parents liked and favorited the offensive posts, and that, at various times, the school administrators ignored her complaints, appeared amused at the events, and gave her unfair teaching evaluations.26

The testimonies and incidents described above point not only to the systemic nature of racism that Black women teachers face in schools, colleges, and universities across the nation, but also to their resolve to contest the structures and speak out against the people who create and maintain racist work environments. Although I have made the case that gendered racism is normalized across the professional sphere in education, I now turn to the subfield of focus in this dissertation—TESOL—where assumptions about racial, ethnic, and national belonging by policy makers, administrators, and students present specific challenges for Black women educators.

The Context: White Supremacist Racism and English Language Education

TESOL is a sprawling, multifaceted field, servicing children and adults of all ages in places all over the world, for purposes ranging from public school education, to private language classes, citizenship preparation, adult education for immigrants and refugees, and more. Teachers and administrators of TESOL programs also represent various levels of training and experience, racial and ethnic identities. Therefore, the field has a reputation as a beacon of multiculturalism. However, despite its global reach and the

[26] "Liking" and "Favoriting" social media posts indicate a user's approval of a particular comment or image.

diversity of its students and teachers, the foundation of TESOL within larger projects of western white supremacist nationalism impacts the field (Auerbach, 1993; Kubota, 2002). Although the need to address racism in the TESOL arena is dire, it too often goes unmet. Kubota (2002) notes the following:

> Discussing racism is uncomfortable, particularly in TESOL. . . . The field of L2 education by nature attracts professionals who are willing to work with people across racial boundaries, and thus it is considered to be a 'nice' field, reflecting liberal humanism. . . . However, this does not make the field devoid of the responsibility to examine how racism or other injustices influence its knowledge and practices. (p. 86)

In fact, teaching English language courses is historically rooted in projects to assimilate immigrants and colonial subjects into dominant western ways of thinking and being in the world (Cavanaugh, 1996; Ray, 2013). Such ways are inherently racist and based on the "ideology of the supremacy of White civilization" (Kubota, 2002, p. 90). In the United States, the purpose of English instruction to speakers of other languages has been "Americanization." For example, Native American children were routinely taken from their families and placed in boarding schools where violent instructors worked to "Americanize" them. Speaking English was required and forced, and children were brutally punished for speaking their home languages (Bird, & Erdoes, 2014; Davey et. al., 2010).

Furthermore, beginning in the late 19th century, the national interest with respect to newcomers, who were predominantly European, "was that immigrants needed to learn English [in public schools or community classes] so that they could learn the U.S. Constitution, understand the government of their new country, and become assimilated

into American culture" (Cavanaugh, 1996, p. 42). Teacher training was an important component of this early movement, and instructors of adult learners "were expected to demonstrate thorough knowledge in principles of Americanization and assimilation" (Ray, 2010, p. 28) and to relay "scripted, standardized" (p. 32) information to students. According to Ray (2010), "the Americanization Movement served as a precursor to the emergence of ESL at universities, one girded by a similar agenda to protect American political, cultural, and economic values" (p.16). In conjunction with education-based Americanization policies, immigration and naturalization laws have also shaped the culture and composition of second language English classrooms.

Consider, for example, requirements that immigrants demonstrate English proficiency and knowledge of U.S. history in order to become citizens, and policies through which "the federal government ranked populations into [racialized] hierarchies of assimilability" (Schmid, 2000, p. 65) and thereby determined who could enter the nation. Bear in mind that until at least the middle of the 20th century, immigrants were to be assimilated into an "America" that formally excluded Black people from equal citizenship under the law. Taken together, it becomes clear that English language instruction historically conflated English proficiency with holding idealized, sanitized, views about U.S. society, despite the white supremacist imperatives that determined who could be in such courses in the first place (Auerbach, 1993; Griswold, 2010; Johnson, 1998)

Beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, immigration from Europe decreased while numbers of Asian, African, Central American, and Mexican immigrants

increased (Waggoner, 2000). Despite language rights movements and bilingual programs and practices throughout the United States (e.g., The Chicano Civil Rights Movement, Bilingual Education Act of 1968), the English Only Movement emerged as a revised iteration of the Americanization Movement, similarly fueled by anti-immigrant sentiments and the firmly entrenched culture of white supremacy. According to Orelus (2011), "proponents of the English-only movement want minority groups to embrace and only speak English rather than their native tongues" (p. 17). From this perspective, "the English language has taken its place beside the American flag as a symbol of what it means to be an American" (Schmid, 2000, p.73).

Additionally, the imposition of English language education on people of color around the world was a central component of western imperialism. For example, U.S. politicians required English language education as part of an Americanizing curriculum in the Philippines and Puerto Rico (Macedo, 2000). In another example, Orelus (2011) reports, "European colonizers imposed their languages on African children in order to maintain their linguistic, political, and socio-economic domination" (p. 16). This colonial schooling ensured that African children "could be quickly assimilated into the European culture" (p. 16). There are similar histories related to colonialism and English education around the globe, but their detailing is beyond the scope of this discussion. Although the specifics of colonial empire differ from place to place, and even though colonial governments did not initiate English language education per se in every instance, the influence of white supremacist ideology cannot be easily uncoupled from English language education.

The result for teachers of color is that employers, colleagues, and students often see English language competence as synonymous with White identity, and therefore prefer White teachers (Amin, 1997; Kubota, 2000; Chung-Constant, 2012). On the other hand, according to Kubota (2000), "people of color [are perceived as] nonnative or illegitimate speakers of English" (p. 101). For example, Chung-Constant (2012), who identifies as Black and Jewish, recalls, "I once had a student who told me he was relieved when I spoke because I did not speak hip hop English" (p. 171). She also once had an administrator tell her that she did not "sound black" on the phone. Similarly, Amin's (1997) interviews with "visible-minority female teachers" revealed their perceptions that immigrant students in Canada often associated English language competence with whiteness and were therefore skeptical of the teachers' Canadian-ness and knowledge of English. Amin, who is of Pakistani ancestry, suggests a relationship between the students' attitude toward "non-White teachers and their investments in learning English" (p. 580).

Consider, for example, Amin's recollection of her years as an English instructor in Canada, "I was constantly being challenged on the rules of English grammar, and it seems to me that some of my students are waiting for me to make a mistake" (p. 581). For students of U.S. teachers, the liberal culture and curriculum of English language education often preclude any challenge to the U.S. master-narrative of democracy, justice for all, and exceptionalism. Although "teachers' decisions about subject matter, teaching methods, and assessment reflect a range of political positions, from wholehearted endorsement of the status quo in school and society, to tacit approval, to critical dissent"

(Benesch, 1993, p. 707), students often learn from instructors who claim to be neutral and free of any particular ideology. This is the case even though, as Kubota (2000) contends, students are "constantly exposed to racially biased textbooks and other materials" (p. 108) that may position White people as the powerful elite, Black people as poor, and immigrants as more passive and less powerful than native English speakers (Kubota, 2000; Sherman, 2010). Unfortunately, "substantive discussions of racism" and other inequities (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 37) in TESOL classrooms, more often than not, simply do not occur.

A final consideration is the pervasive influence of dominant and peripheral U.S. cultures on communities across the world. American cultures are packaged and promoted via Hollywood film, music, consumer goods, news media, and even aid. Although Black American cultures are part of this exchange in sometimes affirming ways, some immigrants may nevertheless develop idealized views of America and anti-Black perceptions of Black people from America (David, 2011; Mora, 2010). Black women teachers of English to speakers of other languages, therefore, enter professional environments vulnerable to the challenges institutional and individual racism present, including curricula and school cultures that discourage critique of racial oppression in U.S. government and society, and students and colleagues who may hold unfavorable beliefs about Black people in the United States. Therefore, there is much work to be done in terms of creating a more equitable professional playing field for Black women in particular, even though, as this chapter demonstrates, we historically face, resist, and triumph over race-gendered oppression.

To return to Clifton's poem, the something of racial sexism, more often than not, fails to stop us from shaping our lives into celebrations, despite its deadly power, as tragically demonstrated in the case of Sandra Bland. However, it is also clear that racism remains the powerful backdrop against which Black women live and dream despite centuries of struggle and dramatic changes to the socio-cultural milieu within and outside the United States. For this reason, it is important to learn from Black women about the role of gendered racism in our professional lives, and our visions for addressing and attempting to eradicate it. Chapter Three explains how critical race methodology offers a process by which to do just that—conduct research that centers on the narratives of Black women educators in order to challenge racial injustice in education and strengthen our legacy of resistance and resilience.

Chapter Three: A Transformative Research Process

Am I Researcher?

I entered the doctoral program because I wanted to "learn more" about education so that I could be an "expert" in my field. Standing on nearly ten years of teaching experience at the time, I had accepted my "calling" as an educator and was looking for a way to learn more about the field so that I could better serve the students I worked with—immigrants and refugees in the United States, and people of color learning English as an additional language. However, I was not giddy about becoming the kind of researcher who studies people. Most of what I knew about research with human subjects was what I learned in undergraduate psychology classes—and I had changed my major after the first year! The notion of research seemed cold, calculating, and presumptuous. After several years in a graduate program, I now know that I can only ever be an expert in my own knowledge and experience, though I can become increasingly conversant in the issues I study passionately.

Moreover, I understand more the wide range of meanings that scholars bring to the identity of researcher and to the process of research. Although I remain tentative about fully embracing the researcher identity, I am far more comfortable with undertaking what I have learned can be warm, investigative, humble, and ultimately

fulfilling research processes. But before I explain my methodological approach to this dissertation study, it is helpful to look a bit more closely at the histories influencing the intellectual traditions of western academia and Black intellectuals, since it was their intersection that positioned me as a Black woman academic researcher.

Race and Research

Black people in the United States, dating back to the 1800s, developed an intellectual tradition primarily concerned with race and racism, freedom, and justice. This tradition was grounded in and guided by research, writing, oration, debate, rigor, experience, and a commitment to liberation. Simultaneously, Black people, by law and custom, were largely excluded from the best-resourced, mainstream formal institutions of higher learning wherein the scientific method developed. This method continues to shape research generally, and educational research specifically (Du Bois, 1909; Cho & Trent, 2006; Leavy, 2009;), and therefore, it is important to briefly highlight the historical disconnect between the two traditions (Black intellectualism and Western scientific research). The scientific method emerged during the 1800s from the tradition of European positivism, which is based on the assumption that "the knowable reality exists independently of the research process and this reality consists of a knowable 'truth,' which can be discovered, measured, and controlled via objective means employed by neutral researchers" (Leavy, 2009, p. 5). This approach to science became "the cornerstone of the quantitative paradigm" (p.7), and later crossed from the natural sciences into other disciplines in ways that began to convince some scholars to question the quantitative approach (Leavy, 2009).

This departure from the strict confines of quantitative scientific research, with its emphasis upon predictability and control, influenced the development of the qualitative paradigm, which is centered on understanding phenomena rather than predicting them (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Leavy (2009) defines the qualitative paradigm as being "generally characterized by inductive approaches to knowledge-building," and strongly influenced by anthropology's ethnographic methodology (p. 6). Her brief history of qualitative research cites the Chicago School of Sociology's ethnographic studies during the 1920s, Erving Goffman's conceptualization of social performance in 1959, and the social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s as important catalysts for growth and expansion. However, it is important to note that in establishing an alternative research paradigm, scholars did not wholly reject Eurocentric epistemological assumptions of objectivity and truth. Therefore, despite its development over the years, qualitative research remains a contested space wherein some scholars challenge assumptions related to "power within the knowledge-building process" (Leavy, 2009, p. 7). In other words, Eurocentric epistemological perspectives upon which the academy at large was built remain influential across research paradigms and academic disciplines.

In fact, academia remains a predominantly White arena (Wallace, et. al., 2012). As Delgado Bernal (2002) reminds us:

> Traditionally, the majority of Euro-Americans adhere to a Eurocentric perspective founded on covert and overt assumptions regarding White superiority, territorial expansion, and "American" democratic ideals such as meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality. What this means is that their way of knowing and understanding the world around them is very naturally and subconsciously interpreted through these beliefs. (p. 111)

Taken together, the historical exclusion of Black people and their epistemologies from academia, the foundational roots of positivism in scientific research, and the dominance of Eurocentric ways of knowing and being inside and outside education make apparent the relevance of my reliance on critical race theory and Black feminist thought as methodologies in educational research and praxis. My methodological standpoint challenges the wide-reaching status quo of white privilege in education, centers as legitimate the ways of knowing and being in the world that come out of the Black experience and intellectual traditions, and thereby expands the realm of possibilities for how to conduct, write, and teach about one's research. After all, Delgado-Bernal (2002) argues that "epistemology, methodology, and pedagogy—can[not] be isolated from one another, as they are closely interdependent and directly influence the research process" (p. 115). Similarly, Stout (2007) suggests that as scholars, our "gender, class, ethnicity—all the qualities of positionality synergize, impacting what we see, understand, the form of inscription we choose, ultimately, what we reveal and promote of those experiences to others" (p. 133). Delgado-Bernal and Stout remind us that we cannot separate the parts of who we are from any piece of the work we do.

I am sure that my trepidation around the identity of researcher is due to my awareness that the academy was not built with or for people like me—"research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (Denzin, 2005, p. 933). Similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's (1981) reflections on writing for women of color, I am familiar with the dominant ideology that insists women of color researchers conform to White, male standards in order to "win the coveted title" (p. 167). And yet, part of the

tradition of people like me—Black women and other marginalized groups—is to make room for ourselves in the places that have been hidden or shut away from us. It is Anzaldúa who revolts, "We revoke, we erase your white male imprint" (p. 167). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) discusses the subjugation of Black women's knowledge in particular in her treatise on Black Feminist Thought. She contends, "Because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship. As a result, U.S. Black women's experiences . . . have been routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge" (Collins, 2000, p. 253).

In terms of academic research, Native American scholar Hermes (1999) identifies two "problems" she encountered when embarking on a research project. First, there is a long history of exploitation in research whereby communities of color were (and still are) "colonized through 'research'" (p. 87). Hermes contends that in response to this history, Native American researchers developed an ethic of "research that serves a specific purpose or need of the community within which it is situated" (p. 87). The second problem has to do with situating oneself in the research. She suggests:

> Situating myself in the text of the dissertation . . .was an important and yet illusive goal for me. My intention was to avoid making sweeping generalizations about Indian education, or positioning myself as "expert" in any other way. This would be . . . antithetical to the idea of community building through this research. (p. 88)

Inasmuch as I chose to join academia and "become" a "researcher," it is my responsibility to address the "problems" Hermes (1999), Anzaldúa (1981), Collins

(2000), and others caution against. I do so in part through a Black Feminist Epistemology (BFE). This stance helps me to be true to my commitment to engage in research as a way to learn with and from others, in order to better serve as an educator for social justice. My epistemological grounding in BFE supports my commitment to social justice, Black people's liberation, and education. According to Collins (2000), BFE is undergirded by "an experiential, material base [encompassing the] collective experiences and accompanying worldviews that U.S. Black women sustained based on our particular history" (p. 256). Although Black women have experienced this history in varied, multifaceted ways, our shared condition within the confines of white supremacy nonetheless creates a unique culture and community. A key factor to this particularity is that the synthesis of "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression . . . creates the conditions of our lives" (Combahee, 1981, p. 210).

From the "different plane" (Tyson, 1998, p. 22) of Black women's culture and community emerged an epistemology that, although "devalued by dominant knowledge validation processes" (Collins, 2000, p. 256), can "enrich our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters both their empowerment and social justice" (p. 269). As a practitioner of this epistemology, I am an agent of my own empowerment as I push back against white-washed intellectual norms (claims to objectivity, reliance on White and European scholars, denial of racism) and lift up my own ways of being and thinking in the world as meaningful, valid, and transformative. Additionally, beyond centering Black women's theory of knowledge, BFE offers a means through which to engage with stories, scholarship, and research from the epistemological

perspectives of other groups and on their own terms. In other words, BFE helps me to recognize the simultaneous power and partiality of my own perspective with respect to making meaning of and in society.

Collins (2000) outlines four defining features of BFE. First, lived experience as a criterion of meaning suggests that wisdom, cultivated through lived experience, is an important partner to knowledge; therefore, a person who has lived through it can call on her experience to validate her own knowledge and to assess the knowledge claims of others. A second feature is the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims. As Collins explains, "connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process" (p. 260). Therefore, communicative exchanges between and amongst people—active participation—facilitate processes of knowledge construction and validation. Put differently, dialogue can "coax us into the habit of listening to each other and learning each other's ways of seeing and being" (Bambara, 1981, p. xxxi). Individual uniqueness, the appropriateness of emotion, and empathy are three interrelated components of the ethics of caring, a third feature of Black Feminist Epistemology. This feature focuses on how the validity of "the word" is contingent upon how it is spoken, the sincerity of emotion, and the connection made between speaker and listener.

Finally, according to the fourth feature, the ethic of personal accountability, the author of the text is relevant to its validity and utility. In other words, knowledge is not objectively constructed because the author and the context shape truths. Adherence to the ethic of personal accountability also covers the need for ethical responsibility as a

researcher: I have a duty to my participants, to Black women especially, and to all those who might read or otherwise be impacted by my research, to be honest, sensitive, rigorous, reflexive, and humble as I engage texts, participants, and my own intellectual and creative work. Being a Black woman in academia from the U.S. Midwest, it is easy to feel like a "Bag Lady," to whom songstress Erykah Badu (2000) warns, "one day, all them bags gon' get in your way . . . so, pack light."27 The bags are the years of research done on and about Black families—research that exploits, misinforms, and ultimately disenfranchises Black communities. Consider the lives ruined by the Tuskegee Experiments, or the scientific exploitation of Henrietta Lacks, her cells, and her family. However, rather than allowing these bags to become a distraction or hindrance, I store them in my heart and mind as reminders of my duty to do research in the name of social justice rather than social degradation.

