

KENNEDY, JOY L., Ph.D. *Order My Steps of Faith: A Philosophical Self-Reflection of Faith using an African-American Womanist-Feminist Standpoint.* (2014)
Directed by Dr. Glenn M. Hudak. 165 pp.

This dissertation is a philosophical self-reflection inquiry of the term faith within a social context of human experience. The primary research question for this study is “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?” The secondary research questions are: “How might faith impede my understanding as an educator? And, how have I navigated faith in a non-theological setting?” For this study, I use Black Feminist Epistemology (Collins, 2009) as the main theoretical framework. This theoretical context provides me the opportunity to engage my voice throughout the study in correlation to a cultural analysis of the term faith in the Black/African-American community. More specifically, I make connections to the lived experiences of faith for Black/African-American women. The theoretical framework of Black Feminist Epistemology supports the inclusion of Black/African-American women’s voices through the integration of lived experience, dialogue, ethics of care, and ethic of personal accountability.

Since religion and faith beliefs are important aspects in the lives of most Black/African-American persons, as a Black womanist-feminist, I have a personal accountability to include definitions of faith inside theological and non-theological frameworks. In a historic overview of the term faith, there are three salient themes of faith in the experiences of most Black/African-American women: Faith as Trust, Faith as Naming, and Faith as Hope. These three themes generally guide the teaching actions for the majority of Black/African-American women educators in academia. In addition, the

study explores the “naming realities” (Dantley, 2005) of faith through my “prophetic imagination” (Brueggemann, 2001) as an African-American womanist educator. I utilize self-reflection to incorporate my varied lived experiences within special educational settings in the public school system. The study concludes with additional self-reflections of my lived experiences of faith as a graduate student.

ORDER MY STEPS OF FAITH: A PHILOSOPHICAL SELF-REFLECTION
OF FAITH USING AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN
WOMANIST-FEMINIST
STANDPOINT

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2014

Approved by

Dr. Glenn Hudak
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This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Royal and Jean Kennedy,
who have supported my educational experiences since birth.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members Dr. Glenn M. Hudak, Dr. Silvia C. Bettez, Dr. William Hart, and Dr. S. Svi Shapiro for your guidance and support during this dissertation process. Your truthfulness in feedback makes me value the significance of honesty as a budding scholar. Special thanks to my chair, Dr. Glenn Hudak, for your continual encouragement of my ideas throughout my tenure in the ELC program.

I also offer thanks to Dr. Chris Poulos, Dr. Dawn Hicks Tafari, Reverend Thomas Grinter, and Reverend Harold Robinson. Each of these individuals assisted me with the provision of reference materials and/or editing services. In addition, I wish to thank my mother for serving as the primary editor for most of my graduate school assignments.

To my family and friends, words most definitely cannot express my gratitude for each of you. Ever since I announced, approximately seven years ago, that I would begin working on my Ph.D., my parents have provided me with infinite emotional and financial support. To my sisters, Jennifer and Sharon, thank you for always checking on me and offering to help with whatever needed to be done. To my nephew, Lee, thank you for being a renewed source of energy and joy for me, but especially for our family.

Last, but certainly not least, I extend thanks unto God who is the author and finisher of my faith.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Theoretical Framework	4
Methodology	6
Methods	8
Liberal Irony & Language	10
Overview of Chapters	13
II. WHO AM I? UNDERSTANDING A FRAGMENTED SELF	17
The Self and Identity	19
The Self and Narrative Voice	22
The Self and Culture	26
The Self and Language	28
The Self and Ethics	31
The Self and Communication Consciousness	34
The Self and Spirit	38
The Self and Authenticity	42
III. TRANSITIONS OF FAITH USING AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMANIST-FEMINIST FRAMEWORK	45
Faith as Trust	49
Faith as Naming	63
Faith as Hope	74
IV. AN ENGAGED PEDAGOGY OF FAITH: CONNECTING THEORY TO PRACTICE	94
Engaged Pedagogy of Faith Defined	96
Self-Reflection #1: Womanist Interactions of Care	100
Self-Reflection #2: The Strong Black Woman	103
Self-Reflection #3: Naming as Resistance	108
Self-Reflection #4: Obedience to Voice	114
Self-Reflection #5: Democracy & Education	120
Self-Reflection #6: In Search of Wholeness	126
Summary	132

V. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: MY GRADUATE SCHOOL	
EXPERIENCES OF FAITH.....	135
Faith is Lived Experience	137
Faith is a Commitment of Hope	140
Faith is Communal Awareness	143
Conclusion	146
REFERENCES	149

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Black men and women have had to find ways to sustain both life and dignity in a society hostile to their very blackness. One of the tools that they fashioned to navigate their experience of struggle was faith.

(Douglas, 2005, p. 199)

There is a gospel song in the African-American Christian community that appeals to the nurture and guidance of one's particular faith belief. In this song, "Order My Steps," an individual specifically petitions for a better understanding of one's faith through the leading and teaching of Christianity as outlined in the Bible. Personally, this song gives me confidence in believing and knowing that my steps of faith are being ordered by a power greater than I am. I believe it is this same faith that numerous African-Americans have depended upon since their arrival to the United States of America as slaves. As a result of this enslavement, African-Americans were forced to leave behind many of their customs, rituals, and religions.

In fact, most African-Americans were forced to adopt the religious faith practices of their White slaveholders. Consequently, during slavery years, the dominant White Christian culture used their religious faith and interpretation of scripture to justify the oppression of African-Americans as slaves. Hence, the religious faith practices for most African-Americans developed into a shared cultural tradition of renewal and commitment

to their liberation from slavery as an oppressed group of people (Cone, 1990). The history of my church denomination of birth, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A. M. E. Zion) Church as “The Freedom Church,” is established upon tenets of liberation and social justice actions for marginalized groups of people (Johnson, 2006, p. 20). Social justice advocates such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass were recorded as members of the A. M. E. Zion Church (Johnson, 2006, p. 20).

Furthermore, the origin of the denomination’s name centers on our ancestral African heritage before slavery years, which signifies the importance of social equality for all persons in the United States of America (Johnson, 2006, p. 18). As practicing Methodists, we are guided by the founding Methodist principles of John and Charles Wesley who “stressed order and truth in personal and private evidence of one’s Spirit-empowered faith” (Johnson, 2006, p. 18). For Methodists, our faith is a result of our salvation and relationship with Jesus, God’s Messiah. Though our faith beliefs are personal, we are expected to demonstrate actions of our faith with other people. For instance, the Bible instructs Christians that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). While I believe I have a personal understanding of this scripture, I continually struggle with the daily practices of “walking by faith” with other people.

Moreover, growing up in the South, my ideas of faith were shaped into a philosophical and theological binary opposition between “religious faith people” and “secular people.” In other words, if one does not attend church on a regular basis, then one surely does not have any faith. However, at this moment in my life, I realize that one’s faith is not something that can be worn or seen by other people. Thus, one can

attend religious services and/or activities with other people and still not have any faith. Likewise, one can also have faith and choose to not participate and/or identify with any organized religious ideology of faith (Caputo, 2001, p. 3). While I am becoming more open to discussing and understanding the concept of faith within both religious and nonreligious frameworks, there are some persons who do not believe that any type of faith is needed on a daily basis (Goodall, 1996, p. 245).

At one point in my life, I would have denounced the skeptic opinions of faith as being ludicrous. Now, as a result of my interest in the concept of faith within both religious and nonreligious constructions, I more willingly acknowledge the historical cultural dominance of “faith talk” solely within Christian religious viewpoints, especially within the United States of America (USA). Hence, I am now called to question my interest with the concept of faith. I am really not sure if my interest with the concept of faith results more from my Christian upbringing and training, or if I am truly attempting to have an open-mind about the concept of faith in both religious and nonreligious standpoints. Therefore, in this dissertation study, I explore the primary research question “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?” The secondary research questions are “How might faith impede my understanding as an educator? And, how have I navigated faith in a non-theological institution?”

The investigation of these questions require me to “wrestle” with the concept of faith inside both nonreligious and religious frameworks. Because of my Christian training experiences, I have always used a religious framework to understand and explain the concept of faith. Thus, the inquiry of faith through a nonreligious perspective is a

daring task of my Christian religion faith belief system. Moreover, as an African-American woman, this research inquiry will also cause me to further probe the cultural significance of faith traditions within the African-American community. Thus, I am essentially putting my cultural and religious thoughts and practices of faith, since childhood, into question. However, although my religious and cultural faith practices will be challenged in this study, my ultimate goal with researching the concept of faith is to gain my voice with understanding and explaining the term faith within both religious and nonreligious frameworks.

More specifically, it is my desire that the investigation of my personal faith thoughts and actions also help other persons, who may struggle with their faith, too, make practical connections with their daily actions of faith. For that reason, I investigate the research inquiry through an inclusion of my lived experiences using Black feminist epistemology. Black feminist epistemology supports the active inclusion of my voice through the explanation of my thoughts and experiences of faith in the study – a primary goal of this research inquiry.

Theoretical Framework

As the primary researcher and subject in the study, I investigate my social and cultural experiences of faith as a woman, daughter, sister, friend, aunt, Christian, speech pathologist, educator, and graduate student. The multidimensional exploration of my life enhances my theoretical and practical connections to the practices of faith with other African-American women throughout the study. Additionally, the integration of the lived experiences of African-American women in this study facilitate the centering of our

voices and experiences within the social context of higher education. My decision to focus on the experiences of African-American women is particularly important, when, in general, the scholarly writings of African-American women have been traditionally marginalized inside academia (Collins, 2009, p. 272).