Critical Race Methodology

What, then, is a fitting methodological approach for a researcher who is epistemologically and theoretically oriented to social justice praxis? Given the importance of social justice in any work I do, it was necessary that my methodological approach expressly reject practices that historically exploit, undermine, and misrepresent Black communities in particular. According to Tyson (2003):

> If educational researchers are to operate from epistemologies of emancipation—with frameworks that are transformative . . . and engage in methodologies that encourage participants to challenge and change the world . . . research would become a conscious political, economic, and personal conduit for empowerment. (p. 24)

[27] From her song "Bag Lady."

From this perspective, research becomes at minimum, a process of individual activism, and potentially a means of collective transformation that inspires positive change in society. However, such an undertaking requires that the researcher enter the process as a conscientious rejector of exploitative epistemological assumptions and methodological practices, and a practitioner of transformative ways of thinking about and engaging in scholarly investigation, analysis, and writing.

For Hylton (2012), "A CRT methodology should in part be characterized by its ability to eschew the passive reproduction of established practices, knowledge, and resources, that make up the way types of research have been traditionally carried out" (p.26). Both Tyson (2003) and Hylton (2012) emphasize the need for critical race scholars to be intentional—to be confrontational, assertive, and unapologetic in their anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and justice-seeking research practices. Relatedly, Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) delineation of five components for a transformative critical race methodology in education offers some direction for scholars seeking to do this kind of work. Below, I explain how my research attends to these components, although my dissertation study focuses on educators rather than students.

(a) It centers race and racism throughout the research process and considers the intersectionality of race, class, and gender in the analysis of student experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). As I have insisted, the factors of (primarily) race and gender are at the front and center of this research, and cannot be removed from any part of the process or analysis. In fact, I have been thinking about the role of race in my lived experience since I was a young child, so for me, race has always been like a screen

through which I see and try to understand the world. In terms of this dissertation study, my concern started with my own experience as a Black woman teacher of English to speakers of other languages. Through research, I seek to learn more about how my experiences converge with and/or differ from those of other Black women educators by placing attention on how our stories, collectively, can enrich and challenge knowledge about race, racism, and power in the 21st century.

(b) It challenges dominant assumptions that undergird studies of students of color experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). I have already established that academia is a predominantly White arena (Wallace, et. al., 2012) grounded in a Eurocentric epistemology that often guides educational research. For example, Ladson-Billings (2007) contends that the "cultural deficit perspective" so pervasive in educational research about Black families suggests that Black children, overall, do not experience academic success at the level of their white counterparts because their parents do not care, do not have enough life experience, are not prepared for school, do not value education, and come from a culture of poverty. In contrast, as a Black woman educator for social justice, my core objective is to engage in writing, research, and advocacy that are uncoupled from, and meaningful to, Black and oppressed peoples. I engage in this type of work from a critical methodological race-based perspective that accounts for the varied experiences and lived realities of Black women.

(c) It is oriented toward liberation experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). In this dissertation study, liberation means that Black women educators, in particular, and teachers of color, in general, can enjoy professional and social atmospheres that are free

from derogatory racial stereotypes and the associated experiences of being devalued, discriminated against, insulted, and/or altogether excluded. This alternative representation, and by extension treatment, of Black women educators can result from their counternarratives, which challenge racist ideology and "strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Therefore, Black women educators would be free to enter classrooms and communities as well respected professionals with the knowledge and compassion required to work with diverse populations of students and families. Furthermore, in my view, liberation in the lives of Black women TESOL educators includes an approach to teaching oriented toward social justice for students and the communities in which they live, work, and learn.

(d) It focuses on and values experiences of students of color experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). Given my interest in the knowledge and perspectives of Black women educators, my participants are all Black women, and the theorists, thinkers, and creatives who I draw from to examine and re-tell our stories are predominantly Black women and other people of color. It is insufficient to analyze or discuss the narratives of Black women based primarily on the epistemological, theoretical, and social thought of White or male scholars. Delgado (1995) has shown how the voices of people of color are often absent from academic literature even when the focus of that literature is their experiences and social conditions. He references this as a "scholarly tradition" in the legal field, and writes, "It consists of white scholars' systematic occupation of, and exclusion of minority scholars from, the central areas of

civil rights scholarship" (p. 48). In challenging this tradition, Delgado suggests that "white liberal authors . . . redirect their efforts" so that "talented and innovative minority writers and commentators" can fill the gap (p. 53).

(e) It is informed by interdisciplinary knowledges (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24). In addition to interview data, my research draws from non-academic sources such as blogs, news articles, and videos, as well as texts representing multiple genres from diverse communities (including fiction, poetry, and music, from Black and Latinx traditions). As Matsuda (1987) points out, these voices bring into conversation useful knowledge and experiences that are ignored and/or devalued in traditional academic scholarship. And Collins (2000) reminds us that the ideas, songs, and texts Black women from all walks of life have shared over history constitute an intellectual tradition overlooked by the majority. As Assata Shakur reminds us, Black people have "carried on this tradition/in newspapers/in arguments and streetfights/in tales told to children/in chants and cantadas/in poems and blues songs." In this dissertation, I answer Shakur's call to "carry on the tradition. . . to pass it on . . to carry it on. . . TO FREEDOM."

The Composite Counterstory as Methodology

As a critical race methodology, composite counterstories offer a way to highlight theoretical concepts of CRT (Vaught, 2011) and to privilege perspectives and voices of people of color through the medium of story. It also draws from the use of story for transformative purposes deeply rooted in Chicana and Latinx communities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). For example, testimonio is a narrative form that is intentional about affirmation and empowerment, and politically oriented toward liberation (Reyes & Curry

Rodriguéz, 2012). Like the counterstory, it has been a "part of the struggle of people of color for educational rights and for the recovery of our knowledge production" (p. 526). Reyes and Curry Rodriguéz emphasize that testimonios take several written and oratory formats, and seek to build and sustain "a discourse of solidarity" (p. 526).

Similarly, composite counterstories are informed by, and can be written in, a variety of formats. Scholars gather and analyze data drawn from their own experiences and reflections, other people's stories, and research data with an intentional focus on the implications of race, racism, and power. Then, researchers write a story that is useful for "exposing, analyzing, and challenging majoritarian stories of racial privilege. . . [and strengthening] traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). The stories often use composite characters and plots in a variety of forms, including fantasy, short story, dialogue, and fantasy (Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Harris, 1993, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, Bell, 1987; Love, 2004), and may or may not include traditional academic analyses.

For Solórzano and Yosso (2002), the data collection and evaluation processes require "theoretical sensitivity," or the ability to really understand the nuances in data, and "cultural intuition," (p.33) or the welcomed influence of community memory and participant insights.28 The sensitive and nuanced treatment of data can prevent the counterstory from "being absorbed into the masternarrative" through false empathy, or the "activation of White sympathies" (Vaught, 2011, p.19). In other words, counterstories should not be framed simply as "feel good" narratives about race or racism, but they must

[28] Solórzano and Yosso cite Strauss & Corbin, 1990, and Delgado Bernal, 1998, respectively.

be purposefully linked to data that reveal truths about the ongoing role of systemic racial oppression in society.

Counterstories and Political Transparency

Constructing a critical race counterstory also requires political transparency. In this context, political refers to a social agenda related to "the intersection of [one's] unique biography with the larger meaning of [one's] historical times" (Collins, 2000, p. vi). Lawrence (1995b) contends that this "self-conscious commitment to a subjective perspective is critical to the work of practitioners of the Word" (p. 338). His conception of subjectivity is three-dimensional, including "the scholars' positioned perspective, . . . that the scholar embraces certain values and that her work is avowedly political, . . . [and that she is] a being capable of acting upon the world" (p. 338). Understood this way, writing a counterstory requires acknowledging one's subjectivity, and embracing of the power of one's position, politics, and potential to change the world through the written word. In fact, given that "knowledge . . . is never neutral, which means it is always a story of some kind, produced by a situated knower" (p. 239), Baszile (2015) argues that what distinguishes CRT from other paradigms is not its use of narrative, but its explicit use of stories to challenge racial oppression.

However, it is important to note that counterstories contest both the message of dominant narratives and the logic that frames them. Baszile (2015) names this faulty logic the "myth of the rational mind and its claims to justice for all" (p. 239). It reflects a "tacit, enlightened consensus that integrationism—understood as the replacement of prejudice and discrimination with reason and neutrality—is the proper way to conceive of

racial justice" (Peller, 1995, p.128). To put this differently, counterstories straightforwardly validate alternative ways of thinking about the world as it is and the world as it should be, and in so doing, they also challenge the dominant logic that shapes thinking about racial justice in the mainstream.

Recognizing the counterstory as rritical race theory's "modus operandi," Baszile (2015) emphasizes the long history of counterstories inside and outside the academy "as a political strategy in struggles for racial justice" (p. 240). To demonstrate the deep roots of this tradition, she locates the beginnings of politically driven counterstory in the U.S. abolitionist movement beginning in the early 19th century. Black intellectuals of the time, according to Baszile, were specifically concerned with "call[ing] out the depravity of the White political imagination" (p. 241), or exposing the hypocrisy of a nation wherein freedom for some was predicated upon the oppression of others. More specifically, she examines writings by David Walker and Frederick Douglass to highlight how their critical race counterstories did the following things: (a) Used personal experiences to counter proslavery propaganda that characterized slaves as content; (b) Served as documented evidence of Black intelligence, thereby invalidating racial propaganda on Black inferiority; (c) Exposed the hypocrisy in a purportedly Christian nation upholding the institution of slavery; and (d) Challenged the idea that emotionless rhetoric was the most productive means of engaging a public committed to equality (p. 242).

For Baszile (2015), acknowledging and examining this early deployment of critical race counterstory for political activism is crucial because it points to its revolutionary relevance and potential today "in challenging racial and other forms of

domination . . . by intervening on the logic of and faith in rational discourse as the most viable path to justice" (p. 240). Black people, other people of color, and critical race theorists in particular continue in the tradition established by Douglass, Walker, Stewart, and others. They construct counterstories clearly intended to challenge taken-for-granted beliefs about students of color, achievement, merit, and the education system in the United States. One example of this is Gloria Ladson Billings' (2006) American Educational Research Association's presidential address, later published in an academic journal, that reframes the conversation on Black students' academic achievement from a focus on Black students' position on the underside of an achievement gap with White and other students, to an education debt owed to Black students by the nation across moral, sociopolitical, historical, and economic spheres. In another example, Shaun Harper's (2009) composite counterstory highlights the perspectives of Black male students who regularly experience racially motivated subordination on and off college and university campuses, and who are characterized as deviant, but who demonstrate achievement and leadership. In these and other counterstories, authors or characters frankly contest racism, oppression, and the discourse of equality, and make a strong case that the stories of people of color are a strength they bring in efforts to improve the education system (Berry & Stovall, 2013; Caton, 2012; Kohli, 2009).

It is also important to note that constructing a politically transparent counterstory is not about framing a narrative that makes Black people, their condition of racial oppression, and/or a political agenda of liberation palatable to the dominant value system. It is not an attempt "to play, and win, by [the dominant system's] rules" (Delgado, 1989,

p. 2425). Instead, it is an act of testifying, which means to "present the facts, to attest to their accuracy, and to profess a personal belief or conviction" in a way that "critiques . . . a society that is dominated by and structured to favor white men of wealth and power" (Austin, 1995, pp. 426-427). In other words, the goal of the critical race counterstory, like testimonio, is to "bring to light a wrong, a point of view, or an urgent call for action" (Reyes & Curry Rodriguéz, 2012, p. 525), and to name, or identify, "the workings and abuses of institutional power, the human costs, and our collective sobrevivencia (survival and beyond)" (Prieto & Villenas, 2012, p. 415).

Counterstories and Audiencing

"Audiencing" the narrative is also imperative when scripting critical race counterstories. In the realm of educational research, Lincoln (2001) argues that researchers must "engage in audiencing, that is, addressing different segments of the multiple communities we desire to reach with different texts, and different kinds of texts, useful for the purposes which that community defines for itself" (p. 4). She cautions against being preoccupied with serving and satisfying an exclusive audience of scholars and policy makers—one that was and is socially constructed through the "discursive practices" of scientific research, itself a space "where power relations are deployed, played out, reformulated, or reinscribed" (p.6).

On this point, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) shares that her writerly voice in Black Feminist Thought "is both individual and collective" (p. vi) and that she was conscious about writing a book that would be accessible to many, including those outside the academy. She continues, "I could not write a book about Black women's ideas that the

vast majority of African-American women could not read and understand" (p. vii). Therefore, Collins was cautious to avoid reinforcing "social relations of domination" (p. vii) through her language, ideas, and style. She draws on theoretical traditions without relying on jargon, grounds her analyses in Black women's experiences, ideas, and words, and uses subjective pronouns throughout the text.

The result is a discussion and analysis of Black women's "collective knowledge" (p. x) that is at once readable, familiar, thoughtful, and complex. In the same spirit, Gloria Anzaldúa (2105/1981) cautions women writers of color against what she calls the "white male" imperative which would insist that we "Bow down to the sacred bull, form" (p. 165). It is this same imperative that tells us to "Put frames and metaframes around the writing. Achieve distance in order to win the coveted title "literary writer" or "professional writer." Above all do not be simple, direct, nor immediate" (p. 165). In fact, for many scholars, engaging in research is part of a grander calling to challenge exploitative power relations and to "do something important in the world . . . to change things for the better" (Goodall, 2008, p. 13). Goodall contends that there is sufficient power in the story to effect such change, so long as scholars choose to write in forms that connect to audiences beyond the confines of traditional western-oriented scholarly journals, conferences, and classrooms. However, while the concept of audiencing may indicate expansive thought within the realm of qualitative research, the critical race counterstory is a form that is, historically, in sync with the language and style of the audience it seeks to compel.

For example, Baszile (2015) suggests that Black abolitionists starting in the 1830s fundamentally shaped the abolitionists movement through the dissemination of their critical race counterstories—narratives that rejected the objective and distant rhetorical stance required by the rational elite in favor of passionate, personal accounts "designed to stir the 'feelings' of the public" (p. 242). Her analysis of the writings of Frederick Douglass and David Walker shows that audiencing, or writing in a language, tone, and style relatable to a particular community, was a paramount concern for Black activists of the time. The writers used two different approaches to counterstorytelling. Walker expressed outrage and called for direct action, using bold language, peppered with exclamation points, while Douglass offered an "invitation to understanding," by telling his personal story as a way to "[suggest] that one's reasoning is inextricably linked to one's experiences of the world and the feelings that those experiences generate" (Baszile, 2015, p. 245). The distinct styles are intentional, since Walker was speaking to Black and White people, and supported insurrection, while Douglass catered to a predominantly White audience familiar with the slave narrative genre.

Baszile (2015) states that both Walker's and Douglass' approaches helped to shape the abolitionist movement. However, Delgado (1989) suggests that the "invitation to understanding" style is best suited for the critical race counterstory. He writes that counterstories "must be or must appear to be noncoercive. They invite the reader to suspend judgment, listen for their point or message, and then decide what measure of truth they contain. Bell's (1987, 1992a) fantastical encounters with composite character Geneva Gay are an example of this invitational form of counterstory writing. He

encourages readers to willingly suspend disbelief and thoughtfully consider the lessons embedded in the stories.

A final point on audiencing has to do with disseminating counterstories. Accounts that are unapologetically political and seek to change the world as we know it cannot be effective if only a few people—such as subscribers to academic journals or students enrolled in institutions of higher education—are likely to read them. Reyes and Curry Rodriguez (2012) write, "The testimonio is not to be kept secret; it requires active participatory readers or listeners who act on behalf of the speaker in an effort to arrive at justice and redemption" (p. 527). Beyond distributing writing through the public news media, the Internet and social media outlets make easy and wide-ranging dissemination of counterstories a possibility for any scholar who is so inclined.

Methods: A Socially Just Research Plan for Composite Counterstory Construction

As I outlined in the previous section, composite counterstory construction (CCC) is a specific form of critical race methodology that is common in CRT research, and there is a growing body of educational scholarship that uses CCC. However, more literature is needed that explains the methods researchers use for CCC, and their justifications for those methods. Still, this gap in literature was not limiting for me, but instead offered an opportunity for me to pull suitable methods from various critical scholars to cultivate a process that worked well for my dissertation study. I drew heavily from Solórzano and Yosso's (2001) essay on critical race methodology (outlined above) and Pizarro's (1999) five-part method for social justice research (outlined below) to develop a research plan of action.

Marc Pizarro's (1999) "method for Chicana/o social justice research" is composed of five phases intended to guide, with general specificity, how to conduct participatory research with a social justice framework. Pizarro believes that educational research with Chicana/o communities must be foremost concerned with transformation of racist academic research traditions and transformative experiences in Chicana/o communities. Importantly, he emphasizes that this requires the ongoing, substantial, and preferential input of Chicana/o students throughout the research process, including analysis and representation. I describe his phases briefly before discussing my need to adapt his process for my dissertation study.

During the first phase, identifying subjects, Pizarro (1999) suggests that it is important to determine the people most impacted by the context of inquiry. The researcher should ask: Who is experiencing exploitation, discrimination, or oppression in some form, and whose knowledge is silenced by "hegemonic ideology and epistemology" (pp. 65-66)? The project definition and description phase is intended to develop with participants a "comfortable context" for sharing details about their thoughts and lives (p. 67). Pizarro argues this requires the following: acknowledge each participant's epistemological position as well the researcher's, make research interest and overall social justice agenda clear, acknowledge participants' authority over their lives, knowledge, and participation, and develop a cooperative research relationship—including the goals of the research, wherein participants and researcher genuinely believe they are working together to "enrich" their communities (p. 67).

Next, the analytical phase is the time to identify key themes while in conversation with participants, based on their perspectives. According to Pizarro, examining the data with participants provides an important opportunity for participants' challenging of one another's views. The fourth phase is the meta-analytical phase, when participants and researcher should review the entire process, including the themes identified during the analytical phase, to determine in what ways their views may have evolved, or what the analysis illuminates for them (p. 70). From this critical review, researcher and participants can think about the "concrete implications and interventions that they can then propose through the research" (p. 70).

Pizarro contends it is critical for the researcher to remain in conversation and collaboration with participants during the "product" and empowerment efforts" (pp. 65-73). He writes, "researchers need to share their writing with the participants, to have them respond to these representations, and to have them "rewrite" them, all through substantive discussions (p. 71). Fundamentally, Pizarro shares with his participants "a community-oriented interest in making change" (p. 64) in their communities and he emphasizes the importance of researcher-participant collaboration and social justice action in community spaces.

I adapted Pizarro's (1999) method to suit the needs of my dissertation study, since he conceptualizes the process as taking place in a community context, with a researcher and youth participants working over an extended period of time toward a common goal of change/action relevant to their lives and community. My primary method of data collection, on the other hand, was conversational interviews with adult participants with

whom I mostly spoke using online video applications. The distinction between extended ethnographic research in a community setting and an interview-based study with a small sample of participants in an online setting is important to note when considering my approach to engaging with participants, especially my responsibilities to them and my expectations of them.

First of all, although it was important to me to develop a genuine and meaningful rapport with the women in my study and to share our experiences for the purposes of effecting change in the direction of social justice, I was mindful that my participants are adults already deeply engaged in the activities and concerns of their own lives. Secondly, qualitative interview research is "based on a relatively straightforward commitment to collecting and representing the perspectives of informants" (DeVault & Gross, 2012, p. 206) and does not necessarily require, although it may at times involve, extended fieldwork in an immersive setting with participants. Therefore, I did not rely on a model of "sustained immersion" (DeVault & Gross, 2012) in a physical space, but remained connected to my participants through online forums, which allowed me further insight into their personal and professional lives, and their perspectives on myriad social issues.

Given the aforementioned considerations, I viewed my participants as busy adults, led by their personal commitments to justice, in general, and their interest in my topic of race, gender, and TESOL, in particular, to share some of their lives with me. I asked them and they agreed to have conversational interviews about their identities, perspectives, and experiences as Black women TESOL educators. It was not their responsibility to me to dedicate numerous hours as "co-researchers" invested in analyzing and interpreting data,

even though the data were their own stories. Instead, they entrusted me with their stories, and it became my responsibility as the investigator, researcher, and doctoral candidate to act as a witness in order to thoughtfully, compassionately, and rigorously analyze, interpret, and re-present their perspectives, experiences, and knowledges.

Can I Get A Witness?

Reflecting on a time when Medgar Evers asked James Baldwin to join him as he investigated a Black man's murder in the southern United States, Baldwin (2017) wrote that he was afraid, and that his experience on that dangerous journey made unmistakably clear that the "line which separates a witness from an actor is a very thin line indeed; nevertheless, the line is real" (p. 30). He goes on to list the realities that he, unlike Evers and others, did not have to face, including, "the criminal state of Mississippi . . . raising money . . .[and] strategy controlling prayer meetings, marches, petitions" (pp. 30-31). Baldwin concludes:

> I was never in town to stay. This was sometimes hard on my morale, but I had to accept, as time wore on, that part of my responsibility—as a witness—was to move as largely and as freely as possible, to write the story, and to get it out. (p. 31)

Baldwin's concept of the witness as distinguished from the actor resonates with me in my position as a researcher-scholar who has been entrusted with the experiences and stories—the personal lives and ideas—of Black women who daily walk in a world riddled with obstacles set against them. To be clear, my journey alongside the women in my dissertation study—in the very safe and comfortable spaces of our homes and offices, via digital technologies, and in one case, at a public library— does not compare to the

ones Baldwin took with Evers and other freedom fighters on the violent streets of the United States during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. However, even absent the imminent threat of violence and murder, taking on the role of witness in order "to write the story, and to get it out" (Baldwin, 2017, p.31) remains a necessary and important one in the overall movement for social justice.

Furthermore, Baldwin, as a Black man concerned with liberation for Black people, understood on a personal (mental, emotional, physiological) level the realities faced by Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and others for whom he bore witness, and thus the deep meaning of justice for and with them. Yet he also recognized that they occupied different positions in the struggle, and that the vantage points from which they operated in the world gave them different perspectives and concerns. In the same way, although I share a community identity with my participants, I was also positioned differently relative to the research study in particular, a distinction that is important to discuss.

Positionality. I am a Black American woman from Columbus, Ohio, who is passionate about working for justice and love in the world. I am also an educator committed to English language education with immigrants and refugees to the United States, and English language learners outside the United States. I grew up in a middle class, working family steeped in Baptist Christian values and customs. These and other factors of my identity are important to me, especially when it comes to the ways in which I view and experience the world. As a Black woman educator and scholar, I am aware of the impact of race and racism in everything I do and in all of my interactions, and I

believe that race and racism have a determining impact on other people's experiences. I agree with Banks (2006) that "the culture, context, and the positionality of researchers influence their assumptions, questions, findings, and interpretations" (p. 780), and I value the need to make clear and remain reflexive about how my belief systems and identities inform my research process.

In terms of my dissertation study, who I am is especially relevant since it was an inward look into my own experiences that led me to turn outward in search of stories from other Black women educators. It was and is important to me to learn from women similarly positioned by gendered racism, about the ways it operates in our lives and how we are often frustrated, in moments defeated, but ultimately undeterred, by it. However, as I emphasized in Chapter 2, I know that simply sharing racial and gender identities does not equate to a sameness of experience or perspectives. I could not assume familiarity with any of the women who shared their time and stories with me, even though I was inclined and tempted to do so. Nevertheless, I do not find the insider/outsider dichotomy to be a fitting description of my researcher-participant relationships. Instead, I return to Gilroy's (1993) concept of rootedness by which to understand the identities of all of my participants and myself to be women of shared community identity who experienced similar societal realities along varied routes.

This helps to explain why each woman whom I reached out to for the dissertation study responded and engaged with an unspoken but deeply felt aura of sisterhood. For example, CJ, who initially responded to my emails based on a colleague's referral, spoke to me with such familiarity the Saturday of our first call that I thought perhaps I already

knew her. I was sure she called me by my nickname, "Car," which only family members and close friends use, but it' is more likely that I just did not hear the last part of my name. Still, her manner of speaking was so familial that I thought I was talking to a friend. First conversations with other participants were similarly at ease and lacked the polite distance that Western "professional etiquette" requires. The women and I were neat, insofar as appearances and dress, for meetings, but, particularly in online video conversations, we were not made up in a way suggestive of official business. These details are all relevant because they point to the reality that despite our differences, Black women do often share a sense of sisterhood that lends itself to sharing our stories with one another openly and enthusiastically. The ways my participants and I related with one another gives credence to the validity of Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) Black Feminist Epistemology, a stance that I claim and that I experienced in conversation with Black women in my study.

With all of the above considerations in mind, my research unfolded in 4 interconnected phases: (1) Identifying Subjects; (2) Interviews and Data Collection; (3) Reflection and Analysis; and (4) Composite Counterstory Construction.

Identifying Subjects

I was clear about the community whose experiences, conditions, and knowledge were most important for my study—Black women with experience as teachers to speakers of other languages. Since I am a part of this community, I know that exploitation and discrimination impact our professional and personal lives, and also that our voices are not often taken seriously. Therefore, it was also important that I selected

women who share my concern with improving the professional and societal conditions of Black women inside and outside TESOL contexts. Following Pizarro (1999), I believe my "primary concern must be to engage in research that investigates and helps to shift social injustice as part of a larger effort" (p. 66) of empowerment for Black women in TESOL, and more broadly, all of those who suffer under the reign of white supremacy.

Therefore, I selected participants by contacting teachers and former teachers I know personally, and asking for referrals, as well as by contacting Black women who maintain Internet blogs, websites, and social media pages about both being a Black woman and teaching English to speakers of other languages. My initial mode of contact was via email, phone, and/or online messaging. I sent an interest inquiry introducing myself, giving a brief overview of my research interests, and inviting the person to participate if she identifies as a Black American woman with experience in TESOL. I provided the research questions so that my focus on race, stories, and justice was apparent. Additionally, I only contacted people who expressed to me personally, through their online writing, or to someone in my personal network, concerns regarding race, gender, education, and/or justice in some way.

This was critical for me because I was interested in learning more about Black women's experiences with and knowledge of racism in their professional and personal lives, and their visions for a more socially just profession and society. I recruited seven self-identified Black American women who are or have been teachers of English to speakers of other languages, either in the United States or abroad. However, this dissertation centers on the data from four participants, whose truncated bios, with

pseudonyms, are below. I selected the focal participants based two interrelated criteria. First, each of the focal participants are currently working full time as educators or administrators in TESOL, and have longer tenures in the field as compared to the other participants, who are not currently active as TESOL educators. That likely explains why the narratives of focal participants aligned in meaningful ways, and it was in their narratives that the key themes were most prominently emphasized.

Focal Participants

JM is an African American woman in her late 20s to early 30s. She was born and raised in a predominantly Black neighborhood the Midwest U.S., and attended predominantly Black grade schools. She attended a predominantly White, private liberal arts college, where she participated in a study abroad to China, and was active in the Intercultural Club. She has a Bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance, a Master's degree Foreign and Second Language Education, and expressed interest in potentially pursuing a doctorate degree in the future. JM stated that she "always loved . . . diverse people" (interview communication, July 14, 2016). She entered the TESOL field as an administrator in a private English language program, at a Midwest university. She currently works as an administrator in the International office of a community college. I interviewed JM at a public library in the Midwest, and we also communicated via email and social media.

JQ is a Black American woman in her late 30s who grew up in racially mixed (Black and White) neighborhoods and schools in the southern and northeastern U.S. In spite of her coming of age in integrated contexts, she recalls becoming aware of the stark

differences in how Black and White people were positioned in society when she moved away from home and attended college, and spent time training in the military. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Media Studies, and got started in the TESOL field as an English teacher in Costa Rica and then to South Korea, where she currently teaches at a government English program for children. She is seeking a teaching certification so that she can be qualified for more lucrative teaching opportunities in more countries, and ultimately intends to settle in Africa. She describes life in the United States as follows: "your American pie is rotten, and I don't want any" (JQ, interview communication, August 31, 2016).

DL, an African American woman in her early 40s, grew up in predominantly White suburbs and schools in the Midwest United States, where she recalls experiencing racial discrimination by White peers and intra-racial tensions with Black family members. She graduated from a private high school and obtained a Bachelor's degree in elementary education, Master's degrees in student personnel services and TESOL, and a doctorate in Foreign, Second, and Multilanguage Language Education. She has taught extensively in Japan, as well as in Korea, Indonesia, and the United States. Her multiple credentials and extensive teaching experience, she believes, were required in order to achieve her career goals. Currently, Dr. DL is a faculty member at an Asian university based in the northeastern United States, where she says she has found her niche.

EW, who is in her late 20s, is of West Indian and African American ancestry, and identifies as "just Black" (interview communication, August 2, 2016). Her family lived in several regions of the United States before settling in the Midwest. She states that

growing up, she disassociated from African Americans and White Americans and was more comfortable with immigrant children. However, she made friends with African American girls in high school, when she began to identify with that community. EW studied abroad in Central America during her time as an undergraduate, is fluent in Spanish, and holds a Bachelor's in International Studies. She obtained a Master's in education and teaching licensure in K-12 English language education and 1-6 elementary education, through the Teach for America program; during her TFA tenure, she taught at a bilingual school in the Midwest. EW later moved to Central America to teach English at a private K-12 school, where she remains.

Interviews and Data Collection

I incorporated Pizarro's (1999) "project definition and descriptive phase" into my data collection process. Central to this point, as Pizarro conceptualizes it, is for researchers to "explain our interests in learning from [participants'] experiences and in developing strategies (together) for changing and improving any conditions they deem problematic" (p. 67). In my case, I began each conversation with my own truncated biography as way to open up the door to trust and sharing, and to provide the listener with some insight into how I came to the work. I believe this approach helped to create a comfortable context for participants to open up. Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker (2001) believe that researchers are often more concerned with mining information from the interviewee than engaging in any "exchange or disclosure about the life of the researcher" (p. 291). They contend that it is particularly important when interviewing people of color for the interviewer to share personal information at the outset of the

interview as way to begin to establish trust and rapport. This is due to the history and ongoing reality of exploitation and misinterpretation of Black people in academic research (p. 291).

In addition, Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker (2001) suggest that throughout the interview process, the researcher should establish commonalities of experience, engage in mutual dialogue, remain observant of what is being communicated through body language and other "subtle clues," and be mindful of cultural differences and concerns (p. 292-294). Although I did not take up too much initial time with my personal stories, I shared my experiences and insights as part of my conversations with the Teachers. I believe that by being open with each woman throughout our dialogues—in relation to my identities, my epistemological perspective, and my experiences related to teaching as a Black woman in TESOL contexts—I demonstrated my commitment to collaboration, intimacy, and truthfulness as central to our research relationships.

I conducted two semi-structured conversational interviews of 45 minutes to one hour with each educator. One woman, JM, met with me in person at a local library while the others, who were not based in the area, participated via an online technologies such as Skype or FaceTime. Following each interview, I wrote or updated a reflective memo and a profile for each participant, based on my observations and impressions of the events leading up to and during the interview, as well as reflections, ideas for follow-up questions, and emerging themes based on a review of the recorded interview.

Reflection and Analysis

After each of the first interviews, I wrote a reflective memo, which included an interview summary and a profile for each participant. Generally speaking, I wrote memos and profiles immediately following the interview. Once I was finished with all of the first interviews, I read through my notes and determined initial themes and questions for the second round of interviews. I also sent emails to the participants to update them on my process and schedule a second interview. Following the second interview, I added information to the reflective memo for each participant, and then I updated the participant's respective profiles when appropriate. Once all of the interviews were complete, I transcribed each interview using the online software, Transcribe Wreally. This allowed me to control the audio speed, and to pause, rewind, fast-forward, and use shorthand.

I transcribed each participants' interviews one after the other, and during this process, I read through the transcriptions and began to think about themes. Once all of the transcriptions were complete, I did an official read through of each set of interviews, taking notes in the margins, highlighting passages, and making lists of ideas. I then read through my notes and determined themes shared across the interviews. I went through this reading, note-taking, and reflection process three times, gaining increasingly greater focus into the core themes, before settling on the strongest themes and the four participants whose stories most strongly resonated for the purposes of the analysis represented in this dissertation. From there, I created data tables with the theme titles and read through the four participants' transcripts again to pull passages reflecting those themes and organize them into the data tables. In other words, I constructed the

counterstory from the final data tables that reflect the core themes from the interview transcripts.

Writing the Composite Counterstory

Although I did not work closely with my participants to analyze and write the counterstory, I was cognizant of Pizarro's (1999) call to maintain the collaborative relationship established with participants throughout the research process and to the very end, even though I alone will ultimately be responsible—and credited—for the final written work. While it is important to respect participants and attempt to capture and re-present their truest sentiments, I also recognize that in the end, I am accountable for the words I put to paper. I was mindful that "Black feminist thought must both be tied to Black women's lived experiences and aim to better those experiences in some fashion" (Collins, 2000, p. 31). For my purposes, this meant keeping the women's words and experiences, and the spirit of our conversations, present in mind during the counterstory construction process.

I used arts-based methods during the creative writing process. As Leavy (2009) maintains, "as a representational form, the arts can be highly effective for communicating the emotional aspects of social life" and "can be employed as a means of creating critical awareness or raising consciousness" (p. 13). Using arts-based methods to re-present data in creative formats is in sync with the assumptions of critical race theory and methodology, as well as Black feminist epistemology (amplifying voices from "the bottom," valuing multiple perspectives, knowledges, and data sources, making research accessible to communities about whom research is concerned). Specifically, and as Leavy

explains, artistic representation of data can: (a) Give voice to "subjugated perspectives (p. 13); (b) "Evoke emotional response" and thereby promote dialogue (p. 14); and (c) Address audiences in and outside of academia.

I knew from early on in the research process that the setting of the counterstory should be the virtual world. All but one of my participants met with me online, and much of the dialogue and communities of support among Black women educators takes place on the Internet. After several iterations of the analytical processes described above, and once I had organized the most relevant interview passages into the data tables, I began to create characters and a broad story idea in my head. In the end, the counterstory is divided into four acts: an online Google chat; a virtual panel; a poetry collection, and an essay. Although writing the entire story was an iterative process, whereby I developed the sections in a cyclical fashion, I outline the creative process for each section separately in what follows.

Writing Acts I and II

The first two acts are closely related, in that they are presented in dialogue format that unfolds online. As I began to develop the story, I decided that one composite character would serve as the main interlocutor, and her voice would carry through each act. I developed two additional composite characters, and mapped out the basic details of their lives and experiences. Again, I drew from the data tables (based on the attributes and interview transcripts of participants) as well as my own biographical information and experiences, and data drawn from Internet research, to develop the characters and the plot. Although the dialogue that composes the first two acts is largely drawn directly

from the transcripts, I made small adjustments when necessary for clarity, and added fictional dialogue based on my own stories, those shared with me by friends and colleagues, and comments and articles on the Internet.