Despite this marginalization in the academy throughout the years, Black women scholars have persevered with using “alternative knowledge validation processes to generate competing knowledge claims” (Collins, 2009, p. 272). It is this “alternative knowledge validation” of Black women that Collins (2009) references as “Black feminist epistemology” (p. 275). According to Collins (2009), most Black women typically engage their scholarly knowledge construction through an examination of their personal lived experiences, dialogue with others, ethic of caring, and ethic of personal accountability. These four epistemological principles assist African-American women with understanding “why we believe what we believe to be true” (Collins, 2009, p. 270). Collins’s Black feminist epistemology framework theoretically supports my primary research question of “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?”

As an African-American woman, Collins’s insight to the epistemology of Black women has cultivated my self-confidence and desire to share my personal experiences of faith during my graduate school matriculation. However, being someone who does not openly share my life experiences with other people, especially “strangers” or people with whom I have not developed a relationship, the inclusion of my narrative experiences, particularly within a public document, will most likely be an excruciating process for me.

Therefore, in this dissertation study, I endeavor to actively engage principles of Collins's (2009) theoretical framework of Black feminist epistemology as "a provocative weave of story and theory" (Spry, 2001, p. 713) in a philosophical self-reflection of past experiences.

Methodology

In this dissertation study, I use self-reflection to discuss and explore my practices of faith, as an African-American woman educator who lives in the South, in relationship to the lived experiences of faith with other people. Consequently, I incorporate the philosophical practice of self-reflection as the primary methodology for this study. Van Manen (1990) explains,

'Methodology' refers to the philosophic framework, the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human science perspective. It includes the general orientation to life, the view of knowledge, and the sense of what it means to be human which is associated with or implied by a certain research method. We might say that the methodology is the theory behind the method, including the study of what method one should follow and why. The Greek *hodos* mean 'way.' And methodology means the *logos* (study) of the *method* (way). So methodology means 'pursuit of knowledge.' And a certain *mode* of inquiry is implied in the notion 'method.' (pp. 27-28)

From this definition of methodology, self-reflection is a process of understanding myself as a person and educator. To this end, self-reflection facilitates the active inclusion of my voice in connection to my social and cultural experiences as an African-American woman educator.

Van Manen (1990) points out, "Self-reflection is the manner by which pedagogy tries to come to terms with self (the parent, the educator) and other (the child). In other

words, self-reflection is the way in which pedagogy reflects on itself while serving other” (p. 89). Thus, my self-reflections will illustrate some of my daily interactions with and for my students in an elementary public school environment. Furthermore, self-reflections also assist with the understanding of my pedagogical experiences of faith as a graduate student. In my role as educator and student, I regard pedagogy as the general process and experience of teaching and learning in our lives (Freire, 1998). Self-reflection is the associative pedagogical link between the practices of teaching and learning.

An example of a self-reflective analysis of one’s educational experiences is Pinar’s (1975) method of “Currere.” The method of Currere “seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of his or her life (and vice versa) ...” (Pinar, 2004, p. 36). The four writing stages of the Currere method are regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical (Pinar, 1975; Pinar, 2004). Each stage emphasizes the communication of one’s thoughts and experiences in association to time-related concepts in the past (regressive), future (progressive), past and present (analytical), and lived present (synthetical) (Pinar, 1975; Pinar, 2004). The writing method of Currere, as a form of self-reflection analysis, allows the researcher to generate qualitative data from one’s lived experiences (Pinar, 1975, p. 14). When reviewing the self-reflective notes, the researcher then originates themes that convey one’s overall lived educational experiences (Pinar, 1975, p. 15).

Themes provide “structures of meanings” to our interrelational and/or intrarelational written documented lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990, p. 101). Van

Manen (1990) indicates, “writing forces the person into a reflective attitude—in contrast to face-to-face conversations in which people are much more immediately involved” (p. 64). Thus, self-reflection is an integral component in the writing process about one’s lived experiences. Moreover, self-reflection is a writing process that engages one’s written voice within one’s past and present lived experiences with potential implications for future lived experience descriptions. Keeping these processes in mind, I will integrate personal self-reflections for the active inclusion of my time-centered narrative voice throughout this dissertation study.

Methods

The explicit inclusion of my narrative voice was facilitated through an accountability system established with peer readers and peer dialogue partners. This accountability system has provided support to the inclusion of my voice in this study in connection to the narratives of other African-American women. I also utilized the following three methods to assist with the inclusion of my voice: chronicle of past events, inventory of the self, and self-observations (Chang, 2008, pp. 72-96). First, I chronicled past events through an autobiographical timeline of my faith practices and experiences since January 2006. I chose to begin my chronicle in January 2006 because this is the year that I began to put my faith into practice due to some major life changes.

Next, in this chronicle of past events, I included those routines in which I participate on a daily, weekly, and annual basis. Through an inventory of the self, I provided an analysis of the expressions, people, and objects that have shaped the construction of my social and cultural meanings of faith. Chang (2008) recommends that

the inventory of the self include reflections on familiar proverbs, virtues/values, rituals, mentors, and artifacts (pp. 77-80). Finally, I collected self-observational data for my inventory of the self. In this self-observational data, I wrote notes of my social interactions with people who are similar and different from me. I documented this self-observational data immediately after my social interactions using a narrative format to discuss the expressions and silences of my voice.

In correlation to the chronicling of past events, I also recorded random samples of my daily interactions with other people in a journal during my research and writing process. These documentations included the specifics about time, location, person, and activity of engagement. Third, I utilized a journal to collect self-observational and self-reflective data during this research process for approximately 9-12 months. In this journal, I recorded my “behaviors, thoughts, and emotions” (Chang, 2008, p. 90) of my interactions with other persons and scholarly reference materials about the theory and practices of faith. As a result, this journal facilitated an ongoing analysis and interpretation of the self’s interactions and culture using an interdisciplinary approach for the inclusion of a variety of texts.

To facilitate self-reflection in this study, I integrate literature from multiple discipline areas such as philosophy, sociology, theology, psychology, history, and education. These connections encourage the continuous engagement of the self with the experiences, thoughts, and beliefs of other people. Therefore, I incorporate personal self-reflections in connection to the thoughts and experiences of other people for a thorough investigation of the language of faith using a variety of viewpoints.

Liberal Irony & Language

Rorty (1989) examines the human language by means of his “liberal” position and explanation of language as “contingent” upon historical circumstances (past and present). For Rorty, the person who is able to acknowledge the “contingency of her language” is by his definition a “liberal ironist” (p. xv). He defines a “liberal ironist” as

The sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires – someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance. (p. xv)

Thus, Rorty, as a philosopher, does not explicate language by referencing divine beings or human nature; rather language is a shared element between and among human beings. Since human beings apparently have expressive language capabilities, Rorty argues that only human beings can influence the language of other human beings (p. 6).

Hence, the human language, with its contingency, aids the verbal expressions of persons within their current social norms and culture. Moreover, Rorty (1999) gives detail to the association of language as a social construction. Basically, as a result of human language, persons are never really “able to step outside of language, never be able [to] grasp reality unmediated by a linguistic description” (Rorty, 1999, p. 48). Therefore, to say that language is a social construction, involves recognizing that the human language is inextricably linked to the current social vocabulary which articulates our needs, desires, and explanations (Rorty, 1999, p.48). Although language is the human

beings primary form of expression, Rorty (1989) would more than likely caution the use and understanding of language as a medium of expression or representation (p. 10).

Rorty's (1989) contention with the application of language as a medium, involves debunking conventional ideology with the thoughts of human language as intrinsic (p. 10). Instead, language for Rorty, using the philosophy of Davidson, functions as a "tool" (p. 10). Consequently, in Rorty's opinion, language as a tool allows the comparison for word efficiency (i.e. "Does our use of these words get in the way of our use of those other words?"); where language as a medium, often compares the validity of beliefs (p. 12). Thus, in order to remove the practice and thoughts of language as a medium, in the words of Rorty (1989), "would be to de-divinize the world" (p. 21). For Rorty, to "de-divinize the world" suggests accepting the tools of language as historically contingent rather than reverencing language as an innate, celestial quality (p. 22).

Using Rorty's concept of a "liberal ironist," I explain my viewpoint on the terms religion and religious. The word religion, on the whole, associates to the global organized (either formally or informally) structures that provide doctrines of belief for persons within the particular membership (Dewey, 1934, p. 9). Consequently, there are diverse types of religious practices in the world – Islam, Hindu, Jewish, Christianity, and so forth. In this regard, whenever referencing the word religion, I specifically indicate the type of religion by stating "Islam religion" or "Christian religion." As a practicing Christian, there are some instances that I include text within the Christian Bible to either define or support theological insight on investigated terms in the dissertation. Although Rorty (1989) encourages persons to "de-divinize" their language, I occasionally mention

the significance of God as the object of faith and/or hope for most Black/African-American Christian women and men.

In some ways, integrating the theological concepts and/or practices of the Christian religion is one way for me to understand religion as a tool of language for the understanding of my beliefs and practices. However, in order to fully interrogate my Christian perspective and to decrease the comparison of beliefs with other religion viewpoints, I include non-theological meanings of the term “faith” throughout the dissertation. For this reason, the written language within the dissertation assumes more of a “religious” stance as with being “political or artistic” (Caputo, 2001, p. 9). Moreover, Dewey (1934) defines “religious” as an adjective that “denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs” (p. 9). Therefore, the “religious” intent of this dissertation is for me to artistically discover the non-theological and theological meanings of faith for most Black/African-American womanist-feminist educators.