Writing Act III

During my first readings of the data tables, there were phrases that stood out to me, that I found particularly poetic and insightful. Some of their utterances were so on point, so impactful, that I felt they might not be as greatly appreciated in narrative or dialogue form. Since poetry writing has been a part of my creative identity since I was a child, I knew it would be meaningful to use poetic representation as part of the counterstory. I wasn't at first sure how the poems would become a part of the story, but I trusted the process and began reading through the data charts to pull out those special lines. Since I had already determined the core themes, I created an additional document and placed the passages in the appropriate section. My goal was to be able to tell the story of the research through the poems alone, although I knew they would make up only a part of the longer counterstory. Once the poems and the first two acts were near completion, I developed the plot turn that meaningfully integrates the poetry into the story.

Writing Act IV

The final act, though written in the voice of the main character, serves as a critical race analysis of the first three sections of the counterstory. Although composite counterstories in critical race research are often presented with a counterstory followed by an analysis of it, I wanted the counterstory *and* the analysis to be accessible to readers. Therefore, Act IV is a critical race analysis of the ideas presented in the online chat, the virtual panel,

and the poetry collection. In other words, the main character reflects on the themes explored in her previous conversations with fellow Black women educators using relevant tenets of critical race theory. This essay therefore serves to simultaneously conclude the counterstory and analyze the themes therein. Taken as a whole, the composite counterstory in the following chapter addresses my first research question: How do race, gender, and racism impact the personal and professional lives of Black women educators in TESOL?

Postscript: Measuring Vigor and Value

I agree with Pizarro (1999), who argues, "social justice must become the measure by which we evaluate the strength of research" and that scholars must "create the context in which this can happen" (p. 54). He cautions that concerns over proving the validity and rigor of research often wields too strong an influence in how scholars dedicated to social justice in education conduct research. Likewise, Leavy (2009) suggests that arts-based research be evaluated on the grounds of its vigor, with respect to "resonance, understanding, multiple meanings, dimensionality, and collaboration" (p. 16). Furthermore, she argues that a study can be deemed successful insofar as it is completed in sync with the stated research objectives, epistemological and methodological assumptions. With this in mind, I believe my participants' responses to the interview process and the final written product are the most valid and valuable tools for determining the strength of this research in addressing the impact of race, gender, and racism in the lives of the selected Black women educators in TESOL.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation—A Composite Counterstory

Writing A/Way: Another Case for Counterstory

Writing is an instrument of testimony, a practice of healing, and a way to freedom (Delgado, 1989; Jacobs, 1861; King, 2005; Reyes & Curry Rodriguéz, 2012). Through stories, we can come to better understand, influence, and be influenced by others (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014). Once made, stories change lives. For this reason, Thomas King (2005) cautions, "you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told" (p. 10). Humans have etched symbols onto surfaces for thousands of years, conveying messages intended to document, protest, and celebrate human and spiritual conditions. Black people in particular have called on the written word as part of their struggles to live as free and equal people in the United States. For example, when Maria W. Stewart published her first political pamphlet in 1831, she wanted to impress upon Black people their divine right to liberty, and the importance of their own voices—spoken and transcribed—in that fight. She wrote, "This is the land of freedom. The press is at liberty. Every man has the right to express his opinion. Many think, because your skins are tinged with a sable hue, that you are an inferior race of beings; but God does not consider you as such" (p. 29).

Indeed, narratives, poems, and speeches written by Black people during the 19th century exposed the realities of white supremacist racism and slavery that oppressed, marginalized, and suffocated, and killed Black life. Those written texts also helped to cultivate a community of resistance amongst Black people and others willing to join in the fight for racial equality, in a society whose laws expressly forbade it (Baszile, 2015). Undeniably, the written word plays an integral role in the complicated, multifaceted processes of social justice advocacy, and the medium has consequences for the message. In other words, form is as important as content. At times, I feel pulled undone by the "competing agendas" (Tyson, 1998, p. 21) of orienting my work either toward western academia or social justice advocacy in the Black community. However, as a Black woman educator for social justice, my core objective is to engage in writing, research, and advocacy that are uncoupled from, and meaningful to, Black people and other people marginalized by systemic white supremacy.

As I have previously discussed in Chapter Three, I approach this commitment to social justice, Black people's liberation, and education with a Black Feminist Epistemology (BFE). As outlined by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), BFE is undergirded by "an experiential, material base [encompassing the] collective experiences and accompanying worldviews that U.S. Black women sustained based on our particular history" (p. 256). Although Black women have experienced this history in multifaceted ways, our shared condition within the confines of systemic white supremacy nonetheless creates a unique culture and community. A key factor to this particularity is that the

synthesis of "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression . . . creates the conditions of our lives" (Combahee, 1981, p. 210).

From the "different plane" (Tyson, 1998, p. 22) of this culture and community emerged an epistemology that, although "devalued by dominant knowledge validation processes" (Collins, 2000, p. 256), can "enrich our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters both their empowerment and social justice" (p. 269). As a practitioner of this epistemology, I am an agent of my own empowerment as I push back against white-washed intellectual norms (such as reliance on White and European men and women's scholarship, making claims to objectivity, ignoring systemic racism, removing my self from my creative and intellectual work) and lift up my own ways of being and thinking in the world as meaningful, valid, and transformative. Additionally, beyond centering Black women's theory of knowledge in general, and thereby legitimating my intellectual and creative processes in particular, BFE acknowledges the value in, and seeks to engage, the stories, scholarship, and research that come from the epistemological perspectives of other people. In other words, BFE helps me to recognize the simultaneous power and partiality of my own perspective in making meaning of and in the world.

I recognize that my intellectual creations are always, at least in part, about me—who I am and what I want from the world—and that I am accountable to my intellectual and artistic creations. Therefore I want my daily life to align with my intellectual work, which represents a collaborative pursuit of a single agenda—that of seeking liberation for Black people and others whose lives inside the chokehold of oppression gasp, "I can't

breathe."[29] One way I can address the goal of liberation is to write a/way to freedom. To write a/way is to create texts that reject the master narrative of Black deviance (write away), and rejoin the magical narrative of Black resistance and excellence (write a way). I hear Assata Shakur (1987) beseeching me to "Carry it on now. Carry it on. Carry it on now. Carry it on. Carry on the tradition" (p. 263).

With respect to research and writing in education, the critical race counterstory, as methodologically conceptualized in critical race theory, offers a means to write in ways that are in tune with the knowledge validation process of BFE. Solórzano and Yosso's (2002) articulation of critical race methodology identifies the counterstory as "a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. . . . [that] can help strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance" (p. 32). However, despite the extensive use of counterstory in critical race research, "many alleys, angles, and avenues of vision remain unarticulated" (Baszile, 2015, p. 240). This chapter, then, extends an "avenue of vision" for how to compose and meaningfully utilize counterstory in critical race research. By following the methodological considerations outlined in Chapter 3, the counterstory presented in this chapter: (a) Centers race and racism while accounting for intersectionality; (b) Challenges dominant epistemological approaches to research about Black women; (c) Is justice oriented; (d) Focuses on the experiences and knowledges of Black women educators; and (e) Is informed by multiple sources and perspectives. I use elements of creative writing (e.g., poetry, narrative

[29] The last words of Eric Garner, a Black man who suffered an asthma attack in 2014 after being choked by White police officers in New York, NY. They arrested him for allegedly selling cigarettes illegally. See http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/video/2014/dec/04/i-cant-breathe-eric-garner-chokehold-death-video

dialogue, composite characters) to tell a story that reflects the spirit of some of the conversations I shared with the Black women educators who participated in my dissertation study. The story also contains reflections shared by Black women TESOL educators on Internet blogs and social media forums realities, and perspectives from my own lived experiences as a Black woman TESOL instructor.

This counterstory addresses my first research question: How do race, gender, and racism impact the personal and professional lives of Black women educators in TESOL? In so doing, it challenges the majoritarian stories of: (a) Black women as professionally and intellectually incompetent; and (b) Multicultural harmony and racial equality in the TESOL field. It also positions Black women as dedicated, highly qualified educators and trailblazers of critical cross-cultural engagement, who build supportive communities as they resist racism and "thrive and survive" (JQ, interview communication, date) in and beyond the TESOL profession.

Womanist Wanderlust: Teaching, Traveling and Serving Cross-Culturally—
A Composite Counterstory

The setting for this composite counterstory (CCS) is in Cyberspace. There are dozens of Facebook pages, blogs, Instagram and other social media accounts on the Internet that cater to Black educators and Black travelers generally, and Black women English language educators or what I call "Womanist Wanderlusters" specifically.[30] These online spaces serve as supportive communities wherein members offer advice, vent, celebrate each other and themselves, wonder aloud, promote businesses, and network.

[30] See Act II for an explanation of this concept.

Because the online world plays such an important role in the lives of Black women English language educators, and since I connected with my participants mostly online, it is an appropriate and realistic setting for this CCS.

Act I (The Google Chat) is an online chat between two Black women friends, both English teachers in TESOL contexts. Each character is identified both by a given name and a social media handle (social media identifier), as it is common practice among Black women to utilize Internet and social media to engage and connect in and with the world. Raelle, or "@MidwestMochaMusing" teaches adult English in the Midwest United States, and April, "@GirlonFire" teaches at a private language school for adults and a primary school, in Ethiopia. In this opening Act, Raelle invites April to be a part of a virtual panel she is planning for Black women English language educators. Act II (The Virtual Panel) is the virtual panel, entitled, Womanist Wanderlust: Teaching, Traveling and Serving Cross-Culturally, featuring three women: Raelle (@MidwestMochaMusing), April (@GirlonFire), and Skye (@Skye_High). Black women from all over the world are tuned in and the panelists answer questions sent via instant messaging. The third Act (The Follow-up Email) is a short collection of poems inspired by the stories shared in the panel discussion, written by panelist April. Finally, Act IV (The Reflective Essay) is an extended essay posted on Raelle's blog. In her reflective essay, she offers a critical race analysis of the panel discussion and April's poems.

Act I: The Google Chat

@MidwestMochaMusing: Hey girl!

@GirlonFire: Hey! Omg it's been forever!

@MidwestMochaMusing: I know right! But I'm glad we finally found some time to catch up.

@GirlonFire: I know right! …So what's up with you? How are classes?

@MidwestMochaMusing: Girl, it's the third week of classes and I've got a great group… But I can already tell it's gonna be one of those sessions where I have to let them know. When we were giving introductions today, a woman from Iraq asked me where I'm from. I told her I'm from the United States and she said, "But where are your parents from? You're so pretty." LOL. I'm like "um, the United States." Then someone else chimes in—an older guy from Somalia says, "No, you must be from Africa-not just Black American." It's like I can't ever just be Black. But how's your day?

@GirlonFire: Amazing. I'm on break so I've been relaxing today. But I met a sista today in the café, and she was telling me about her teaching experiences—she's been in the game for 10 years, in the U.S. and abroad. She said that most of the time, the only Black face she sees on staff is the one in mirror, on bathroom breaks! We laughed about how often White colleagues ask to touch our hair—when we wear it natural. Or how they get confused when we change it up on 'em. Ha! It's so interesting how many of our experiences are so similar.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Yeah…ever the exotic. I just finished an entry for my blog, "Sara and Nikki: Leverging the limitations of sexual agency." So the struggle continues! Le sigh! But how are you rockin' your hair these days anyway? And what did your new friend (what's her name??) share with you?

@GirlonFire: Omg Baartman! I remember the first time I read about her story in an African American women's lit class in undergrad. BTW, that was one of the only times a professor assigned readings by or about Black women writers during my entire college career—in a class specifically focused on and conspicuously titled after African American women!! Offered, of course, by the African and African American Studies department! Why don't professors in other departments value our experience? Even in the texts we are given to teach in English courses…the only Black woman who shows up is Rosa Parks….and even then it's never her own voice. Just a generic "we shall overcome" blurb on the Civil Rights Movement. Ugh.

@GirlonFire: I'm definitely gonna check your article out. Let me know when you post it. But um, my hair...the salons here get you in and out pretty quickly, and are affordable, so I've been getting it set on rollers, which is kind of a thing here. It's cute and convenient—everyone is natural here, so I can count on walking into any salon and getting similar results.

@GirlonFire: And, the woman I met is Nzingha. She ended up here in Addis after an administrator in China told her that parents wouldn't be happy with her, since they wouldn't trust she was "American." They apparently weren't feelin' her dark skin and locs. He hired her anyway, but she didn't trust he would be supportive. So, rather than risk living in misery, she decided to explore an African country, and lucked up on her job here at a private language school—which, by the way, she says is run by a White man from London who is a colorblind racist.

@MidwestMochaMusing: I guess you can find them everywhere. SMH. You gotta love a friendly colorblind racist! Did I tell you what happened to me last week? One of my colleagues—hired last year—subbed for me….This White woman just out of undergrad. So she emailed me and copied my supervisor, critiquing my lesson plans and advising me on improvements. She tried to check me for not being "on schedule" with the curriculum guide (that she wrote last semester). Well I'm sorry but I don't rush through lessons with disregard to my students' needs! I adapt the generic lessons and supplement with articles and materials that will support their learning. I'm not a robot—and neither are they. SMH. Keep in mind—she and I barely know one another, and I've been teaching in this position for 6 years!

@GirlonFire: It would be funny if it weren't so insulting. I'm sure that teacher just thought she was "helping" you. I don't know…it's like we go through daily insults and they add up to a mountain of hurt by the end of the week. But we are expected to smile through it all.

@MidwestMochaMusing: You know it. And you don't want to be the "Angry Black Woman."

@GirlonFire: How are you though? I see the blog and everything is doing well… What do you have, like five thousand followers on Instagram now! Celebrity status!

@MidwestMochaMusing: Well, you know, you know! Seriously though it's been such a learning experience but so fulfilling to be a part of this movement and community, and to create a forum for Black women professionals to connect in this way. It's

awesome. Oh, and lucky you with those weekly appointments. I'm back in box braids…soooo convenient and necessary right now!

@MidwestMochaMusing: How is the primary school? I bet the kids are soooo cute. I mean. I don't think I will ever do kids again, but they still cute!

@GirlonFire: Hahahaha. To thine own self be true! They are adorable. So polite. So yeah, primary school is cool. At home I was working with mostly White female teachers, and you know, some of them were great educators—but most of the time White folks who teach in the hood have such low opinions and expectations of our children. But here, the staff members are all Ethiopian, and the expectation for the kids is excellence. It's a beautiful thing to see—and be a part of. I teach the kids poetry, and this week we are working on this stanza from Kinloch's A Colored Democracy—"And I am asked if my Blackness/If my Beautiful Blackness/Would I remove?" Then we yell NO! They are so much fun.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Love it! That sounds too cute! You are going to have to post more pics and videos! And, speaking of DOPE teaching, I NEED you to be a panelist for this online conference I'm planning next month. It's called, "Womanist Wanderlust," and it's for Black women in TESOL….Well, and Black women who travel in general. Hell, a lot of the time, English language teachers are also avid travelers, so the two go hand in hand.

@GirlonFire: Right. Okay cool. Aww thanks for thinking of me! I'm in, as long as I'm not teaching!

@MidwestMochaMusing: Okay, it's going to be the first of what I hope...

@GirlonFire: Hold up my ride is here. I gotta go. But email me the details.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Thank you! Doing that now. I've got one other panelist, so I'll send a group email to schedule. Talk to you later, girl.

Act II: The Virtual Panel

@MidwestMochaMusing: Hello Everyone! Welcome to Womanist Wanderlust: Teaching, Traveling and Serving Cross-Culturally. Thank you so much for being here! I want to go ahead and get started—I see folks are still joining us, and I know we will have some signing on and off during the livecast, and that's fine. Can everyone hear me? I'm getting yeses in the chat bar…Wow…already 35 women from all over the world are here to learn and share about surviving and thriving as a Black woman in TESOL! And many of us may not be educators per say, but have an affinity for cross-cultural experiences, whether it's in the work, travel, social, or leisure parts of our lives. I know for myself, and my panelists, cross-cultural experiences are important parts of all of those aspects of our lives. Hey there April and Skye!

@MidwestMochaMusing: So, before I have these sistas introduce themselves, a few things to keep in mind. First, this is just the first of what I hope will be ongoing discussions on navigating the world as a Black woman globetrotter, with a special emphasis on educators in TESOL. With that being said, please understand that all of our experiences and often our perspectives are different. Although we all identify as Black women, we are unique individuals and so no insight or advice is "one size fits all." That brings me to my second point—which is that we are the panelists but not the only experts! Please use this community space to share, learn from, and support one another.

We are better together! And finally, a shameless plug—please join and share my page on FB—it's Black Women in TESOL for those who don't already know. And of course, subscribe to my Blog, and follow on Instagram and Snapchat, all at @MidwestMochaMusing! Okay panelists! Let's get started! Tell us about yourselves please.

@GirlOnFire: Hey Y'all! So glad to be here! This is exciting. My name is April and I am originally from the West Indies, but grew up about half the time in Fayetteville, North Carolina. I have a Bachelor's in English and Business, and a Master's degree in International Studies. I'm also TESOL certified through the TFA program—that's Teach for America—don't judge me; it was a horrendous experience! And anyway currently I am teaching at a private language school in Addis Ababa, where I also volunteer at a primary school in my neighborhood. I'm in my second academic year here, and I love it. Um, let's see…I got started in the field volunteering at an ESL library program for adult newcomers to the United States, and that was during undergrad. Um, as far as travel…Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Mexico…Canada—does that count? (laughs)

@MidwestMochaMusing: Everything counts! Thank you April. Skye?

@Skye_High: Peace ladies! Thank you Raelle for having me here for this wonderful forum. I think it is so so important to gather together in spaces like this—virtual or otherwise—to just feel each other's presence and vibe and be magical together! So, I am from Cincinnati, Ohio, attended college in Chicago where I got a Bachelor's in Education many moons ago it seems now. (laughter) Uh...I was certified as an English language educator, and taught in the classroom for five years, then went on to get a

Master's in Higher Education Administration, and a doctorate in Foreign and Second Language Education. I served in the Peace Corps in Kazakhstan and so I'm fluent in Russian, a skill that may become useful given the current political climate (laughs). No seriously, can we just take a moment on that? I just cannot believe America voted that fool into the presidency. I honestly thought it was a joke up until he was elected. I did not think it would happen. But it just goes to show how raw racism is in the United States.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Girl, don't even get me started.

@Skye_High: Okay yes, moving on. But before Peace Corps, in undergrad I did a study abroad in Ghana, which was just incredible, and now, in my current role as the Director of Language Programs at Midwest University, I lead a study abroad program to Guatemala each year, and I've done some traveling around Central America through that program. I love love love what I do! And uh…Ms. Raelle. You know you skipped yourself?

@MidwestMochaMusing: You are so right Raelle! Thank you both for getting us started then, and forgive me, you know, I was just being a gracious host! (laughter) You all know me as Midwest Mocha Musing but my government name is Raelle and I too am from the great state of Ohio! In fact I completed my education here, with a Bachelor's in Media Studies and a Master's in both African and African American Studies and Journalism. So one thing that makes me different from April and Raelle is that I am not formally trained in education and am not certified. However, I got my start as a fellow in the JET program, which is a Japanese program that places native English speakers in Japanese primary schools to assist with English instruction. Just as I was finishing my

first Master's in AAAS, I was turning in a paper and I saw a sign that said JET program, teach in Japan, and I thought, wow, I haven't been abroad yet, that would be nice. So I took the little post card, sent off for the application, and next thing you know I'm in Detroit at the Japan consulate for an interview, and I got the position and they flew me to Japan that summer after graduation. Uh, so…yeah, I was an assistant language teacher. I was in the countryside, in the middle of nowhere. I learned Japanese, made Japanese friends…I learned a lot about Japanese culture, went to weddings, it became home for me. I did two years, and from there I went on to teach in Korea for a year, then I returned to the States to get my Masters in journalism. For the past six years, I've traveled to a different island…. So, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, Bahamas… and a few more! Right now, I teach English at a community college, and of course, manage my blog and other cool social media stuff.

@GirlOnFire: And we Lovvvveeee following everything you do! Everyone joining us please do yourself a favor and follow all things @MidwestMochaMusing!

@MidwestMochaMusing: Awww thank you! So, let's get into the discussion. I asked each panelist to think about her experiences in the field, and to decide on one primary insight to share with us today. So, to begin, they will each share about their chosen topic, and then we will open the call for questions, comments, and collective sharing. To begin, I will start with the common theme that brings us all here today. I believe that April, Skye, all of you joining the talk, and I have what I call Womanist Wanderlust. As Black women, we have a special place in our hearts for exploring cultures and engaging the world. This could be in our hometowns, as we make friends

across ethnic, racial, and cultural lines, attend international performances and events, teach or volunteer with students from international locales, or whatever…and we tend to do this work from a service perspective. But it also includes worldwide travel and career. So if I think about myself, my early memories of longing to explore really began in middle school. That's when I started reading heavily, and I loved historical fiction and geography and watching PBS (laughs). On PBS they would talk about Rick Steeves and him traveling the world, and I was like oh, I wanna go there, I wanna see that, I wanna see it for myself and not just on TV. I can even remember reading the book Zeely, and I was fascinated by Zeely, just like the little girl—I cant remember the main character's name right now. But, just thinking about Africa and women from far away places. I wanted to meet women like Zeely. So when the opportunity came up for me to go explore, I was like, I'm taking it, I have to do this. And I did. That's when I did the JET program.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Now, I use the term 'Womanist' not because I always identify as a Womanist, but for those who are not familiar, the term was coined by Alice Walker as a way to define and make apparent the existence and work of Black feminists. And I first encountered the term in my Master's program, and at the time, what I mostly loved about it was how she wrote that "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" because, of course, I love the book and the movie, The Color Purple![31] But anyway, I choose to use it to describe Black women in this field because I do want to emphasize that our motivations and our experiences as TESOL educators and as world travelers are

[31] See Walker, A. (1983). In search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist prose. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

different from those of White people—who dominate the field. We go into the world knowing spaces may or may not be hostile to us—and then, a lot of the time, it's just different, unfamiliar. But we go, and with a different frame of mind. And that's because, for me, I'm just so accustomed to being other or being different, that it's comfortable to me. And Black women I know are so much more comfortable with being uncomfortable than any group of people I know. Black women lean into discomfort more than others and that opens doors for us, where others might be afraid of discomfort, it's our whole lives. So yes, womanist wanderlusterssss mount up!

Panelists all laugh

@MidwestMochaMusing: Okay, April, what you got for us?

@GirlOnFire: Well, first of all, I googled Zeely and the protagonist is Elizabeth, or Geeder. I think I read Zeely too! So anyway, I'd like to talk about Living Outside the Bubble and outside the Bubble is a wonderful place to be—I think it's that place of wanderlusting that Raelle just preached about! But we are outside for some problematic reasons. As Black women, we live outside the bubble because racism has determined that our experiences, opportunities, and perspectives are different from those of the mostly White people we work with. We know racism and sexism are real because we deal with them as a fact of life. And because of that, we often enter and exist in spaces with a different awareness and different values and intentions. White people in the field live in this well resourced and comfortable bubble that allows them to travel and work without thinking about or accounting for their race or for racism generally. But for us, it gets tiring to deal with racism in our careers and, because, as Raelle pointed out, we usually

have a passion and compassion for people, we also are concerned with the oppressions taking place all over the world and with other groups of people. So, let me break it down a bit because it's like two parts to this one idea. First of all there's racism for us to deal with, whether it's particular to the field or just life—that they don't have to deal with. And so partially because of that, we teach and we travel for different reasons.

@GirlonFire: So for example, before I moved to Ethiopia, Michael Brown had been murdered and I was living in Illinois and I just couldn't go to sleep before my boyfriend came home. I started having panic attacks. It wasn't even a way to live, and that influenced my decision to leave the States. I do love my family and community in the States but at the same time, I got tired of being in a country where you have to fight to even be considered a part. My ancestors fought and died for us to live. To be thriving and surviving, to use Raelle's words. So I feel like I would rather die in Africa than live in America.

@Skye_High: Girl that's deep. Sorry to interrupt.

@GirlonFire: Oh no, it is deep though isn't it? But to get to the point of this Bubble and the racism we deal with...In or outside the US, no one that I work with can relate to any of those things at all. It's like we carry around this awareness of racial injustice, and it's just not something that is on the radar of White colleagues. They simply don't notice or worry about what's going on unless it's a mass shooting or something, in all of the mainstream newspapers. But I know about the police murders and abuse and incarceration of Black people. I have to know because it affects my family, friends, it impacts me. I can't escape it. But them, they've got it boiled down to their own selves.

And so it's hard to share an office with people constantly talking about stuff that doesn't matter! And if you do talk about it, you're the one who's being divisive because you're focusing on the negative. I'm like, I'm just talking about reality. And especially when it comes to teaching and what we teach, when you teach reality and they teach fairytales.

@GirlonFire: I just don't get it…how do you ignore all of this history, and the modern stuff, because you want to hold on to and sustain this fairytale that you grew up with? That America is a land of equal opportunity? Thanksgiving was pleasant fellowship among equals? Even though the Indigenous community historically was practically annihilated and in America right now are still going through hell, with the pipeline mess, with police brutality, with poverty and continued disregard of treaties? You know, but everywhere they go, they know one of their ancestors has conquered some shit in the past. There are military bases all over the place…the embassy has their back. I'm a Black woman in a world I already know feels afraid or unsure of me. I can rise in spite of it, shine despite it, but I can't pretend I don't know what's going on in the world. So I live outside The Bubble.

Raelle snaps her fingers.

@GirlonFire: And so the second part of The Bubble, like...I mean, most of these people came to take cool Facebook pictures, honestly. So our reasons for coming and being here are very different. And another thing that just really bothers me is that, the way White people treat the culture here separates us. They honestly have an innate feeling that everything about them is better. Their whole way of life, language, religion, everything about them is better, and they are doing other cultures a favor by spreading

their values. But at the same time, they don't really want to engage or get to know the people in the communities they work in. I guess cultural imperialism is a way to look at it. They come to communities or countries around the world with this idea that democracy and American values are something that is very important to teach people, as if people don't have their own thousand-year-old culture and traditions. I have had coworkers who will share PowerPoints and apparently not realize that everyone in their PowerPoint or lesson plan is White. And they are teaching Black or Latino or Ethiopian students. It's like, why aren't there any Ethiopian people in your lesson? Where are the Mexican or African American people? And if you are teaching about something in America, where are the different cultures that make up that country? It's not just a White or Black space. But it's like they don't even notice! And so I edit it to add more diversity and realistic representation. Come on people you are not the only ones that live in the world! But they are the only ones in The Bubble. And that's what matters to them. That's what's important and real to them.

@Skye_High: What happened when you changed their PowerPoint?

@GirlonFire: Oh they got angry. They don't like the implication that they are racist. There was an instance when I refused to have my class join in a Thanksgiving lesson and celebration. One guy said, why even teach English in the first place if you don't love American culture? I'm not making buckled hats or cornucopias. That's what I mean about the fairytale. If you dare criticize the history, culture, or people of America—you are seen as not being a proud American. I told him, your American pie is rotten and I don't want any. I am proud of some very different aspects of America.

@Skye_High: Wow, wow, wow. All of what you both said resonates with me so deeply. So deeply. Wow. Okay, before I add my topic, can I comment on April's idea of the Bubble?

@MidwestMochaMusing: Of course.

@Skye_High: When I do the trips to Guatemala, I typically have about 80% White students. But they are also, regardless of race, almost always American. And so, one of the big lessons I try to instill before the trip as we prepare, is for them to realize there is a history here, that as soon as you step off the plane, a hundred pound weight is added to you, because of the history of colonialism and the ongoing impact of Western imperialism and White supremacy. It can be hard to get students to see the problems in how they view the people of other countries relative to themselves and their own culture. But you and I cannot sit and plan what we're gonna do for a mother in Guatemala, or Liberia, or wherever, without that mother sitting there at the table telling us what needs to happen, and how can we assist her. So it's just changing that paradigm, because so many people in America, White, Black or whatever but predominantly White, because that is the population of power—they will sit at a table in America and make all these plans, and then go to Central America or wherever and say here, we made this for you. And it's not what the community wants or needs.

@Skye_High: So I don't want to get too far off the topic, but I constantly do the work of self-reflection. First of all, I have identified my own identities and my own issues and, you know, I constantly realize when I'm in certain situations, when do I feel like I'm the elite because I'm an American? When am I guilty of what I'm pointing fingers at?

Colonialism as a rule is gone, but the mentality and the weight is still here, and I have to say when am I taking advantage of it? So…uh, sometimes you jump on the bandwagon that you're cursing, and you don't even realize it in the moment. So first I have to admit that I'm in it also—even though I live outside the bubble, as April has so perfectly described it, I have my own work to do. And I think that is important to say to each other, too. As Black women, we of course deal with racism and other forms of injustice, but we must also be aware of our positions of privilege.

@GirlonFire: Absolutely, absolutely.

@MidwestMochaMusing: I see the topic for the next panel emerging! Go ahead with your topic though, Skye.

@Skye_High: Sure. Okay, well, I thought a lot about our Work. We work so damn hard to get to the places we go. To accomplish what we do. Don't we? I'm sure everyone listening understands the idea that we have to "work twice as hard to get half as far" as White men especially, but White women, Black men many times, too. Last I checked we made about 68 cents to White men's dollar, although White women make about 77 cents to the same. So we are among the most poorly paid group of people for comparative work. And this is true even though studies show that we have higher rates of participating in the workforce.[32] Now I don't mean to erase people from other racial or ethnic backgrounds, but let's be real. We live in a White dominated world and it is against the standard of White people and culture that we are judged. And furthermore, this field can be quite Black and White in a lot of places and spaces. But we as Black

[32] Black Women in the United States, 2014 report.

women are also dedicated to our work and our students. We love teaching and we care about the people in the communities we serve. And that is special and important. We just want to be paid and promoted fairly for our love!

Panelists laugh

@Skye_High: But in this work, I've dealt with a lot of racism. It's embedded in the culture of workplaces, the assumptions they have about you, your work product, your work ethic, your demeanor even. And when you prove these assumptions wrong, colleagues can get very closed off. And if you try to have an open conversation about it, especially if there's no one else of color, it's hard, because they won't understand. They'll just think you're complaining, as I was told once. However, this just drives me to work harder and have more qualifications, and I think that's why I knew I needed the PhD. I needed more, more, more education. More experiences, it's just ridiculous how much more experience I have to have than other people, to get a job! You have to be overqualified just to get an interview. Let me be clear. Because I am a Black woman, I feel like I wouldn't have gotten this job" without the 3 degrees in addition to my PhD. But there's also the second aspect I mentioned. We work hard also because we care. I love what I do, and I am here for my students first and foremost. And I have amazing relationships with them. Throughout my career, I've had the attitude that if it's not what's best for the kids, the students, I'm willing to lose my job and I would be completely fine with that. And I don't think that's where other people are coming from. But, you know, it's difficult, when as a professional, you're not given the respect, or the compensation, that you deserve.

@Skye_High: So let me give you some examples from my experience to kind of illustrate what I mean. First of all, the assumption that Black women aren't as knowledgeable or qualified in any given area of expertise. All the way back to my days as a grad student in education. I remember being in this training or workshop and this was when research was coming out about how students tend to perform better, or feel better about themselves, when they have teachers who represent their background. The facilitator was talking about how the teachers of color may have an additional or special impact with their students and there was also some research about teachers of color having experience with leadership positions in their communities, and this made the White grad students feel really bad about themselves, really uncomfortable. So I'm sitting next to one of these White grad students who is feeling really bad about herself and she starts basically referring to anyone of color in the program, that we were only there because of affirmative action policies and because it looks good for the college—but that she hadn't met any Black people with that kind of experience. And she actually said this to me! Of course I shared with her all of my experiences but I'm sure it didn't change her mind at all.

@Skye_High: So it becomes clear that this is a widespread and thoroughly entrenched belief, because you look around, and whether you're at a private language school or a public school or in grad school yourself, you find that the staff is just White, White, White. I have a friend who works for an international language program—one of these private programs for international students in the US, and she had told me that the entire company is White. They are servicing people of color, international students but

predominantly from the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, etc. the center directors are White, the district directors are White, corporate headquarters, all of them are White.

@Skye_High: And unfortunately, and you know I love my students, I love what I do. But unfortunately sometimes these racist ideas about our unworthiness comes from the students. So, I have had problems. I know when I have problems with classroom management it's probably because I'm Black, or I'm a woman, or both. I really have to think about how to navigate that. I make a point to talk about my credentials in the beginning, to establish that I have experience and I'm not new. I look younger than I actually am and I've been teaching longer than you think. I mean and I have to prepare, prepare, prepare. Oh my goodness, I spent so much time preparing grammar lessons! I think it through step by step because I know if I don't know the answer, if I say, I have to look it up, I'll check into that, that doesn't work for me. I can't do that. Other people can do that. I can't do that. Because students will challenge you. And that also drives me to work harder.

@Skye_High: But let me give you another example, from the professional standpoint or from the side of how we are evaluated by administrators. During my time studying in the doctoral program, I applied for a position at a summer ESL program held at a boarding school. I did not get the position. Now at this time, I had a Master's in higher ed, was a certified ESL educator, with classroom experience. So I find out that I didn't get the position, but a few weeks into the summer, I was contacted to see if I was still interested. Well, I find out that the person who had left the position did not have a Master's degree, did not even have a degree in education—this person was still in

undergrad, okay! No experience at all. I just didn't understand. What was it that made her more qualified than me? Well, she was a White woman about 20 years old. So I suspect it was race! And I find out from my colleagues when I get there that the other woman was my supervisor's first choice, and that he was really disappointed that she left. And so I was a second, desperation choice, and it showed. When I would write emails he would say, oh your writing skills are so good. Did he expect them to be bad? So it was just this underlying sense that I was not good enough. Whenever I showcased my skillset, especially since it exceeded the requirements of the job, he always pointed out how talented I was, as if he had to let me know I was doing better than he expected me to do.

@Skye_High: This situation actually escalated and got pretty ugly, because my supervisor became so hostile that I actually reported him to HR, and they did not like that. And this is prevalent in any field as a Black woman, but in TESOL and cross-cultural work especially, because there are not many Black people in the field, it can be difficult to get ahead or even just get the respect any professional deserves. The thing is, if they're not ready for the diversity, regardless of how qualified you are, if you don't fit into the vision of what an office or school should look like, you're gonna have a problem. Or as DuBois stated, you will be a problem! I'll stop there for now. [33] *(singing)* Workworkworkworkworkwork!