Even though I have an idea of my writing goals for this dissertation, Dewey (1934) points out, “The actual religious quality in the experience described is the *effect* produced, the better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the manner and cause of its production” (p. 14). To this end, I will not have a full understanding of how the term “faith” assists and/or impedes my understanding as an educator until the completion of research and writing for this study. According to Dewey, self-reflection may possibly initiate the “religious” experiences of life for some persons (p. 14). In self-reflection during the writing process of the dissertation, I will ponder the “contingency” of my

language use within the current historical period of the 21st Century. Essentially, I believe, like Caputo (2001), that the “religious sense of life” necessitates openness to the experiences of faith.

Overview of Chapters

In this dissertation, I examine my daily actions of faith as an African-American woman in the South. Personally, I have struggled with my understanding and application of faith within a variety of settings – home, school, and church. Consequently, the concept of faith offers solid ground for inquiry, partly because it continues to intrigue me both personally, as an African-American woman, and professionally, as an educator in the South. Therefore, for this dissertation, I investigate three research questions. The primary research question is “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?” The secondary research questions are “How might faith impede my understanding as an educator?” and “How have I navigated faith in a non-theological institution?”

In the first research question, the word “assist” implies how I will continue and expand academic discussions of faith within Black/African-American womanist-feminist scholarly traditions. Moreover, the second research question involves using self-reflection throughout my research and writing process to determine how my Christian faith beliefs may hinder my thoughts on the term within non-theological frameworks. The third research question necessitates practical connections to my experiences as a graduate student in a non-theological public setting. An outline of the remaining dissertation chapters follows.

In Chapter II, I utilize self-reflections to make connections between my identities as an African-American womanist-feminist educator who practices Christianity and lives in the South. In addition, I also integrate theoretical precepts of Collins's (2009) Black feminist epistemology framework to aid with the understanding of my scholarly thoughts on the term faith. I begin the exploration in a discussion of my subjective "I" and narrative voice in correlation to my race, ethnicity, and gender identities. Then, I reference the self and communal interpretations of culture through a language discourse within the "transitional spaces" (Flax, 1990) of oral and written communication.

Due to the centering of the researcher's experiences in self-reflection practices, the researcher is ethically accountable to the inclusion and/or exclusion of shared experiences with other people. The ethic of accountability is also a component of Black Feminist Epistemology. Furthermore, assuming personal accountability in one's research requires a conscious awareness to one's thoughts and feelings during interactions with other people and the writing process. The conscious actions of thinking, speaking, and listening allow the researcher to engage within a "spiritual pursuit of truth" (Dillard, 2000, p. 674). As an authentic researcher, the construction of truth is determined in the congruence of one's actions and words with other people.

In Chapter III, I construct a theological and non-theological framework of faith experiences within the Black/African-American womanist-feminist scholarly traditions with some historical references to faith during slavery. For instance, in the Faith as Trust section, it is revealed that most Black slaves directed their faith as trust in God, rather than designating faith as trust in their White slave masters. However, in the Black slave

community, there was an unexpressed confidence in faith as trust in the actions of Black slave women as caretakers and freedom seekers of the community. In like manner, faith as trust in people is evidenced within the Black/African-American community today. Furthermore, most Black/African-American women scholars develop faith as trust in people through the establishment of dialogue and mutual trust in the educational setting.

Hence, for most Black/African-American educators, dialogue facilitates the interpretation of “Faith as Naming” one’s lived experiences through self-definition as either a womanist or feminist scholar in theological and non-theological settings. “Faith as Naming” is a personal and communal action with identifying one’s privileges and oppressions. Moreover, “Faith as Hope” is a standpoint that conjoins the naming of one’s lived realities in actions of social justice for most Black/African-American educators. While in Christian theological terms, hope is a form of expectation, within human experiences, hope is a daily action in one’s interactions with other people. Consequently, hope and faith are experiences with centering one’s doubts in the daily realities of life.

In Chapter IV, I probe my viewpoint as an African-American womanist special educator through the lens of “prophetic imagination” (Brueggemann, 2001). As an educator, I formulate my discussion on hooks’s (1994) concept of “Engaged Pedagogy” and Meyer’s (2007) definition of “Queer Theory” for an engaged inclusion of voice in the discussion of the ability/disability construct in our world. Additionally, I discuss the teaching practices of “Engaged Pedagogy” and “Queer Theory” as pedagogical frameworks of faith. For the remaining chapter sections, I present six self-reflections of experience as a public school special educator.

The first self-reflection discusses the actions of care by teachers as being culturally responsive to student's needs and as an ethic responsibility. Traditionally, the actions of care are a characteristic of most Black/African-American womanist teachers. The second self-reflection mentions the implications of the word "strength" for most Black/African-American women educators. The third self-reflection examines the process of naming one's lived experiences as a form of resistance to social labels. The fourth self-reflection highlights the significance of being obedient to one's gendered voice. The fifth self-reflection explores the meanings of democracy and education as intentional "cultural ways of being" (West, 2004) in the world. Finally, the sixth self-reflection considers the search for wholeness in education as an awareness of self in one's teaching and learning practices.

Chapter V provides a summative analysis of the main themes of faith included in this dissertation study. Using three self-reflective themes of faith, I make practical applications to my experiences of faith as a graduate student. The first theme discusses my lived experiences of faith beginning with the application submission process to pursue my doctorate. The second theme describes the intersections of the terms faith and hope in terms of one's commitment to the dissertation process. The third theme emphasizes having communal awareness to one's actions of faith as an educator. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the primary and secondary dissertation research questions and answers.

CHAPTER II
WHO AM I? UNDERSTANDING
A FRAGMENTED SELF

Knowing who you are strengthens your faith.
(Wright Jr., 1995, p. 144)

For this research study, I have chosen to utilize a qualitative research format that allows the active inclusion of my voice and personal experiences as an African-American woman within my written analysis. To this end, I will use self-reflection as the primary methodology in this dissertation. Self-reflection assists educational researchers with linking their lived experiences to the contexts of their social and cultural (i.e. family, career, church, etc.) conceptual frameworks. For the majority of my life, I have viewed my personal experiences as being separate from my educational and/or schooling experiences. However, self-reflection provides me the opportunity to understand and discuss the intersections of my lived experiences as an African-American woman educator.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will explain how self-reflection assists me with understanding myself as an educational researcher, which facilitates my understanding of the word “faith.” In addition, I will also incorporate tenets of Collins’s (2009) Black feminist epistemology. Collins’s concept of Black feminist epistemology has cultivated the interpretation of my experiences as an African-American woman educator through an understanding of theoretical concepts such as lived experiences, dialogue with others,

ethic of care, and ethic of personal accountability. Accordingly, I will explain my lived experiences in relationship to a theoretical construction of the self as an educational researcher. The guiding theoretical constructions for this chapter include understanding the connections between the self and identity, the self and narrative voice, the self and culture, the self and language, the self and ethics, the self and communication consciousness, the self and spirit, and the self and authenticity.

Moreover, to facilitate practical connections to my educational research standpoint, I will also use a familiar “secret” game to bridge the correlations between one’s personal and educational experiences. For instance, during my childhood, I remember playing the “secret game” where one person would whisper a word, phrase, or sentence into the ear of another person. That person is then responsible for communicating “the secret” to someone else. The game continues in this same manner until the last person in the group receives the message. At this time, the last person announces “the secret” to the entire group participating in the game. Of course, the final word and/or statement never resembles the expressions from the first communication exchange.

When the last player in the game does not understand the transferred message, the person then becomes open to communicating her/his individual thoughts disconnected from contextual meaning. Hence, the final player then derives interpretive meaning from the utterances that s/he is able to decipher. The resulting terms of expression typically convey a different connotation of the original thought. To a certain extent, my development as an educational researcher seems like a “secret message” that I have

learned how to decode through my interactions with other people. In contrast to the last player in the “secret game,” who is generally able to create a spontaneous individual response, the distortion of the secret message, for me, often occurs as a result of my dependence on the thoughts of other researchers. For this reason, this chapter is my attempt to construct a meaningful message of my standpoint as an educational researcher using self-reflection. The first point in my theoretical construction of the self is recognition between one’s research identities as a self.

The Self and Identity

One’s identity as a self is developed through one’s communicative interactions with other people. Similar to “the secret” game, our identity as a self is constructed in relationship to the expressive use of recurring words and labels in our world. For instance, when posed with the question, “Who Am I?”, most persons generally respond by stating traits of their identity – name, gender, and race/ethnicity. However, Taylor (1989) argues that to answer the question “Who Am I?” with responses such as your name and family ancestry does not provide an adequate orientation to the self (p. 27). Although such descriptions as one’s name, gender, race/ethnicity, assist with defining the “I” of one’s identity, ultimately, our responses are relational to other persons within our families and/or communities (Taylor, 1989, p. 35).

Accordingly, my subjective “I” as a researcher is also a reflection of my interactive experiences with other subjects and objects in the world. Stonebanks and Stonebanks (2010) comment,

Although the self is developed through interaction, it is the individualization of one's subjective feelings in a social setting that indicates the birth of the individual. We can only develop a sense of identity when we understand who others are. Then we compare our differences. (pg. 231)

For instance, at birth, we are labeled according to our physical characteristics of race (skin color) and gender (sexual organs) traits. As we begin to grow and mature as human beings, we then utilize these same object traits to understand and express our experiences as subjects through words and expressions.