@MidwestMochaMusing: (dancing and laughing) Well don't stop quite yet. Can you tell us what happened with that supervisor and HR?

[33] See DuBois, W.E.B.

@Skye_High: Well let me give you-all the truncated version, because there were so many things that happened. My supervisor was racist and sexist toward me from the time I started. Things got to the point where he cut my hours and said I was a "non essential" staff person—even though I had been hired on as essential. Well, because my job required doing things outside of the office, for like, event planning or programming purposes, he told me that whenever I needed things for student activities, I needed to email him a detailed account of what I needed, you know the items, price, event, etc.—and that he would go get them. Well there were two weeks that I didn't need him to get any activity materials because I already had them. Do you know he gave me a written warning for insubordination because he said those two weeks I didn't send him an email detailing my materials needs for the week? I mean he picked the most back door kinda way, and I was like, really? You're gonna give me a written warning for this? It doesn't even make sense! You never dictated in your new policy that I needed to email you if I didn't need anything!

@Skye_High: So I took it to HR, and that was a whole 'nother mess. She asked me what I wanted to do about it—she didn't think he was being discriminatory. I told her, first of all I want to be respected. And so things went on like that until the end of the summer. But yeah, I could tell you a few more stories. But that story really sums up my experience. The blatant disrespect and the second guessing of your work ethic, product, and professionalism. To ding me for insubordination…and you know that's what they are doing to our kids in schools. Creating a record of criminality and a paper trail of failure to perform. I will say, that the fact that I stood up for myself, I stood up for anybody else

who is Black, especially Black women, who might be in that office. And I feel great about that, to this day.

@MidwestMocha: Yaaaaasssss! You are so right that we have to know that even when we feel alone, we are making room in some way for the person who comes behind us, and I do think it matters. Even though most of the time we don't get to see it. Okay excellent, thank you April and Skye... That gives us much to think about as we move into the question and answer session. So, please, I see that we have questions popping up and I love that there is so much to discuss. We will try to get to as many questions as we can, but if we don't get to your question today, please, continue the conversation on our Facebook page, and look out for future Cyber Cafes. Alright, here's a good one: Alex asks, "can other panelists speak about the pressure to perform? How do you cope?"

@GirlonFire: Well I can definitely share some of my experience on this. When I was in Illinois, I was working about 70 hours per week. And I was very emotionally invested in my work. Like Skye stated, I cared so much. I was at a school with a large Black and Latino population, and I wasn't just like I need to do this so I feel good about myself, it was like I need to do this for these kids and the community. But you know I was always raised that you had to be so much better than everyone else you're working with, so my standard is always just really high. And so you know, even now, in Ethiopia the issues with systemic racism are not present, it's not the same. The students at the language school I work at are more or less all middle class adults, Ethiopians or internationals. And the teachers are all expats, and most of them are White. Now, my students always, always, always perform better on their post-tests than my colleagues'

students. I know I'm really obsessive about using best practices, and I just spend more time preparing than other people do and I know it pays off in my students' results. And that does help me cope.

@MidwestMochaMusing: I actually thought a lot about expectations and pressures when I was living and working in Asia, especially since all of the other expats were White. In Korea I was the only Black staff of about 15. And I definitely noticed a difference in how we were treated by the Korean staff. So for example, when I stayed in my classroom too much, I would get nervous that the Koreans would think I was anti-social because I'm Black. And I worried that it would affect future hiring decisions. My white male co-workers were always shocked when I would espouse that view because it never, ever occurred to them, since they're always hired in droves. It was also very annoying, watching the Korean staff just giggling at everything the White guys said and doting over the White women. They would say they loved the guys because they're so laid back. And you know, they were laid back because they don't care about the job. How is that cool? That bugged me because I could see it, the difference, but no one else could.

@MidwestMochaMusing: And so as far as coping, it goes back to the Bubble that April talked about. The feeling is isolation cause you really can't talk about things that happen and the things that really matter to you. Let me give you an example. Just last week, we were talking in the office—3 White women—about the right to vote, and one of them was saying how important it is to vote, and I said oh yes, that's right, because, you know, for a long time, my people couldn't vote. She was like oh yeah, at my church they were talking about how women couldn't vote. I'm like yeah (laughs) But I meant

Black women couldn't vote. But I just said yeah, yeah, right, White women couldn't vote. So, to cope, I only show a part of myself.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Oh and I can't forget the wonderful groups on Facebook, beside my own, like Brothers and Sisters of South Korea. I actually connected with this group before I left for the JET program, even though I was going to Japan, because I'd heard such great things about it. There is probably a group dedicated to all of the major countries where people go to teach English. There is Black Educators Rock, there are just so many groups that you can get connected with and make real life friends or connect to for in-person meet ups. However, most of the time, when I want to talk to someone I call my mom, my friends. I did a lot of Skype calls when I was abroad. And I also hosted couch surfers. It was always so exciting to get a Black guest, because it is rare to get Black people using the service. A lot of Europeans, Canadians, and even that was better than hanging with the expat community. But my therapy is my blog, I nurture myself through this community. This is also part of the work, and it's part of the coping. I guess that's living outside the Bubble, April? Right?

@Skye_High: You got it. But I wouldn't just call it coping. Is it coping? That sounds so…passive. As Black women, I know we are, just like fearless. Because historically, everything we've been through, if there's something new to try or new to do, something new to learn, a new challenge to overcome—racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, poverty—I feel like, there's nothing we can't conquer. And it's not because we don't hurt or we aren't affected, but we support one another and we stand on the shoulders of those who have worked before us, and we persevere. As a people we've

suffered so much. My father has stories to tell, my mom has stories to tell. My grandparents. How can I complain? We can't afford to quit, so we deal with it. And we do it well.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Okay let's take another question: April, can talk more about your experience with TFA, and why you describe it as horrendous?

@GirlonFire: Oh wow…okay well, it was an awful experience. Very stressful. I worked at a dual language school, so half the classes were in English and half were in Spanish. But the program itself is really geared toward White upper middle class people who have very little interaction with people of color, so a lot of their diversity programming was just really an experience and not geared toward people of color or people from low income backgrounds, and it was very uncomfortable and stressful, the kind of conversations I had with people on a daily basis, and especially the way I heard people talk about the communities they were supposed to be serving alongside! It made me so angry. I was living among people of color and teaching students of color but working with people who…had just the typical White savior attitude—that they are better and they can save these poor, backwards Black and Brown children by somehow civilizing them. I simply could not, I cannot, relate to that. It was so painful to know that these people who are standing in front of kids who look like me everyday have these deficit ideas about them in their head. So it was horrendous because on the one hand I cared so much, but I worked really hard because I cared…and on the other hand, I was carrying with me the stress and pain of racism every single day.

@MidwestMocha: Let's take one more question: "Can the panelists talk more about their "womanist wanderlust?" Were there common experiences that inspired your interest in international cultures or language?" Oh this is such a great question.

@Skye_High: I can start on this one. And I know Raelle and I have talked briefly about this. For me, I'd studied Spanish in high school, and I wanted to go on the study abroad trip to Spain but my parents couldn't afford to send me—it was really expensive. So that was my first time wanting to go abroad, but I think I, you know, I have always lived in a very Black and White world. I grew up in predominantly White neighborhoods, and attended White public schools. Because the schools were better. So my cousins called us White, cause they grew up in Black neighborhoods and went to predominantly Black schools. But I didn't feel White when the kids at school were calling me nigger. How can you feel White? It was hard for me to be in between those two worlds, and I think that in part opened me up to exploring different cultures. I feel like the Black and White world is limiting, and not enough. There's a bigger world out there.

@GirlonFire: But so often, especially in schools, we are not exposed to the bigger world and the bigger connections among cultures, especially Black cultures. I was actually born in the West Indies, to an African American mother and a Dominican father. So, I was accustomed to a more multicultural or diverse way of life than the Black and White kids I met once I moved to North Carolina in middle school. I have always had a Black American identity because of my mother, but, I saw myself as different from the Black and White kids, who, like Skye said, seemed more accustomed to a Black and White world. And so when I got to the States I felt I was not Black enough for the Black

kids and definitely not White. And the White kids had lots of stereotypes and biases about people of color. I really identified with immigrant kids. It wasn't until I went to college that I started to understand racial dynamics and the divisions more. I think everyone gets to their most liberal and radical self in college, and that's when I made real friends and could be more comfortable. The diversity was there. And I was reading works from the African diaspora, and about colonialism and structural racism. I began to see things differently, but it was because of my coming of age being that puzzle piece that doesn't quite fit, that just gave me this perspective of being Black yes, but being comfortable with people who are somehow, quote, different.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Both of your stories are so on point with my own. I did grow up in a home that was very pro-Black. My parents enrolled my siblings and me in enrichment programs, and I loved them because we learned about Black history, Black music, Black culture, so it really helped me to have a strong since of self and awareness of our history. But as I mentioned before, I would read and watch these programs, and, where the other kids were more interested in playing together outside, I was inside or off to myself dreaming of this bigger world. And that kind of set me apart. But it really was when I went to college, which was a small predominantly White college, that I found myself drawn to the international community. There really weren't many Black students and so I flocked to the international students, and it was a comforting place. They were different too, it felt natural. But I also felt sometimes like I was teetering, too—as April and Skye have described—I was part of the Black student population but not fully, in with the international crowd but not fully, and part of the White institution but not

accepted completely. So it was a balancing act, but definitely part of this "womanist wanderlust" phenomena.

@MidwestMochaMusing: Um...okay, I see we have many more questions coming up, but we also want to give you all a chance to share. So let me put a question out there for you. Please share some of your experiences with teaching abroad or teaching cross-culturally as Black women, especially as they resonate with the topics shared today. April and Raelle, maybe we can take turns reading the entries?

@Skye_High: Sounds good to me.

@GirlonFire: Let's do it!

@Skye_High: All right, first comment reads: "Stereotyping sucks sometimes. I've had guys try to talk to me, they just met me on the street, and I look like a student. Glasses, afro, backpack, and he's trying to get me to his hotel room. There's the stereotype that we are prostitutes. I could see if I was dressed for the club and you proposition me to go home with you, but when I look like a student and you're trying to take advantage of me anyway, well, I've never seen or heard White peers dealing with that."

@GirlonFire: Alright next one, "I once applied for a job in Singapore, and they seemed really excited about me, and then, they asked for a picture of me, so I sent them a picture, and I never heard from them again. No one said, you didn't get the job cause you're a Black woman, but, I got the picture. Pun intended!"

@MidwestMocha: This comment says, "Just the stereotype that we're here just to fill gaps, and that we're probably not as qualified as everyone else but they want us there to look good, to appear fair."

@MidwestMocha: Since that one was so short I'll do another one: "I teach for Kaplan, in the English language program. My students are wealthy international students, mostly from Asian countries. They are fabulous. We have fun together, and in the upper level classes, we can talk about cultural stereotypes and even racism. I love traveling and have visited five continents. Australia is next on my list."

@Skye_High: Wow listen to this, "I was working at a boarding school in Rhode Island and the students drew a caricature of me in the classroom on the board, with big lips. They were Eastern European students. I was so upset and I went to tell the person in charge of the program, a White guy. He didn't even do anything! I was so hurt that my students did that. It was so terrible. I don't know why they did it. I erased the board, and continued teaching."

@MidwestMochaMusing: Let's take a few more, ladies. I'm so sorry we won't be able to hear from all of you!

@GirlonFire: Okay. "I love what I do. I've had great experiences with my adult students for the five years I've been teaching in TESOL. I'm here for the students first and foremost, and I have amazing relationships with them. Many times I feel a special connection because I am a Black woman—there is a sense of understanding what it feels like to be an outsider. Students become friends."

@MidwestMocha: This sister says, "I was working at a community college in Kentucky and a White woman came in and checked my board. And then she went up and told the director something, and I got a message that the director wanted to see me teach. Well after she saw me teach she knew I was an excellent teacher. But she had already second-guessed my competence."

@MidwestMochaMusing: And here's a good note to end on, "I was in a situation where I felt isolated but the shining star was my students. That's the reason I stayed. My students were just everything. They made everything better. It was a diverse mix of students and we really connected. And they learned so much and I learned so much from them, with them. From that moment on, regardless of what I would do professionally, and the challenges of this profession, I knew this was the field I want to be in, and I'm here to stay."

Act III: The Follow-up Email

Raelle, girl! That forum was so necessary. I can't thank you enough for asking me to be on the panel! Did you see how many folks joined the discussion!? It just goes to show how crucial it is that we continue to make space to support one another! It's rough out here but clearly, we got this!

Okay so I was inspired so much by the discussion that I just, like, exhaled some fire! I wanted to share it with you—it's a short collection that just touches on the stories and ideas that came out of Womanist Wanderlust. Maybe you can post them on your blog? Let me know what you think. And you know, I'm an artist...and I'm sensitive bout my…..

peace,

April

Poems for Colored Girls Who Thrive and Survive When Enough is Enough

Part I: Living Outside the Bubble

White Communion, or Open Letter to The White Expats
I have a problem with the oblivious bubble you're living in
You've got it boiled down to just yourself
You've come here for your own reasons
To take cool Facebook pictures
To have White talk

You honestly have an innate feeling that everything about you is better
Your whole way of life, your language, your religion
You think you're doing other cultures a favor by spreading your values
But I can't pretend like I don't know what's going on in the world

The world's on fire as far as I'm concerned
I've experienced a lot of racism
But everywhere you go you already know
One of your ancestors conquered some shit in the past
And the way you're treated is so different from the way I'm treated

I can't be around you
And not feel slightly resentful of it
You don't have to think about it
It doesn't have to affect you
You're just having a good time

And I don't really wanna stay
In a shared office with a bunch of people
Talkin about stuff that doesn't matter
When I really can't talk about things that matter to me

We don't share similar values
I don't have things in common with you
I'm so done

Outside
The feeling is isolation
I would say it's lonely
I am the only Black female
I'm only showing a part of myself
They hold me to this standard
Force me into this box
They think I'm supposed to be in

When the Bottom Falls Out
Living in Kansas City after Ferguson
I just couldn't go to sleep
I started having anxiety and panic attacks
It wasn't even a way to live

We're gonna shoot a bunch of you in the street
Beat a bunch of you
Tear you down as much as possible

(They hate us so much)

My ancestors fought and died for us to live
They didn't fight for this scrap of land
They fought for me to be thriving and surviving
And I don't really feel like I can thrive
In a country that was built on their blood

We're gonna shoot a bunch of you in the street
Beat a bunch of you
Tear you down as much as possible

(They hate us so much)

I'm tired of being this country
I can't see myself living here
It's so stressful
There's this nagging unhappiness, unfulfillment
It's just sad energy to be around

We're gonna shoot a bunch of you in the street
Beat a bunch of you
Tear you down as much as possible

(They hate us so much)

I'd rather die in Africa than live in America
This American pie is rotten
I don't want any
I wanna go home

Part II: Womanist Wanderlust

Rise, Shine, Thrive
Black women I know
Are so much more comfortable
With being uncomfortable
Than any group of people I know
I think we are
I know we are
Fearless
There's nothing that we can't conquer

Bigger than Black and White
I always lived in a very Black and White world
I think that's very limiting
It's just not enough
I felt like I didn't fit anywhere
Didn't fit with the Black kids
Didn't fit with the White kids

I usually hung out
With a lot of immigrant children
International students
It's always this balancing act
Your different roles
Your different ideology

To still keep your personal essence
But to connect with people
I've always loved diverse people
You know there's a bigger world out there

Wanderlusters Mount Up
I wanna go there

I wanna see that
I wanna see it for myself
And not just on television

I really wanna do this
I always had a desire for it
I have to do this for myself

I'm taking the opportunity
Explore that part of me

Travel
People
Diversity

Part III: Work work work work work work

For Colored Girls in TESOL Who Are Enough
Because I'm a black woman
My standard is always just really high
I have to be better
Than everyone else I work with
Have more qualifications
More education
More experience
Super over perform to the extreme
I work hard to establish that I am a professional
I keep going back because I enjoy what I do
For the kids and the community

Black Woman's Recipe for Success
Work harder
Push yourself
More, more, more
Try to look confident
Prepare, prepare, prepare
Work harder

Push yourself
More more more
Try to look confident

Prepare, prepare, prepare
Work harder
Push yourself

More more more
Try to look confident
Prepare, prepare, prepare
Work harder
Push yourself
More more more

Keep going
Keep going
Keep going

Act IV: The Reflective Essay

Understanding the experiences of Black women in TESOL:

Why Critical Race Theory is the dopest filter ever

Hello Cyber Framily! Today's post is a little heavier than my usual musings, so buckle down for a bit of a longer ride. Writing it took me back to the days of being in graduate school, so this is more of an extended essay than my typical blog post, but I promise not to get too esoteric and academic on you! As you know, last week I hosted an online conference entitled, Womanist Wanderlust. It was soooo amazing! It was my first online conference and it definitely far exceeded my expectations. So, I have to thank the panelists—my dear friend April who lives abroad teaching English, and another sista, Skye, who is super smart, a globetrotter, and a wonderful spirit and activist doing good in the world. And also to all of you who joined the call, we couldn't have done it without you. I'm already planning the next panel, so please stay tuned.

For those of you who missed it, this is a recap, and then some. You will learn what we discussed, the big take aways, and my reflections on those take aways. As an extra bonus, I've also included some poetry that April sent to me after the panel. She is an amazing poet and I'm glad she was inspired by our discussion to write these amazing pieces. Here is a link to the poems, and since I reference them in this essay as well, you may want to take a look at those first, and then come back to the rest of the essay.

I did a lot of reflecting after the conference on the experiences, ideas, and the stories shared in that space. It got me thinking about critical race theory (CRT), an academic tradition and movement that is focused on how race and racism shape every aspect of our society. I remember a professor telling us that critical race theory is like a lens that helps you to see the world in a particular way. Photo filters similarly change the focus of a picture to highlight or clarify certain attributes or create a specific feel for the viewer. So in this essay, I use critical race filters (i.e., some of its primary features) to view the ideas discussed during the conference, and to make meaning from them.

I won't give a detailed overview of critical race theory, but in a nutshell, the position is this: (a) Racism is an everyday reality that is so deeply integrated throughout our society that no happenings unfold outside it's influence; (b) Activist-scholars should do research that challenges and seeks to dismantle racism; and (c) The stories (referred to as counternarratives or counterstories) of people most greatly affected by oppression in society must be a primary and valued component of that research. Of course, critical race research is far more complex than I've just described, but if you are interested in a more thorough but still friendly overview, I recommend the text, Critical Race Theory: An

Introduction, by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic. Now, in the rest of the essay, I'll use some key filters of CRT to unpack the "Womanist Wanderlust" discussion.

Each of the three panelists (myself included) focused on one topic related to life as a Black woman in TESOL. First, womanist wanderlust describes the affinity for international and cross-cultural relationships, education, work, and travel. Living outside the bubble refers to the difference in our perceptions of and experiences in the world, and that of our predominantly White colleagues. Finally, as Black women, we face the reality of 'work work work work work work' in our professional lives—and as much as we love Rihanna and her song, this is about how we have to work harder and have more education than our peers to enjoy comparable levels of success, and how we are dedicated to excellence in teaching. The filter most pertinent to our discussion of the topics mentioned above is the main premise of CRT: racism is at play, every day, everywhere, and it undeniably impacts our professional lives. As part of my explanation of the ever-presence of racism, I'll also use the filters of intersectionality, the critique of liberalism, and the commitment to social justice.

Racism is the Reality I am a Black American/heterosexual/woman/with two college degrees/and no children/who grew up in an Afrocentric/middle class/predominantly Black neighborhood. Those identities represent just a few of the characteristics that make me who I am, and partially determine how others define me and therefore how I experience society. That is the essence of *intersectionality:* every person has multiple factors that make up her identities and that impact her experiences at any given moment. When it comes to Black women in TESOL, our panel discussion makes

clear that race and gender are important to how they experience the professional world. But in addition to race and gender, the neighborhoods and schools they were part of (their communities), shaped how they developed and define their Black female identity, and therefore, how they came to relate to the people and the world around them. This is so important because as Black women we are not all the same and we know that. But I do think that sometimes we forget and a lot of times other folks don't know it.

I found it very interesting how all of the panelists came into their Black womanhood feeling kind of in a cultural limbo—not totally in sync with the Black or White communities they were part of—and this in between space kind of led them to have an appreciation and interest in multicultural friendships and experiences. They felt the Black and White world [was] very limiting/just not enough (from April's "Bigger than Black and White"). It's also significant that the tensions they experienced with Black peers and White peers, and their desire to know more about different cultures and experiences did not negate their sense of being Black girls and Black women. In fact the panelists shared that being in the TESOL field in some ways keeps them hyper aware of that Black female identity, because of how they are treated by employers, colleagues, students, and families. They also indicated that the challenges of working in TESOL do not deter them because as Black women they are so much more comfortable/with being uncomfortable/than any group of people (from "Rise, Shine, Thrive"). And that brings us to the main point here: racism, all day, every day. I don't know what else to say!

All of the testimonies shared last week prove that racism is a fact of life in the TESOL profession. One of the clearest examples of the common knowledge of this is the

existence and large memberships of groups like Black Women in TESOL, Brothas and Sistas of South Korea, Black Educators Rock, and Expat Women of Color. These are just a few of the several social media communities dedicated to supporting teachers of color inside and outside of the United States. On these forums, teachers seek advice and support related to teaching as a Black educator and teaching abroad as a Black person. I joined a similar group before moving to Japan with the JET program, and I remain active in several, in addition to maintaining and growing my own group and blog. There are also several blogs and discussion forums dedicated to providing support and advice for Black teachers in the TESOL profession as well as for Black travelers.

At the same time, I have searched and have not found similar groups, discussion forums, or blogs dedicated to supporting White teachers or travelers in a way that focuses on their White identity. This is the difference. It is race, and racism, at play, all day, every day. It emphasizes that as Black women, we have to consider our race as a factor in ways that White people don't. I would say these support groups are inspired both by our unequivocal knowledge of the reality that because of racism, our race and gender can be barriers to the professional experiences and achievements we seek, and by our tradition of creating spaces to preserve and exchange knowledge and build networks of alternative community. For those people who think we have moved beyond race or racism in the 21st century, the ongoing need for Black women to take our racial and gender identities into account when negotiating our professional lives proves that we continue to live in a world dictated by the ever present relevance of race, the daily dictates of racism.

Racism is an ever-present factor when it comes to being hired, evaluated, and building and sustaining professional relationships. I think it was Skye who said, "I suspect it was race," that disqualified her from a position that ultimately went to a less credentialed, less experienced White woman. Each of the panelists, myself included, shared experiences about times when we were overlooked, or otherwise treated unfairly and differently from White colleagues, despite our qualifications and performances. As a Black woman, I have to be better than everyone else I work with/have more qualifications/more education/more experience/super over perform to the extreme/work hard to establish that I am a professional (from "For Colored Girls in TESOL"). So this is a day in and day out reality. It is not only the potentially frequent instances of hearing or seeing racially offensive comments or judgments in the offices, hallways, and classrooms of our workplaces, but it's the knowledge that they are at play, even when we don't witness them. If I know for sure that one time I did not hear back from a job after sending my picture, or that once a less qualified White candidate got a position I applied for, it is not a far leap to suspect that there have been other times that the same bias negatively affected me. If I can document, as Skye did, that I performed a task according to protocol and yet was reprimanded for not doing so, then even those instances when I can not actually prove bias or discrimination in writing, I know in my heart that it is taking place. This is why critical race theorists describe racism like the air we breathe—it's not usually like smoke. We know it's all around us, even when there's no funny smell.

However, there's this popular and widely held belief in America that we are all competing on equal ground, playing by the same rules, in a post-racial and colorblind

society. The belief in the fairness and effectiveness of civil rights law is a hallmark of liberalism, but critical race theorists have some serious issues with this "fairytale," to use April's appropriate phrasing. Although this American fairytale promises that those who work hard receive a big reward—and the law ensures that life is fair, the ideology of white supremacist racism so heavily influenced and influences the lawmakers, the law, and its interpreters, such that neutrality is an impossibility. April hits home with this point when she writes:

> *The world's on fire as far as I'm concerned*
> *I've experienced a lot of racism*
> *But everywhere you go you already know*
> *One of your ancestors conquered some shit in the past*
> *And the way you're treated is so different from the way I'm treated*
>
> *I can't be around you*
> *And not feel slightly resentful of it*
> *You don't have to think about it*
> *It doesn't have to affect you*
> *You're just having a good time*
> *(from White Communion)*

I mean, wow. As Black women, we live the reality that life is not fair, and it's unfair because of racial inequality in the law, and in mainstream societal traditions and practices. When we apply the filter that *critiques liberalism,* the importance of race consciousness and race conscious measures that would right historical and ongoing wrongs become clear. The panelists point out several manifestations of these wrongs in the TESOL field. How can it be true that hiring practices are fair when Black women see themselves overlooked for positions they are qualified and overqualified for, in favor of

less credentialed White candidates? Or when they take a grievance for discrimination to Human Resources and are told they are just complaining, oversensitive, exaggerating?

But even though we know it's there, our panelist talk about how we often have to deal with racial biases and discrimination in isolation or silence, because we are typically the only person of color in a workplace, and White colleagues appear unaware or unbothered by the racism unfolding in the world in general, and in our schools or offices in particular. The feeling is isolation/I would say it's lonely (from "Outside"). In fact, our colleagues are sometimes the perpetrators of racial microaggressions, offenses to which they appear oblivious. Microaggressions—those off the cuff racially insensitive comments, assumptions, photos, lesson plan omissions, or problematic inclusions—they add up, and being on the receiving end gets old fast. But these are the constant and daily reminders that we live in a world surrounded by people whose beliefs and actions are motivated by race and by racism. And that creates another layer of racial stress, or racial fatigue as it is sometimes called, in our professional lives.

And yet, our conversation demonstrates that Black women remain dedicated to personal and professional excellence. My panelists had ambitious educational aspirations, obtaining multiple credentials each. They are multilingual and well traveled. I've always had a desire for it/I'm taking every opportunity (from "Wanderlusters Mount Up"). And these sistas testified to working overtime in order to give their best to their students and schools, even though they are often undercompensated and undervalued for their work. They work hard because they care—not just about good teaching for the sake of good teaching, but in the interest of providing a kind of educational justice to otherwise

disenfranchised populations of students. I keep going back because I enjoy what I do/for the kids and the community (from "For Colored Girls in TESOL"). And they are not only dedicated to the work of teaching, but also the work of advocating for equity and justice in the lives of Black people and others. The women who joined the panel—although they didn't come out and use the words social justice—demonstrate a commitment to justice in the world. They teach and travel with a compassion for people, and express frustration with the racially motivated violence, poverty, economic exploitation, and other forms of oppression taking place against Black and Brown people in the United States, and other groups the world over. My ancestors fought and died for us to live (from "When the bottom").

As I wrap up this reflection, I must point out that it's so critical that we continue to share our stories, on forums and in groups and however we do it, because you know, it helps to affirm that we're not crazy. We're not making things up in our head. It is definitely therapeutic to hear the horror stories or the stories of struggle, because otherwise, I have found myself doubting my own experience, or questioning my value or sanity! But sharing is also great because you hear all of the amazing work that Black women are doing in this profession, and that is incredibly inspirational. It proves the mainstream narrative, that we are not as good or not good enough, it proves that wrong. In fact, as Black women in TESOL, we are thriving and surviving. We do have to keep going, keep going, keep going—it is the "Recipe for Success." Every day, we "Rise, Shine, Thrive," because we know, There's nothing we can't conquer.

Chapter 5: Carry On the Tradition

In late April 2015, following the police murder of yet another unarmed Black person, 25 year-old Freddie Gray, Black people in Baltimore, Maryland took to the streets in protest. Although the majority of protestors opted to march with signs and express outrage with chants and speeches, some present at protests engaged in violent acts, such as throwing rocks at police, tossing trashcans at sports spectators, and setting stores to flame. The mainstream U.S. media swiftly shaped a narrative of Black thuggery and unwarranted, ill-advised barbarism. Many journalists shifted focus away from the senseless murder of Freddie Gray and systematic murders of unarmed Black people, and placed attention on the associated acts of violence that result from poverty, prison, and substandard schooling conditions, among other oppressions.

The reality, according to the dominant, white-power-centric press in the U.S., was captured in the contention that the deployment of the National Guard made sense because, “In Baltimore, there is a "credible threat" that local gangs are targeting police for murder. Young rioters are hurling rocks and bottles at police. But you can’t expect police to do their job and hold the line against rioters if they fear being maimed or killed” (Lott, 2015). Lott goes on to lament the property damage in Baltimore neighborhoods

that would make "life exceeding [sic] difficult for the law-abiding poor who live in the areas being destroyed" (para 12).

In contrast, the perspective of many Black people, other people of color, and justice-conscious people, is summed up in the following quote, taken from a student editorial:

> To say that "violence isn't the answer" in response to the Baltimore protests and riots shows complete misunderstanding for the importance of the issues at hand. The black community in Baltimore protested peacefully days before the violent riots broke out—these protests were not appreciated or covered by major news outlets. It is the unfortunate truth that no progress will be made if victims are quiet and unassuming. (Staff, 2015)

This student also notes the hypocrisy in news media that characterize Black protesters who burn or damage property as thugs, even though White people who burn and damage property at mass street gatherings, such as those following sports games, are often referred to simply as "revelers."

As the above account demonstrates, the storyteller determines the truth. Every writer "construct[s] a truth, but not the only truth," and represents rather than reproduces it (Goodall, 2008, p. 23). Nevertheless, in the United States, truth is often presented as singular and it emanates from the domain of the powerful. The dominant storyteller speaks from the perspective of the common, taken-for-granted majoritarian story, or master narrative, which generally celebrates and normalizes White people's cultures, and demonizes, appropriates, or altogether ignores Black and other cultures (Indigenous, Latinx, African, etc). Part of the work, and most crucially, the danger, of the dominant truth is that it justifies and legitimates violence against Black people. As Ta-Nehisi

Coates (2015) reminds us, "You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body" (p. 10).

For this reason, counternarratives—those stories that challenge, reject, expose, delegitimize, nullify, and cast aside dominant "mindset"—do life saving work. In their presentation of alternative realities, truths, and knowledges, counternarratives indict dominant discourses and the violence they birth. Nevertheless, an equally important consideration for composing counterstories is recognizing the conundrum of engaging in activism, with understanding one's own limitations and the impossibility of creating a perfect world. Thomas King's (2003) reflection that he "wrote knowing that none of the stories we told would change the world. But we wrote in the hope that they would" (p. 92) resonates with me. It shares the sense of foreboding in Bell's (1992b) statement that our "actions are not likely to lead to transcendent change and, despite our best efforts, may be of more help to the system we despise than to the victims of that system we are trying to help" (p. 378). Consider that nearly fifty years ago, in his final speech on April 3, 1968, hours before James Earl Ray shot him dead, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke to his Memphis, Tennessee audience about going to the Mountaintop and seeing the Promised Land. He declared, "I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land" (I've been to the mountaintop). Freddie Gray, Marshawn McCarrel, Renisha McBride, Marissa Alexander, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice, Tyre King, Henry Green, Dajerria Becton, Sandra Bland. Black people have not made it to the Promised Land.

Still, as Baszile (2015) contends, "radical change require[s] first and foremost a rhetorical revolution" (p. 247). Therefore, I believe counterstories have the potential to alter the way society at large characterizes, regards, and engages with Black communities. Accounts that celebrate Black identities, thought, knowledge, and experiences, and those that highlight the mechanisms of institutional, legal racism, and inequity, can render illogical the stereotypes that dehumanize and marginalize Black people, invalidate liberal discourses of equality and meritocracy, and add to the documented history of resistance. This is activism. It is a kind of victory—the elusiveness of the Promised Land aside—because words are powerful.

Preview to Implications: A Brief Review of the Journey

In this dissertation study, I set out committed to uncovering the power in the knowledges, perspectives, and experiences of Black women educators, as shared in and through their own words. My purpose was to focus on Black women's ideas about the influence of race, gender, and racism in their professional lives. I wanted to learn from Black women TESOL educators how they see, engage with, are impacted by, and seek to change conditions in their professional lives. Their valuable insights are part of the toolkit required to advocate for changes in mindset, policy, and practice that can make the TESOL field more equitable for educators and students alike.

I began with an explanation of my interest in and commitment to liberation in the lives of Black women in particular, and Black communities in general, and a review of Black intellectual and activist traditions, including critical race theory in education. From there, I provided an overview of literature related to the historical and contemporary

subjugation of Black women in the United States, and our legacy of excellence as educators and community advocates in the face of gendered racism. Having highlighted some of the many ways that Black people in general, and Black women educators especially, have turned the tragedy of living in a racist society into triumphs of achievement and resilience, in part by engaging in intellectual and activist work, I detailed my epistemological and methodological approach to conducting research with Black women TESOL educators.

The composite counterstory, which highlights key themes from the data and core tenets of critical race theory, challenges the majoritarian stories of: (a) Black women as professionally and intellectually incompetent; and (b) Multicultural harmony and racial equality in the TESOL field. In so doing, the composite counterstory addresses my first research question: How do race, gender, and racism impact the personal and professional lives of Black women educators in TESOL? The key finding is that for Black women educators, race matters, and gendered-racism is a well-established reality in the TESOL profession. Womanist wanderlusters, who share both a strong sense of Black identity and an affinity for cross-cultural relationships, work, and travel experiences, must work harder and be more credentialed than White peers to achieve their career goals. Moreover, the racism that daily impacts their lives positions them outside the bubble wherein privileged White peers exist in an apparently carefree state of mind. Nevertheless, Black women are dedicated, highly qualified educators and trailblazers of critical cross-cultural engagement, who build supportive communities as they resist racism and "thrive and survive" in and beyond the TESOL profession.

As I bring the writing of this dissertation study to a close, it is time for the judgment call, which requires that I now attend to my final research question: How can Black women educators' counternarratives enrich the existing literature that examines relationships among race, gender, and racism for women of color generally, and Black women educators, specifically? In the final section, I address this question by outlining implications of the dissertation research study for theory, research methodology, and praxis.

Theoretical Implications

The counternarratives in this dissertation study enrich the existing literature concerned with the intersections of race, gender, and racism in the lives of women of color who identify as Black in three primary areas of research: presumed incompetence, microaggressions, and highly qualified teaching. First of all, women of color in academia are often presumed incompetent by administrators, colleagues, and students, and regularly navigate hostile professional terrains in order to achieve success. As Harris and González (2012) explain:

> Despite their undeniable privilege, women of color faculty members are entrenched in byzantine patterns of race, gender and class hierarchy that confound popular narratives about meritocracy. Far from being above the fray, faculty at institutions of higher education are immersed in the daunting inequities and painful struggles taking place throughout an increasingly multicultural America. (p. 2)

The Black women educators in this dissertation study, who have worked at U.S. public schools, community colleges, and universities, as well as in international K-12 school programs, report facing similar challenges to their intellectual aptitude and professional competence. Therefore this research underscores the need to address biases in the

education workforce—beyond the academy—related to race, gender, national identities, and racism. It also highlights the resilience Black women demonstrate as they continue to excel professionally despite the challenges and obstacles they endure.