On the other hand, our assigned traits (i.e. race & gender) also influence how other people interact with us through their social and cultural constructions of race and gender (Schwalbe, 2008, p. 24). Defining and labeling people according to their race and gender, "results from the invention of schemes for sorting people into groups" (Schwalbe, 2008, p. 24). Therefore, in actuality, our interactions with other human beings (i.e. objects) is more contingent on the determined social labels used to identify and categorize based on physical characteristics rather than one's personal experiences as a subject. For the majority of my life, I did not have any major issues with being identified as a Black person. Now that I am older with more educational experiences, I have a better understanding of the derivation of Black as a racial classification system for the oppression of Black men and women slaves (Collins, 1998, p. 98).

Since the term "Black" solely references one's experiences based on a racial classification system, I prefer to use the expression "African-American" as a representation of my African and American cultural heritages. On the other hand, like Muhammad (2012), I also recognize the global inclusiveness of the term Black when

referencing the racial experiences of other persons who identify as Black. Therefore, in this dissertation, I will use both terms “African-American” and “Black” interchangeably for the discussion of experiences for a group of people either in the USA (African-American) and/or world-wide (Black). However, to locate my personal viewpoint as a researcher, I will identify my standpoint as an African-American woman when discussing my lived experiences in this dissertation.

The expression African-American woman provides me the opportunity to identify with a history before the slavery of Black/African-American persons in the USA, while also enabling me to differentiate my lived narrative experiences from African-American men. The location of my standpoint as an African-American woman does not designate the exclusion of the narrative experiences of men; it simply specifies that my narrative experiences may differ from the dominant male norms of knowledge and faith expressions in academia. Baszile (2006) expresses,

As Black women, we live at the nexus of race, and gender hierarchies; we be in the spaces in between, not quite here, and not quite there. We are/we be in between Black and White, male and female, and even race and gender as categories that contradict in the defining of Black women’s identities. (p. 200)

As a Black woman professor, Baszile asserts her lived experiences within an “ontopistemological in-between” framework of her race and gender standpoint.

Distinguishing one’s race and gendered narrative perspective is particularly important in self-reflection research studies since “the researcher is the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns” (Spry, 2001, p. 711). This is the significance for the inclusion of my personal lived experiences of faith as an

African-American woman in this dissertation study. In addition, the inclusion of lived experiences is an essential component of Collins's (2009) Black Feminist Epistemology. Collins stipulates, "For most African-American women those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experience" (p. 276). In that case, it is not sufficient for me to provide an interpretation of the term "faith" without having evidence of living by faith through the expression of my lived experiences.

The expression of my lived experiences begins with the acknowledgement of my ethnicity and gender position as an African-American woman. Ellis (2004) discusses,

Many feminist writers advocate starting research from one's own experience. Thus, to a greater or lesser extent, researchers incorporate their personal experiences and standpoint in their research by starting with a story about themselves, explaining their personal connection to the project, or using personal knowledge to help them in the research process. (pp. 47-48)

Again, I am challenged with explaining my lived experiences in the middle position of my ontological (race/ethnicity) and epistemology (gender) standpoint. Thus, my ethnicity and gender identities are very important to my perspective as an African-American woman. These identities will shape my narrative voice throughout this research study.

The Self and Narrative Voice

Since the use of the subjective narrative "I" is a general expectation within most qualitative research studies, the researcher is typically not required to offer justification for using the narrative "I" in association to the research analysis. Because of this

understanding in qualitative research, I have struggled with explicitly naming my particular standpoint as a qualitative researcher for my dissertation study. At times, I have even questioned the importance of labeling one's qualitative research study in resistance to the explicit and implicit privileges of language. While defining my qualitative research methodology will assign me to a more specialized research group, I also become excluded from other fields of research. However, in my attempt to resist naming and defining my scholarly research position, it has actually been more difficult for me to develop an understanding of myself as a qualitative researcher.

Taylor (1989) reassures me that naming my scholarly self will provide the necessary navigational frameworks to conduct research that is meaningful to me (p. 27). For this reason, one of my goals as an educational researcher entails incorporating my subjective standpoint as an African American woman as both a "subject (researcher who does investigation) and object (participant who is investigated)" (Chang, 2011, p. 15) within my research. The "I" as subject incorporates my lived experiences through a personal narrative voice; whereas, the "I" as object investigates my interactions with other people from a past tense perspective (Pinar, 1975, p. 8). Moreover, the subjective narrative "I" is generally expressed as a result of the researcher's previous experiences with other people (Pinar, 1975, p. 8).

In relationship to "the secret" game, however, the researcher's subjective "I" is best developed in the middle position of the game. While the first person in the game passes "the secret" message to someone else, this person generally does not confer with others about the message before initiating the game. Likewise, because the message

becomes so distorted by the end of the game, the last person commonly has free reign to invent a response. But, it is the person or people in the middle who will find ways to incorporate the perceptible words from the previous person with their own to aid the next message transmission. Of the three positions in the game, the middle position promotes the active integration of one's subjective thoughts of the message in connection to the expressions of the previous persons.

Under these circumstances, being in the middle position is somewhat of a "transitional space" that "bridges the gaps--between self and other and inner and outer reality" (Flax, 1990, p. 119). The idea of the "transitional space" was first conceived by psychoanalyst, D. W. Winnicott. Flax (1990) comprehensively presents a discussion of Winnicott's thoughts on the "transitional space" and the interconnections between the self and objects. Although Winnicott's "transitional space" theory relates more to the development of a mother-child relationship, Flax points out,

Winnicott's notion of the transitional space shares some of the qualities postmodernists attribute to 'writing,' but because this space is defined by less grandiose boundaries, it provides a more useful way to think about certain aspects of experience. (pp. 116-117)

For example, Harris (2011) utilizes the phrase "transitional space" as a metaphor to discuss her changes in thoughts and theoretical frameworks during the writing stages of the dissertation process.

In her article, Harris recalls her eventual decision to write her dissertation using a poststructural perspective rather than a critical race theory or critical pedagogy viewpoint. While writing the dissertation, Harris became concerned with her "ability to capture the

lived experiences of [her] participants, specifically their ‘voice’” (p. 726). As a result, Harris transitioned her standpoint within a poststructural framework that, in her perception, provided more opportunities for discussion and analysis of race in connection to her racial identity experiences as a White woman (p. 726). In this instance, the poststructural framework offered Harris a “transitional space” in the middle position to explicate her stance on race issues in relationship to the voices of her research participants.

Somewhat similar to Harris, self-reflection is the “transitional space” bridge between my personal and social interactions with other people. As the youngest of three siblings, writing in the middle position is an awkward standpoint for me. For the majority of my life, I have been celebrated for being the youngest person in my family. However, the only downside to being the youngest sibling is that everyone else in the family has a tendency to speak for you in certain circumstances. In some ways, developing my subjective voice has been complicated – not only with my family members, but in other personal relationships too. Sometimes, I have neglected using my voice as a passive object without expressing my beliefs and opinions.

On the other hand, there have been occasions when I excessively used the ideas and experiences of other people to explain my personal standpoint. But, in both situations, the use or nonuse of my subjective voice generally centered on letting other people talk for me. The development of my narrative voice on the term “faith” is very important for me as an educational researcher. This research study is my opportunity to demonstrate my ideas of the term “faith” through the active inclusion of my narrative

voice where the self's identity is a relational cultural experience through the narrative "transitional space" of the middle position.

The Self and Culture

The cultural identity of the self is best understood in connection to one's subject and object position as a researcher. If, I, as a researcher, only explore the tenets of culture from an objective third-person stance, then I presumably relate to the concepts of culture within an object standpoint. From this object perspective, culture is defined by other people and the researcher explains culture through the viewpoints of other people. Likewise, the researcher who does not identify her standpoint within a cultural framework of identity, in some instances, remains detached from the realities of her object of study. Flax (1990) points out, "Culture, like play, exists in the third area, the potential space between the individual's inner life and objective reality" (p. 119).

Using the "transitional space" metaphor, my self-awareness of my outer cultural experiences is mediated through the middle position of my subject-object cultural language experiences. For some women of color, writing in the middle position is a consequence of their marginalized experiences. As an example, Lee (2006), a Native American woman scholar, navigates academic life by using her marginalized cultural and gender experiences to centralize her thoughts within her academic work. According to Lee, the centering of her marginalized experiences results from the embracement of her cultural identity with other Native Americans (p. 56). Because Lee acknowledges the influence of her cultural identity and gender on her research, she is able to offer new subjective perspectives within academic research, rather than retell established research

through the viewpoints of other researchers. Lee's research position requires an astute consciousness to her subject and object positions as a Native American woman.

Furthermore, the researcher's position as a subject and object in the research study also relates to the researcher's macro- and micro- analysis of culture. In the USA, a macroculture analysis involves understanding the national ideologies and symbols that shape our collective values (Banks, 2008, p. 58). In particular, "Faith of Our Fathers" is a common phrase used to explain the object of our national faith in the USA.

Historically, the direction of our faith has been guided towards God, as the divine father of our nation, or towards the men who are regarded as the founding fathers of the USA. A macroanalysis of the phrase "Faith of Our Father" will highlight the emphasis of the direction of one's faith in men typically symbolized as being white in paintings and/or portraits.