Secondly, the findings in this study contribute to research on racial and gender microaggressions faced by women of color in education. Sue, et al. (2007) describe microaggressions as follows:

> Subtle verbal and non-verbal insults/assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out automatically or unconsciously; Layered insults/assaults, based on one's race, gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or name; Cumulative insults/assaults that take their toll on People of Color. In isolation, racial microaggressions may not have much meaning or impact; however, as repeated slights, the effect can be profound. (p. 447)

Examples of microaggressions from the counternarratives of Black women in TESOL include being mistaken for sex workers, receiving compliments for speaking Dominant Academic English, and having to supplement curriculum that excludes people of color. Extant literature centers on students and educators from various racial, ethnic, and gender groups, including Chicana scholars (Solórzano, 2010), African American college students (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), and Asian American women teachers (Endo, 201). However, this dissertation research enriches the existing literature in that the counternarratives of Black women educators in TESOL add yet another layer of complexity to the chorus of voices from people of color across the educational sphere who express frustration with the accumulated impact of these "repeated slights."

Finally, the counternarratives in this dissertation study extend literature that examines Black women educators' legacy of excellence in teaching and community care.

As I discuss in Chapter 2, Black women educators traditionally hold multiple credentials, are vastly experienced, and are committed to social justice for and in Black communities. Similarly, the TESOL educators in this study have multiple college degrees, go over and above the call of duty in service to their students, and express anti-racist, anti-oppressive perspectives. The three areas of literature discussed above are interrelated. Specifically, research that demonstrates the legacy of Black women as highly qualified teachers serves as a counternarrative to the majoritarian story of Black female intellectual, moral, and physical inferiority—the very discourse that leads them to face presumed incompetence and micgoaggressions. Therefore, taken together, the research from this dissertation meaningfully enriches extant literature that highlights both the challenges Black women in education face, and the ways Black women challenge and overcome race-gendered oppression.

However, beyond meaningfully extending the existing literature, what are the implications of this research for critical race scholarship more generally? First of all, although there exists a body of work that uses critical race theory to look into the lives of students of color and teachers of color, I have not been able to locate research that centers exclusively on the experiences and perspectives of Black women educators in TESOL. There is much more to learn from Black women in education about how race, gender, and racism impact their personal and professional lives. Critical race theory can be used to look into other areas of their lives, such as relationships with students and community members, teaching praxis, and community engagements.

This study also provides a basis from which to delve more deeply into the areas of

concern expressed in Black women educators' counternarratives. For example, the counternarratives in this dissertation indicate that Black women experience discrimination in hiring, promotion, and compensation. Additionally, quantitative studies could gather and examine statistical data related to these areas of the professional milieu. Similarly, future qualitative studies might inquire into the hiring practices of TESOL programs by focusing on the narratives and experiences of program managers and administrators.

The counternarratives also indicate that Black women educators feel they need to have more education and experiences as compared to their White peers in order to access comparable career opportunities. Future research studies could compare the credentials of staff in TESOL programs, and center on the perspectives of White educators. Critical race theory would be useful for all of the aforementioned studies, since it would be important to focus on race at the intersections of gender, nationality, education, language, etc. Such studies could help highlight bias as a general reality in the field, and encourage program staff to look into discriminatory policies and practices at specific institutions and programs, and then make just changes. Sites of inquiry might include, for example, an English language school outside of the United States, the Peace Corps, and/or a public school district in the United States.

Methodological Implications

In 1997, Howard Jones published a short essay that reflected his time as a doctor at a Johns Hopkins clinic in Maryland, where he was the first physician, in 1951, to examine Henrietta Lacks, a Black woman farmer. Following her death in 1951, Lacks'

cells were used, without her or her family's consent, for myriad scientific research (Jones, 1997; Skloot, 2013). Rebecca Skloot's (2010) book, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, details the many ways that Lacks and other Black people were exploited by scientists conducting research on and with their bodies and without obtaining consent and/or providing compensation. However, Jones describes the discovery of Lacks' cells and their valuable uses for scientific research as "the best of times" for science, and the "worst of times" for the Lacks family, excusing the decades-long ethical offenses on the part of thousands of scientists as a "sacrifice" made by Henrietta Lacks in the name of "progress . . . made at great cost" (p. 228).

Despite Jones' easy dismissal of Lacks' and her family's rights to information, ongoing consent, and compensation, and his paternalistic assumption of Lacks' sacrifice, scientific research does not have to be an exploitative, oppressive endeavor. My dissertation study demonstrates that it is possible, useful, and meaningful to conduct research with Black communities (and by extension, other communities) in which the participants are the experts and knowledge bearers, and the researcher is the conscientious investigator, seeking to amplify the voices of the experts, and to make meaning with them. In other words, it is possible, necessary, meaningful, and enjoyable to conduct transformative research.

A few methodological lessons from my dissertation study include:

- Participants do not necessarily need to be involved in research as co-investigators in order for academic researchers to treat participants, their lives, and their stories with dignity, respect, and care.

- However, researchers must sincerely view participants as experts who have valuable insights. Researchers must also establish and maintain an agreed upon intensity of communicative exchange, dialogue, and when appropriate, co-analysis of data.
- It is not necessary to use Eurocentric scholarship to produce rigorous academic research. On the contrary, the intellectual contributions of people of color are critical and sufficient without qualification.

Additional implications for the composite counterstory included in my dissertation study are:

- It is readable and accessible and could be offered to administrators and staff of education programs, as part of pre-service and continuing education opportunities.
- To facilitate wide dissemination outside of academia alone, it can be housed on a social media group page, or a blog, and/or distributed to hosts/writers of existing blogs.
- It can be used to advocate for necessary changes in curriculum and materials used to teach English language courses.
- It can serve as reading material for English language students as a way to encourage conversations around racism and influence perceptions of Black women globally.
- It can be used at part of training materials to inform recruitment and retention efforts in programs such the Peace Corps, the English Fellows, Teach for America, etc. Thus, it can provide insight that will help diversify the workforce as

well as help to retain Black women educators and other people of color. Such measures can lead to changing the climate of workplaces such that they are less (if not fully) racist.

Implications for Praxis

In March 2017, political commentator Bill O'Reilly, who is a White man, insulted African American Congresswoman Maxine Waters when he stated, in response to a speech she had recently given, "I — I didn't hear a word she said . . . I was looking at the James Brown wig." He went on to emphasize his inability to take her seriously, given that he indicated that he was distracted by her appearance. Waters later responded, "I'm a strong Black woman, and I cannot be intimidated. I cannot be undermined . . . To all the women out there, be who you are, do what you do."[34] This incident inspired a national conversation, much of it on Twitter, around the racism and sexism that #BlackWomenAtWork face. One of my friends, who is a journalist, responded to the O'Reilly insult with the following social media post:

> The reason why so many of my sisters have rallied behind Maxine Waters is, as a black woman people are ALWAYS trying to intimidate us and use our blackness and our womanhood against us. Basically what O'Really (no typo) was saying was, 'who cares what this black girl has to say.' As a black woman we all know how that feels, to be more than competent and RIGHT, but then be disqualified based off of having an invisible point of view. But guess what? That mindset is not going to fly anymore. I just cannot be intimidated anymore, as of yesterday, with Auntie Waters words, I now have that sword in my back pocket. (Donna Marbury, Facebook post, March 28th, 2017)

When I read this post, I immediately texted my friend and told her, "your post is so on point. I am quoting you in my dissertation." To which she responded, "oh wow,

[34] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/03/28/bill-oreilly-compared-a-black-congresswomans-hair-to-a-james-brown-wig/?utm_term=.f77862b53b45

that is such an honor" (personal communication). Our exchange reveals a level of mutual inspiration, admiration, and respect, and a shared understanding of the importance of using our voices and words to publically speak truth to power. Moreover, "O'Really's" insult and the public response that ensued make apparent the ongoing war Black women fight daily against regarding racial and gender oppression. As I have indicated throughout this dissertation, this war is centuries old.

For example, in 1772 Phillis Wheatly, who was an 18-year-old African slave in the United States, wrote a collection of poetry in English. Before she could publish it, however, a collective of White men summoned her into a room to test her knowledge. They did not believe that an African slave woman was capable of producing poetic verse. But Wheatly was the author of her eloquent excellence, and her mastery, despite the chains of bondage, shamed their disbelief (Gates, 1988). Nevertheless, too many people today still look with doubt on Black women, particularly those who claim mastery of the English language. Many Black women teachers still ask the question, "Can I teach here?" when considering work opportunities in TESOL programs. Therefore it remains important for Black women teachers to share our stories—and for our colleagues, students, as well as researchers in TESOL communities, to listen to us. We reject the master narrative that characterizes Black women as incompetent, out of place, and out of line, and we seek to cultivate learning communities that are anti-oppressive, anti-racist, and oriented toward building a more socially just society together.

This means that administrators, in particular, must support work environments that encourage and require critical discussions on and actions to defend against systemic

oppression and social justice. We must all talk about racism, sexism, homophobia, linguicism, Islamophobia, and other forms of exclusion and violence that impact the lives of teachers and students alike. Program directors might coordinate regular opportunities to talk about institutional racism with teachers and students, as part of ongoing program requirements. Importantly, when teachers (and/or students) express having experienced racism in the classroom, office, or community, measures must be taken to address and rectify situations. This might require mediation with or disciplinary action taken against faculty, staff, and/or students who perpetrate racial discrimination, and as Kubota (2002) notes, this is likely to be uncomfortable—but so is facing racial hostility as a fact of life.

Teachers also have a responsibility to incorporate an anti-racist and anti-oppression agenda into the classroom pedagogy and workplace culture. This will require that those who are not experienced in talking and teaching about racial injustice be open to learning from those highly qualified educators who are so skilled. When faced with hallway, break-room, or promotion conversations that promulgate and/or ignore the everydayness of racism, socially conscientious educators must speak up. When required curriculum ignores the racist history that created the conditions for contemporary racial inequality, teachers must bring in supplemental materials that challenge students and themselves to rethink the master narrative that casts the United States as a fundamentally free and fair nation. It is not.

Additionally, the anti-racist, anti-oppression talks and teachings must be undergirded by measurable changes to policy. Programs must recruit more educators of color, and those that discriminate against teachers of color must be penalized.

Administrators, teachers, and others whose decisions and behaviors shape the professional environment must be held accountable for either working against, or helping to sustain the culture of racism that persists in educational institutions. In developing such policies, the experiences, perspectives, and directives of Black women and other people of color must take precedence. Finally, Black women teachers of English must continue to deny and defy the master narrative— to thrive and survive where they have chosen to belong—with brilliance, compassion, and joy.

Significance of the Study

Have I made good on the purpose of my dissertation study? In other words, does this dissertation study help to further the struggle for racial equity, equality, and social justice? In Chapter Three, I referenced two key criteria to measuring validity in transformative research. First, I explained that the ethic of personal accountability as outlined in BFE (Collins, 2000) requires that "I have a duty to my participants, to Black women especially, and to all those who might read or otherwise be impacted by my research to be honest, sensitive, rigorous, reflexive, and humble as I engage texts, participants, and my own intellectual and creative work" (see p. 91). Secondly, the participants and other members of the community about which the research is focused must "approve" of it, or find value, purpose, and meaning in the process and the product. Although as researcher I believe I have honored the ethic of personal accountability, the second measure—how the participants and community members evaluate the work, serves as a check of sorts on how I view my self and my work.

Although this counterstory (see Chapter 4) has not been widely disseminated, due to time constraints and the bureaucratic nature of the dissertation writing and defense processes, I have been able to gather a few early responses to the study from focal participants. Responses include:

> *I chose to participate because representation is extremely important. Your thesis was provoking and I knew it would definitely help bring issues that women of color in TESOL/international education face to light. So often people confide in their colleagues about challenges, that oftentimes some cannot relate to. Our sessions provided an opportunity for me to not just "vent", but to share struggles and how I conquered them. Your research will hopefully help to provide tools and initial research for current and future educators. Your research also promotes inclusivity (which I try to live and breathe) and will help students, educators and other stakeholders reassess implicit biases that plague not just student success, but the success of educators as well. I wish you all the best! Very proud of what you've accomplished and all that you will continue to conquer!!!*
> *(JM, email communication, April 2017)*

> *The topic is relevant to me, and I knew I could contribute. Besides, I'm grateful to the participants who volunteered for my study, so I want to pay it forward. There is a lack of research on this topic. That renders black women invisible in the literature. We need to be seen. Everywhere I go, I am the only one. It's tiring sometimes. I look forward to reading this study and learning about the experiences of other black women. Additionally, this will be informative for women of color considering a career in TESOL.*
> *(DL, email communication, April 2017)*

These responses affirm the value of the dissertation research I conducted with Black women educators. I feel inspired and appreciated when I read their sense of appreciation for the research, pride in my scholarly efforts, and sisterhood both in trial and triumph. Beyond the sense of personal fulfillment that these comments inspire, they further underscore the importance of research that centers on the experiences of Black women in general, and especially Black women in TESOL. As DL states, there is a

paucity of literature available that examines our experiences and seeks out our perspectives, and our counternarratives can enrich Black women's lives as well as educational research. Their responses help me to address my final question from above: How does this dissertation study help to further the struggle for racial equity and social justice?

- First, I center race, gender, and racism, through the voices of Black women educators: *"Black women [are] invisible in the literature. We need to be seen. Everywhere I go, I am the only one. It's tiring sometimes. I look forward to reading this study and learning about the experiences of other black women"(DL, email communication, April 2017).*
- In so doing, this "*research will hopefully help to provide tools and initial research for current and future educators. Your research also promotes inclusivity (which I try to live and breathe) and will help students, educators and other stakeholders reassess implicit biases that plague not just student success, but the success of educators as well" (JM, email communication, April 2017).*

In other words, I willingly conducted research centered on race, gender, and racism by investigating the counternarratives of Black women educators. In so doing, I believe that my research process and the final dissertation product help to advance the goals of social justice.

Areas of Opportunity

I conducted this research in the space of one year, during which I also carried and gave birth to my first child, Jember. It was therefore a year of deep and steep learning, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. One area of opportunity for the process of researching, analyzing, and writing the dissertation study is additional time to reconnect with participants, especially to bring them together to talk as a group, share collective insights, and brainstorm ways to use this research to effect the changes I have posited in this chapter. This final product holds rich content for further discussion and analysis, and it would be wonderful and meaningful to read it in full with the research participants, with other educators, and specifically with other women of color. Therefore, I consider this dissertation as a pathway into further research, discussion, and analysis, and I am excited to continue this conversation with Black women and others invested in social justice in education and society.

However, Black women work in education in all of its positions and spaces, and by focusing exclusively on teachers in this dissertation research study, I have rendered invisible the Black women who work in other capacities in support of education for speakers of other languages. Toward the end of the study, I read a speech given in 1994 by Johnetta Cole, the first Black woman president of Spelman University. In her introduction, she makes clear that her discussion of "black women in the academy" referred to "all these sisters" (including administrators and faculty, cooks and cleaners, students, etc.) (p.182). Following Cole's sentiment, Black women in education work in upper administration and as teachers, assistants, accountants, cooks, custodians,

secretaries, faculty, fellows, work-study students, and more. Therefore, in future studies, I look forward to seeking out the voices and perspectives of all these sisters.

Final Thought: Note to Future Self

it was a dream
in which my greater self
rose up before me
accusing me of my life
with her extra finger
whirling in a gyre of rage
at what my days had come to.
what,
i pleaded with her, could i do,
oh what could i have done?
and she twisted her wild hair
and sparked her wild eyes
and screamed as long as
i could hear her
This. This. This.
(Lucille Clifton, 1993, p. 29)

The woman who Clifton refers to as her "greater self" lives in my psyche as my "future self." Especially when faced with moments of uncertainty or trial, I remind myself that my decision will impact the "future me," and I would hate to disappoint her, or worse, put her in a bad place. The "process and goal" of social justice requires daily, diligent reflection and action. There are times of intense action and deep reflection. There can also be weeks of despair and seasons of optimism. At every turn, my future self speaks to me, sometimes in a whisper, occasionally with an insistent chide, at moments in song; she is there to remind me that it all counts. And Langston Hughes (2014) has reminded us that it ain't always easy (Mother to Son). Still, the "This, This, This" that Clifton's "greater self" screams of, are those actions we do not take, those words left

unspoken, the status quo-ing we engaged in to get by. In the context of academia and society at large, I feel compelled to work with others toward equity, toward freedom, and for justice.

For too many Black people, life "ain't been no crystal stair" (Hughes, 2014). Instead, it's had "tacks in it, and splinters, and boards torn up, and places with no carpet on the floor—bare." And yet we climb on, "sometimes goin in the dark, where there ain't been no light." I do not believe we, Black people, will make it to the Promised Land—the land of universal and comprehensive freedom and satisfaction—before I pass on. In the grand-scheme of history, four hundred years is just a drop in a deep, wide ocean. But one day, the centuries of abuse will end. So, I continue to care and fight on, so that I can tell my greater, future self, that I:

Carried on the tradition.
Carried a strong tradition.
Carried a proud tradition.
Carried a Black tradition. (Shakur, 1997, p. 264)

I do not carry this tradition alone, but in the company of *all these sisters,* who together transform all of society, as we liberate ourselves. *We will not be intimidated. We will not be undermined.* We will continue to rise, shine, thrive and survive.

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