Nevertheless, DuBois (n.d.) offers a contrasting symbolization of the "Faith of Our Fathers" based on the experiences of Black/African-American persons in the USA. Although DuBois's depiction of faith is centered within a microcultural analysis of the Black/African-American community, his explanation is still premised on the foundational faith of men in the Black/African-American church. While microcultures are essentially thought of as subcultures within the larger macroculture framework (Banks, 2008, p. 58), there are instances when both cultural frameworks will share similar symbols of faith as evidenced by DuBois. However, my goal is to use a microcultural analysis of my standpoint as an African-American woman to provide a different perspective on the term faith.

This standpoint will assist me with the writing experiences of the “gaze in and gaze out” (Boylorn, 2008) and the “being here and being there” (Spry, 2001) of macro- and micro-cultural analysis. As an African-American woman, the “gaze in and gaze out” is a position that allows me to look at the historical implications of racism and sexism in the USA; while the “being here and being there” represent my standpoint as the subject and object of this study. Again, I am positioned in the “transitional space” of the middle position between being a subject and object in my research study. Consequently, in order to demonstrate writing transitions between my personal and cultural analysis, I will need awareness to the social and cultural implications of language usage.

The Self and Language

Even in my attempt to describe and explain my experiences as an African American self, I am limited with using the social vocabulary and language of my time. To this end, my language becomes somewhat of a “barrier” to my understanding and explanation of the subject-object relationship (Rorty, 1999, pp. 49-50). Rorty (1999) expresses, “that our language imposes categories on objects which may not be intrinsic to them” (p. 50). If this is the case, then simply because I am labeled as Black/African-American or as a woman, I may not innately identify with either socially defined category. However, as a result of the labels, I am more aware of my objectified status as a person of color and woman in correlation to non-persons of color and men. The sheer fact that some researchers can ignore the significance of their subject-object positions with their objects of study is a form of privilege (Johnson, 2006, pp. 21-22). McIntosh (as cited in Johnson 2006) defines privilege as, “when one group has something of value

that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they've done or failed to do" (p. 21).

In this same way, our language as subject-object beings is a privileged standpoint in correlation to non-living objects. Although other animals may have some form of communication system with other animals, only human beings are able to decipher the language of other human beings. The human language system is typically facilitated through the expressed cultural language experiences of our qualitative subject-object descriptions (Rorty, 1999, p. 63). For example, in relationship to "the secret" game, if someone initiates the game by saying "O ye of faith," this person is possibly referencing one's belief or trust in people or a divine higher power as the object of her/his faith. However, the next person who hears "the secret" may translate the message as "O ye of little faith." In this particular instance, one's faith is substantiated through the qualification and quantification of the amount of one's faith belief.

In another viewpoint, the person who hears this "secret" message may automatically transform the message into "O ye of no faith," particularly if the person professes to not participate or believe in religious doctrine. Furthermore, for someone, like me, who lives in the South, the "secret" message may become interpreted as "O ye of the Christian faith." From this example of the "secret" game, we become aware that the qualification of the word faith, as an object, is redefined in relation to the subjective language and experiences of each "secret" game participant. These various descriptions of the word faith demonstrate the simultaneous barrier and privilege of the human language. The barrier of the human language is "that we shall never be able to step

outside of language, never be able to grasp reality unmediated by a linguistic description” (Rorty, 1999, p. 48). The privilege of the human language is that only human beings have the subjective capability to define one’s faith – the term faith, as an inanimate object, cannot provide its own description.

Therefore, it is pertinent for me as a researcher, not only to locate my subjective “I” as an African-American self, but also to acknowledge the influence of the Southern culture on my language development. As someone who has lived in the Southeastern region of the USA for my entire life, my cultural language experiences as an African-American self may differ significantly from another African-American person who lives in the Northern or Western regions of the USA. For example, in the South, it is very common for persons to use phrases such as: “God Bless You” after someone sneezes, or “I’m Blessed” in response to the question “How are you?”, and some persons may even end a conversation by saying “Have a blessed day.” All of these phrases are examples of how most persons in the South are indoctrinated with using religious expressions in their everyday salutations.

Because of my southern religious language enculturation, I will continually include the lived experiences, thoughts, and beliefs of persons who have similar, different, and/or oppositional standpoints (Chang, 2008, p. 26) on the term faith in this dissertation. It is my goal to utilize my subject-object standpoint to assist with the cultural interpretation of the language of faith within a “shared reality” (Flax, 1990, p. 118) of experiences with other educational scholars who may or may not use religious language. The diverse inclusion of faith language beliefs will, hopefully, not overshadow

my standpoint; but, will assist with the development of my personal voice on the term faith. The inclusion of one's personal perspective as a qualitative researcher is typically a crucial factor for the inclusion of one's narrative descriptions in the research. In this realization, I am summoned to remain cognizant of my ethical commitments to other people as the subject and object of the study.

The Self and Ethics

In everyday life, most people do not encourage the sharing of another person's secrets to an audience of people. In actuality, this is the irony in playing the "secret" game. The overall objective of the game is to determine how far the initial shared "secret" message will last before being contorted into a new "secret" statement. However, in reality, the expressed "secret" message is not really a secret at all. The "secret" message usually originates as a random thought from the first player in the game. Because only one person truly knows the original message of the game, the message assumes the position of "secret" for the remainder of the game. While playing the game, there is a type of energy that excites the continued sharing of the "secret" to the other game participants. Maybe the energy is a result of participants desiring to know if the "secret" message was communicated successfully, or maybe the energy is a result of participants being engaged with the paradoxical idea of telling someone else's "secret" message.

In "Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics in Research with Intimate Others," Ellis (2007) recommends researchers practicing a form of "relational ethics" (p. 4) during the writing process. She states, "Relational ethics recognizes and values mutual

respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work” (Ellis, 2007, p. 4). Thus, dialogue with other people is encouraged (Ellis, 2004) as a form of relational ethics. In addition, dialogue is another component of Collins’s (2009) Black Feminist Epistemology (pp. 279-281). In academia, dialogue fosters connections between and among Black/African-American women educators and other scholars for the sharing of ideas.

Alternatively, oral history traditions within the African communities have used dialogue as a way to determine the truthfulness of one’s story (Collins, 2009, pp. 279-280). Therefore, I am ethically responsible for the information conveyed through personal and communal interpretations. Collins (2009) refers to this tenet of Black Feminist Epistemology as “The Ethic of Personal Accountability” (pp. 284-285). According to Collins, “Not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims” (p. 284).

In order to preserve the ethical privacy of my personal interactions in this dissertation study, there will be instances when I will need to utilize a variety of subjective viewpoints in my written analysis. When making an object analysis of my standpoint as an African-American woman educator, I may utilize a more communal language of description resembling the first-person plural viewpoint. The use of a communal language is typical for most Black/African-American women researchers, especially those who work with or write about Black/African-American children (Collins,

2009, p. 206). Particularly, as an educator in the public school system, I hope to incorporate experiences with my elementary school students that have influenced my analysis on the term “faith.”

To this end, my purpose with using a more inclusive communal language to describe the experiences of Black/African-American women educators will be to hopefully decrease the ethical dichotomy between theory and practice. Shope (2006) reminds me, “Theory detached from experience tends to reproduce the Other, someone made distant by abstraction, the object of the ethnographic gaze” (p. 178). In order for me to use Black Feminist Epistemology as a theoretical framework, I need to evidence a communal language of similar lived cultural experiences with other Black/African-American women educators.

For Black women scholars, lived experience is used to determine one’s personal accountability to her thoughts, beliefs, and/or actions. From an ethical standpoint, as a researcher, my lived experiences with the cultural group of study will ultimately impact my written presentation and interpretation of the cultural group. Hence, in my written self-reflection analysis, I will need to occasionally distinguish my personal lived experiences separate from the experiences of other Black/African-American women. However, in relationship to my cultural identity as a self, my personal lived experiences are always in connection to my identity as an African-American woman. Once again, my subjective “I” as an African-American woman becomes relational within a communal language system.

Instead of “I”, the researcher, subjecting my thoughts and/or opinions on a cultural group of people, my researcher subjective “I” communicates as a communal “us” and “we” within an interrelationship of shared experiences (Spry, 2001, p. 711). This will ultimately assist me with writing inside the “transitional spaces” of my social and cultural identities in this dissertation study. In self-reflection, the researcher’s ethical position within the “transitional space” of the middle position is one that fluctuates between the researcher’s relational experiences as the subject and object of the study. These relational experiences are further developed and communicated through the researcher’s written engagement between the “transitional spaces” of consciousness and communication.

The Self and Communication Consciousness

Goodall (1996) believes communication is “the practical manifestation of consciousness” (p. 5), especially when communication is analyzed through one’s descriptions as a self. Goodall continues to express, “It [communication] is a consciousness that holds both the questions and the narrative frameworks that lead to answers and actions” (pp. 5-6). In other words, for a research question such as, “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?”, the answer to the question resides in the researcher’s subjective standpoint. In addition Langer (as cited in Fiumara 1990) states, “... A question is really an ambiguous proposition; the answer is its determination” (p. 35). Therefore, the research question simply provides the researcher an opportunity to do meaningful personal research.

In that case, the answer to the research question is contingent upon the researcher's consciousness to her interactions within a variety of social and/or cultural locations. The researcher typically uses her conscious thoughts to self-reflect on her experiences with other people. These self-reflections are incorporated into the written analysis by means of oral and/or written self-reflective documentation (Chang, 2008; Poulos, 2013) as conscious pathways to social and cultural interpretations. Consequently, self-reflective observations enable the researcher to actively engage in conscious thinking of one's thoughts, feelings, and experiences in correlation to the ideas and experiences of other scholarly researchers.

Heidegger (1966) discusses two types of thinking – meditative and calculative thinking (p. 46). Heidegger points out, "... meditative thinking does not just happen by itself any more than does calculative thinking. At times it requires a greater effort. It demands more practice" (pp. 46-47). Whereas calculative thinking refers to the end results of something by means of arithmetic calculation or the presentation of facts; meditative thinking is similar to the position of pondering (pp. 46-52). Heidegger explains,

Meditative thinking demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track course of ideas. Meditative thinking demands of us that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all. (p. 53)

In order to make these disparate connections, self-reflections may need to resemble more of a meditative thinking stance with a perceptive consciousness to the interconnections of experiences.

One of my goals in this dissertation study is to make connections between experiences in my life that I have typically viewed as being separate without any relational links. For instance, my current occupation as a Speech-Language Pathologist does not have any obvious correlations to my scholarly interests with the concept of faith. In the public school system, the work expectations of a speech-language pathologist are often confined to the identification, prevention, and remediation of speech (articulation, voice, fluency) and language (receptive and expressive) disorders. While all of these elements are important to one's overall communication skills, as a doctoral student, I gained a new awareness to the underlying factors of my communication skills with other people. Essentially, my communication skills are influenced by my race/ethnicity, gender, social class status, religion, age, ability, regional location, and so forth.

Because these factors shape my overall communication skills with other people, my discussion of the term "faith" centers on my current consciousness of the intersecting aspects of my communication skills as a self. A researcher's communicative consciousness correlates favorably to the performance aspects of autoethnography. Spry (2001) expresses,

Performing autoethnography has allowed me to position myself as active agent with narrative authority over many hegemonizing dominant cultural myths that restricted my social freedom and personal development, also causing me to realize how my Whiteness and class membership can restrict the social freedom and personal development of others. (p. 711)

For Spry, her communication as a narrative self resulted from a conscious stance to the benefits and hindering potentials of her race, gender, and social class status. As a White

woman, Spry is able to offer a narrative story in contrast to the traditional narratives of men. On the other hand, Spry recognizes how her narrative accounts as a White woman may hinder and/or silence the narrative experiences of women of color and women in different social class positions.

From a theoretical standpoint, Black feminist epistemology encourages me to remain consciously attentive to the possible advantages and impediments of my experiences and viewpoints of faith as a middle-class African-American woman. My position as a subject in the study facilitates the active inclusion of my narrative voice in connection to the often marginalized experiences of other African-American women. My position as an object in the study permits me the opportunity to think about the social class privileges with having a scholarly discourse on the term faith. From a methodology standpoint, self-reflection engages the performance of my body within my research.

This exploration requires an extreme attentiveness to my communicative “bodily standpoint” (Spry, 2001, p. 711) of voice during the writing process.

Pelias (2004) expresses, “To speak the body is to live in its centeredness. It is to articulate the heart of the matter. When all is said, it is the body that is done” (p. 37). As the heart is in the center of the body, our voice (via the mouth) is between our heart and head. This is why speaking requires a listening attentiveness to what is being said in the mind and how the body feels. Although I sometimes feel pains of nausea in my stomach when thinking about the reactions of other people to my non-theological stance on the word faith, I do not permit my bodily feelings to hinder my research progress. Instead, I seek to understand the cause(s) of my bodily emotions through the use of my narrative

voice. Listening to the communicative thoughts and conscious feelings of my mind and body has the potential to become an integrating component of the self's mind, body, and spirit.

The Self and Spirit

Dillard (2000) uses her viewpoint as an African-American woman to explain her educational framework of an “Endarkened Feminist Epistemology.” Dillard (2000) expands upon Collins’s (2009) idea of a “Black Feminist Epistemology” with the incorporation of spiritual and psychological aspects to her theory of an “Endarkened Feminist Epistemology.” In Dillard’s opinion, although spirituality may implicitly direct the research and leadership skills of numerous African-American women, there is rarely any explicit identification of the spiritual scholarship of African-American women. Therefore, Dillard composed six assumptions to her “Endarkened Feminist Epistemology.” According to Dillard’s assumption number two, “Research is both an intellectual and a spiritual pursuit” (p. 674). In this assumption Dillard explains,

An endarkened feminist epistemology draws on a spiritual tradition, where the concern is not solely with the production of knowledge (an intellectual pursuit) but also with uncovering and constructing truth as the fabric of everyday life (a spiritual pursuit) (p. 674).

One way for me to construct my personal truth about the concept of faith is to explicitly talk about my ideas and experiences of faith with other people. The primary issue with talking about the word faith, from a non-religious standpoint, is that some people have preconceived notions about the term faith within a theological framework. From a Biblical standpoint, the word faith is one of three theological virtues in union with hope

and love. But, while persons appear comfortable with discussing the words hope and love within both theological and non-theological viewpoints, the term “faith” is typically confined to discussions of theology. Accordingly, my challenge with having a scholarly discourse on faith involves using a persuasive speech that will be heard by other persons (hooks, 1989, p. 6). This is my opportunity to “talk back” (hooks, 1989) to the normative narratives of faith as a religious belief.

Even with my “talking back” about my faith experiences, Fiumara (1990) reminds me that listening is just as important as speaking. Fiumara stipulates, “Perhaps we could start out by admitting that there could be no saying without hearing, no speaking which is not an integral part of listening, no speech which is not somehow received” (p. 1). For instance, when playing the “secret game,” if the players are constantly talking to each other, then no one is able to hear the message being transferred. On the other hand, a player hearing the “secret” message does not necessarily imply that the player was listening to the message. The process of listening to a message demands one “to recover the neglected and perhaps deeper roots of what we call thinking, an activity which in some way gathers and synthesizes human endeavours” (Fiumara, 1990, p. 13).

Perhaps thinking is the “transitional space” between speaking and listening. This is the very meditative and spiritual process of self-reflective writing – the acts of speaking, listening, and thinking. In self-reflection, as the subject and object of study, the researcher uses an active thinking consciousness as a pathway for being able to understand and explain the explicit and implicit messages of the researcher’s social and cultural interactions. As someone who has lived in the South for my entire life, I have

always equated the church, religion, or being religious as nearly synonymous with having spirituality. Thus, for me, being a spiritual person entailed attending church service on a regular basis to listen to the “preached word.” I often expressed the beliefs of my spirituality by quoting Biblical scripture to persons who appeared in need of support and/or encouragement.

Basically, my spirituality centered on my thoughts and beliefs as a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in the South. While my Christian beliefs often directed my actions with other people, there was an unspoken separation between my spiritual experiences as a Christian and my educational experiences as a graduate student. In education, I never realized the importance with identifying spiritual connections to my research. Cozart (2010), however, discusses her spiritual resolution and conflicts in the academy. Cozart explains,

My spiritual crisis in the academy rose out of my belief that spirituality was a separate layer of marginalization I privately embraced how my spirituality grounds my worldview, but publicly ignored how it impacted my scholarship (p. 253).

For Cozart, her “reconciliation” with the academy began when she merged or centered her spiritual consciousness within her research and academic writings. Personally, Cozart’s article has inspired me to reconnect the initiation of my spiritual journey as a graduate student to my scholarly research and interests.

Though Cozart made associations to her spiritual “reconciliation” in the academy to her spiritual identity with the Black Church, I will not focus solely on my spiritual identity as a Christian in the Black/African-American Church. Even though locating my

subjective “I” as a Christian is necessary to understand the foundational basis of my spirituality, it is important for me to recognize that my Christian perspective may also limit my outlook on the non-theological aspects of spirituality. However, unlike Cozart, the facilitation of my spiritual “reconciliation” resulted from my attendance at a non-religious institutional setting. The spiritual integration of one’s multiple selves as a researcher cannot and should not be limited to religious institutions and/or theological frameworks. “Not all students with religious and spiritual inclinations attend religiously affiliated schools, and not all students attending such institutions are religious or spiritual practitioners” (Chang, 2011, p. 20).

In fact, in addition to Cozart (2010), there are several scholars in non-religious higher education settings, who actively incorporate an understanding of the spiritual self in their educational research (Galman, 2011; Poplin, 2011; Nash & Swaby, 2011). Moreover, it has become more prevalent for Black/African-American women and men scholars to utilize spiritual themes to explicate their scholarly standpoint as educators and leaders (Ladson-Billings, 2001; hooks & West, 2001; Dillard, 2000, 2006; Dantley, 2003, 2005, 2010). Personally, the private spiritual practices of speaking, listening, and thinking continually support my public spiritual practices of Christianity. No longer do I interpret my public spiritual practices as being separate or superior to my private spiritual practices. Actually, the spiritual actions of speaking, listening, and thinking aid the process of becoming an authentic self.

The Self and Authenticity

In the “secret” game, one might attribute the first player as being an authentic self as a result of her self-generated “secret” message that seems genuine and/or real. The concept of authenticity typically focuses on the originality of one’s thoughts and/or ideas. However, in research, the random creation of thoughts and/or ideas without methodological or theoretical support is generally discouraged and even devalued. Thus, researchers are challenged with communicating their own thoughts and experiences in association to the documented ideas and experiences of other researchers. In educational research, the recognition of one’s multiple subjective standpoints initiates the inward and outward outlook for the development of an authentic self. According to Guignon (2004), there are two primary factors with becoming an authentic researcher.

The first factor involves “getting in touch with your real, innermost self” (p. 146). In other words, the researcher uses self-reflection and/or meditative thinking to make personal connections between her thoughts and experiences (Guignon, 2004, p. 146). For me, as an African-American woman this entails defining who I am as a researcher in correlation to a larger group of researchers. Self-definition is a vital component of Collins’s (2000) and Dillard’s (2000) epistemological frameworks for Black/African-American women scholars. Through self-definition, I am able to define myself as an African-American woman, not by how other people see me (object status); but, how I see myself (subjective status). Although one’s self-definition is both a “personal” and “cultural” communicative action (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 112), defining one’s

standpoint typically results from seeking to understand oneself in relationship to persons in one's family and/or community.

Accordingly, Guignon's second factor to becoming an authentic self necessitates "living in such a way that in all your actions you express the true self you discovered through the process of inward-turning" (p. 146). Thus, my development of an authentic voice on the term faith becomes apparent in my educational interactions with my colleagues. As an educator in the classroom, this entails listening to my students' ideas on the term faith as I incorporate my personal thoughts and experiences. The teaching and writing position of educational researchers is very similar to the middle player position in the "secret" game. The researcher in the middle position correlates her thoughts to the ideas of previous research players, while also thinking about how to best convey the summation of her thoughts to the next research players in her field of study.

For the researcher, the discussion of ideas and experiences with other researchers becomes more about "the ongoing play of ideas as they carry the matter at hand forward" (Guignon, 2004, p. 165). According to Guignon (2004), in dialogue, "The locus of the activity as we experience it is not my mind and yours, but rather the 'between' made concrete in the issue of the truth of the matter we are discussing" (p. 165). Therefore, in research, the active discussion of thoughts between researchers facilitates writing within the "transitional space" of the middle position. Moreover, my narrative voice is given meaning when constructed through my cultural identity as a self that requires attentiveness to my multiple social roles as a researcher. In educational research, the recognition of one's multiple subjective standpoints initiates the inward and outward

outlook for the development of an authentic self. Hence, I am an African-American woman educator who uses an authentic voice to communicate her research through an ethical consciousness to my readers.

In the next chapter, I explore the primary research question “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?” through the discussion of social applications of faith for African-American women educators. The prevalent themes of faith are: “Faith as Trust,” “Faith as Naming,” and “Faith as Hope.” The theme outline begins with historical connections of faith and trust for Black/African-American slaves in the United States of America. Then, faith as trust is explained through the development of dialogue in education. Dialogue facilitates the naming of one’s lived experiences of faith. Numerous Black/African-American women scholars utilize naming as faith to name their feminist and/or womanist standpoints. The practice of naming as faith for Black/African-American women educators permits social justice actions in faith as hope in meeting the educational needs of our children, women, and men.

CHAPTER III
TRANSITIONS OF FAITH USING AN
AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMANIST-FEMINIST FRAMEWORK

As historically, we [Black/African-American women] have been the ones who were able to keep our families together and pass down the faith—a faith that was religious in more ways than usually understood in our individualistic and consumer oriented society; a faith that encompassed all of life, making all of life sacred and therefore to be cherished; today we must rekindle that faith...
(Hayes, 1995, p. 46)

In Chapter II, I investigated the various components of myself that have seemed fragmented before my doctoral studies. In my self-inquiry, I made connections between the following eight segments of the self: identity, narrative voice, culture, language, ethics, communication, spirit, and authenticity. Of the eight self-explorations, identity and narrative voice facilitate awareness to the gendered aspects of my perspective. Hence, I socially identify as an African-American woman, which influences my understanding and experiences of faith. I also mentioned in Chapter II that White and Black men have generally dominated the social conversations and explanations of faith. Therefore, it is my desire to integrate the voices and experiences of Black/African-American women in this transitional definition outline of the term faith.

My scholarly interest with the concept of faith initiated after reading Caputo's (2001) philosophy of faith in *On Religion: Thinking in Action* in a graduate school class entitled, "Moral Dimensions of Education," during the Spring Semester of 2009. I reference my graduate school learning about the term faith as "scholarly" because I have

been encouraged to understand faith within and outside my dominant Christian perspective. Thus, for this chapter, I will seek to further my understanding and explanation of faith as an African-American woman educator who lives in the South. I will specifically endeavor to answer the primary research question, “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?” There are three key points to the framework of faith for most African-American women educators: Section I, “Faith as Trust”; Section II, “Faith as Naming”; and Section II, “Faith as Hope.”

In the first section, “Faith as Trust”, the words faith and trust are given historical meaning through an explanation of the terms in association to the social control effects of slavery in the USA. Although numerous Black slaves directed their faith as trust in divine beings such as God, it was the Black slave woman who directed her faith as trust toward the freedom of her people. Moreover, the practices of faith as trust become relevant in educational settings through the engagement of dialogue. In the next section, “Faith as Naming,” Black/African-American educational scholars employ their naming skills as an action of faith to self-define their personal and communal realities. The self-definition for most Black/African-American women scholars occurs within either feminist or womanist traditions. The last section, “Faith as Hope,” highlights the efforts of Black/African-American women in the continual struggle for social justice in the Black/African-American community. All three frameworks incorporate theological and non-theological standpoints to reduce binary constructions of the term faith.

My reasoning for using the words “theological” and “non-theological” in this dissertation correlates to my desire to deconstruct my Southern learned terminology

binaries of the words “religion” and “secular.” In my experiences, the words “religion” and “secular” are generally expressed in opposition to each other. For me, to participate with a religion meant living a devoted life to Christian principles and rejecting anything that resembled a secular position in the world or not pertaining to the expectations of a Christian lifestyle. However, during my graduate schooling, my definitions of “religion” and “secular” have changed. Now, the word “religion” as a noun denotes an understanding of various religions and their systems of belief (Judaism, Islam, Hindu, Christianity, etc.).

For the word “secular,” Hart (2008) contends that the terms “religion” and “secularism” are mutually interdependent concepts (p. 273). He states, “The terms go together, with secularism depending on and referring to religion. Without religion, there can be no secularism” (p. 273). Hart continues to explain the term “secularism” as originating within the Christian religion for the maintenance of social class divisions (p. 273). Additionally, Caputo (2001) points out, “secular did not describe a sphere separated from ‘religion’ but referred to someone who was not a member of a monastic order” (p. 43). Thus, the initial meaning of the word “secularism” related more to the networks within the Christian religion rather than being in opposition to the Christian religion (Hart, 2008, p. 273). Nonetheless, despite my new understandings of the words “religion” and “secular,” I am choosing to intentionally use the words “theological” and “non-theological” in this chapter explanation of the term faith.

From an educational standpoint, the term “theological” references the study of God and/or divine beings without any relational ties to a specific religion. The term

“non-theological” indicates an educational viewpoint not pertaining to God or divine beings. Although these terms highlight contrasts in our thoughts, the purpose with using the words “theological” and “non-theological” is to acknowledge the interconnections of the word faith. Specifically, in the African culture, one’s theological and non-theological perspectives are mutually supporting viewpoints that acknowledge the human and divine as one thought (Hayes, 1995, p. 22). In other words, faith is a lived experience in relationship to God and other people (Townes, 1995, p. 140). As an African-American woman, the acknowledgement of my African cultural heritage inspires me to understand and explain the term faith as a unified concept within theological and non-theological frameworks.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will seek to define the term faith in association to the concepts of trust, naming, and hope with references to the lived experiences of the Black/African-American community, specifically African-American women. Womanist theologian Williams (1993) states,

In the midst of testifying about my own faith and marveling at the faith and courage of female progenitors, I reflect upon what it means to take seriously (as a primary theological source) the faith, thought and life struggle of African-American women. I am in the throes of what the ancient African theologian Augustine and the European theologian Anselm termed “faith seeking understanding.” By understanding I mean exploring faith so that I provide theological responses to issues confronting African-American women and the black community trying to survive in today’s world. (p. xi)

Like Williams, I too, am in search of a more integrated understanding of the term faith as an African-American woman educator. My construction of the word faith will occur in both theological and non-theological contexts integrating the experiences of

Black/African-American women educators throughout the faith frameworks. To begin the inquiry, I will investigate the meanings and interconnections of faith as trust.

Faith as Trust

During slavery years, Black persons were expected to have a trust and faith in the same Christian people and Christian faith principles that were used to control their social interactions. Instead of having a faith and trust in their White Christian slave masters, numerous Black slaves designated their faith as trust in the divine being of God. Even Proctor (1995) comments, “They [Black slaves] fixed their trust in God and began the journey up the road to equality” (p. 6). Proctor’s use of faith and trust denotes God as the object of the Black slave’s faith and trust, not people (p. 6). However, faith and trust within the Black community often implicitly centered upon the actions of the Black slave woman.

Since the Black slave woman was the primary caretaker of the home, “she was thrust by the force of circumstances into the center of the slave community” (Davis, 1995, p. 205). In many instances, the Black slave woman was responsible for childrearing, housecleaning, teaching and spiritual nurturing within the home and community. Furthermore, it was Harriet Tubman, a Black slave woman, who guided several Black slaves (women and men) to freedom in the North through the passages of the Underground Railroad in the 19th Century (1850s-1860s). Although most Black slaves may have explicitly designated their faith and trust in God for deliverance from slavery, there were Black slave women who were helping to bring a realization to freedom for numerous Black slaves. Therefore, in the Black community, there has

always been an underlying faith and trust in people for the freedom of the community, specifically Black women.

Fowler (1996) refers to our interconnectedness as human beings as the “triadic pattern to our being in faith” (p. 22). He comments, “Self and others, related in mutual trust in and loyalty to shared centers of meaning, value, and power—these are the spiritual dynamics of faith” (p. 22). Fowler (1981) compares the triadic description of self, others, and shared centers of meaning to the shape of a triangle. In this analogy, one’s shared centers of meaning form the point of the triangle and the interrelationships of self and others form the base points of the triangle (p. 17). The established relationships between self and others form the community; while, the shared centers of meaning provide structure to the purpose of the community. Essentially, faith as trust connects the three points in the triangle throughout the communal network of people.

In Fowler’s (1996) framework, the self as an individual person shares the foundational base of the triangle with other people in the community. Based on this description, one’s faith as trust becomes one’s reality in association to one’s lived experiences with other people. Parks (2011) states,

A worthy faith must bear the test of lived experiences in the real world—our world discoveries and disappointments, expectations and betrayals, assumptions and surprises. It is the ongoing dialogue between self and world, between community and lived reality, that meaning—a faith—takes form. (p. 33)

For Black slaves, their faith as trust evolved into shared centers of meaning for freedom, equality, and justice. In the Black slave community, slaves would typically gather late at night to have secret meetings. To indicate meeting gatherings, individuals would sing

Negro spiritual songs and/or “Freedom Songs” to notify the other slaves of an upcoming escape during the night (Bell, 1996; Levine, 2006).

Consequently, Black slaves were in constant dialogue with each other about how to achieve freedom from slavery. As mentioned previously, Black slaves had an implicit faith as trust in each other within the slave community – it was their distrust in their White slave masters that, in general, directed the explicit object of their faith as trust towards God. According to Fletcher (2011), the European origin of the word trust initiated as a form of social control, specifically for Native Americans. Fletcher states, “The special ‘trust relationship’ was meant to dictate how Native American peoples were to act and interact with the white man, namely as inferior dependents” (pp. 85-86). Additionally, Fletcher discusses how the word trust was used as a form of personal conduct and obedience for Native Americans to the dominant White culture through Christian policies (pp. 90-104). In the conclusion of her research analysis, Fletcher considers the word trust as being a “misguided concept” (p. 141).

The misconception of the word “trust” results from the Europeans using the word as a one-sided concept. In other words, Native American people were expected to have trust in the Europeans, while the Europeans used the word “trust” as a form of social control (Fletcher, 2011, p. 128). Similarly, Black slaves were also expected to have faith as trust in their White slave masters. Again, the word “trust” has historical social control implications as a one-sided concept for both Black slaves and Native American persons in the USA. Based on Fowler’s (1996) definition of the spiritual dynamics of faith, the concept of trust is a multidimensional concept between and among a community of

people with shared values. Because Black slaves and Native American persons were obviously excluded from the dominant White cultures shared meaning of trust, numerous people, like Fletcher (2011), question the validity with having trust in people.

However, when discussing the term trust, maybe we should think more in terms of dialogue rather than “trust in” people. Returning to Fowler’s definition of faith, our dialogue of mutual trust facilitates the understanding of our faith as relational shared centers of meaning. Freire (1993) stipulates, “... dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence” (p. 91). In Freire’s opinion, the establishment of mutual trust within dialogue is only possible when dialogue is initiated upon faith (pp. 90-91). Thus, Freire states,

Dialogue further requires an intense faith in humankind, faith in their power to make and remake, to create and re-create, faith in their vocation to be more fully human (which is not the privilege of an elite, but the birthright of all). Faith in people is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue; the “dialogical man” believes in others even before he meets them face to face. His faith, however, is not naïve. The “dialogical man” is critical and knows that although it is within the power of humans to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation individuals may be impaired in the use of that power. (pp. 90-91)

Therefore, faith as trust facilitates the integration of dialogue among persons in a community. Although due to the historical omissions of dialogue about the words faith and trust, there is an apparent social mistrust with using and understanding the term faith outside the contexts of religion, especially in academia.

Since I am a Christian, some persons may question the need for me to understand the term faith inside and outside religion contexts. Whereas the Christian Bible has the chief influence in the discussions of religion practices for most Black/African-American

womanist theologians, their experiences as Black women necessitates the integration of their realities within discussions of faith (Cannon, 2008, p. 56). Even though my scholarly interests with the term faith were initiated in a non-theological setting, talking about the word faith outside the context of religion has been extremely difficult with other colleagues in the same university. Personally, I have continually struggled with using the word faith in my research analysis to understand the educational actions of other Black/African-American women scholars.

Some persons may even speculate the need to trust my analysis of the word faith outside religion perspectives. In reference to Freire's (1993) definition of faith as trust, I am seeking to establish trust through the written dialogical engagement of the term faith with a variety of theological and non-theological scholarly traditions. In addition, collaborative dialogue is central to the teaching and learning practices for most Black/African-American womanist educators (Williams, 2006; Mitchem, 2002; Baker-Fletcher, 2006; Floyd-Thomas, 2006). This dialogue typically includes diverse groups of women and men scholars.

Moreover, as dialogue is a conduit for the establishment of mutual trust, the correlation of one's actions with one's words ultimately determine trust. Freire (1993) explains,

Trust is contingent on the evidence which one party provides the others of his true, concrete intentions; it cannot exist if that party's words do not coincide with their actions. To say one thing and do another—to take one's own word lightly—cannot inspire trust. (p. 91)

Trust becomes pertinent to my research analysis with the inclusion of both theological and non-theological references. From the beginning stages of my research, I have explicitly stated my objectives with using a variety of resources to explain my standpoint on the term faith. In that case, for me to state my research goals and then only include a one-sided perspective on the term faith would be an action resulting in mistrust of my analysis by the reader.

For example, womanist theologian Williams (1990) expresses her mistrust in the words and actions of her colleague James Cone, a Black male theologian. In the Twentieth Anniversary edition of Cone's (1990) *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Williams gives her reflection of Cone's updated liberation analysis. Williams points out that in the first 1970 edition, Cone's liberation analysis focuses solely on race matters, but in the preface of the 1986 edition, Cone mentions the need for Black male theologians to become more inclusive of gender oppression, specifically for Black/African-American women. Although Williams appreciates Cone's acknowledgement for a more gender inclusive liberation theology, she questions Cone's words due to the exclusion of Black/African-American women and their thoughts in the preface of the book (p. 191). Williams comments, "Not a single woman is named, quoted, or given credit for contributing to the transformation Cone says he has made in his thought and style in the last twenty years" (p. 191). Consequently, Williams admits her apprehension, a type of mistrust, with believing Cone's position on gender inclusiveness in Black theology when his words do not coincide with his actions.

In another example, Wallace (1999) has also been critiqued by other Black/African-American feminists for her discussion of the “Superwoman Myth.” In Wallace’s first book publication in 1978, the primary concern with her superwoman justification was the obvious omission of the voices and experiences of Black/African-American women. As a professed Black feminist, Wallace neglected to include the voices of other Black/African-American women in the construction of her “Superwoman Myth.” Once again, readers formulated a mistrust of Wallace’s study due to a disconnection between her standpoint as a Black feminist and her exclusionary actions with the experiences of other Black/African-American women. Consequently, in 1979, Wallace published a revised manuscript that included the scholarly work of other Black feminists in the bibliography.

In academia, the integration of one’s research standpoint with one’s research actions requires an active consciousness for the establishment of mutual trust between the researcher and reader. The researcher’s language generally shapes the interpretation of mutual trust within a community of learners. Tillich (1957) indicates, “the act of faith, live every act in man’s spiritual life, is dependent on language and therefore on community” (pp. 23-24). For this reason, we can conclude that one’s community often directs one’s language use. Small (2009) conducted a study with her undergraduate students in a non-theological university on religious identity development. In this study, Small explains how religious identity shapes the individual “faith frames” or perspectives for each student participant. Furthermore, during class discussions, Small points out the changes in language use with some of her students throughout the course of the study.

According to Small, some students became more inclusive with their language use when explaining their belief systems in the classroom (p. 14).

The modification of language use by some of Small's students facilitated the sharing of individual "faith frames" in an environment of mutual trust. Small's study demonstrates the development of a "community of faith" in a non-theological setting. Whereas some people refer to a "community of faith" in religious contexts, hooks and West (1991) describe a "community of faith" as "a community of comrades who are seeking to deepen [their] spiritual experience and [their] political solidarity" (p. 2). Thus, a "community of faith" can exist without the integration of one's religion principles (hooks & West, 1991, p. 2). Although Small's study was premised on understanding the perspectives of religious identity, the participants essentially expanded their knowledge of other religion beliefs through interfaith dialogue that changed some student's language use. The development of a "community of faith" is possible in theological and non-theological university environments. One of the crucial elements to having a "community of faith" is dialogue within the classroom.

While the purpose of dialogue should support the growth of mutual trust in the classroom, there are times when dialogue is counteractive to its intention. Small (2009) admits in her study that most students who identified as Christian used their "Christian frames" to primarily question and discuss their Christian beliefs to other peers (p. 16). However, some students were not mentally ready to question their "Christian faith" frame and preferred having conversations with students who had different frames of religion (p. 15). The occurrence of interfaith dialogue, in any situation, is definitely positive, but the

student's difficulty with intrafaith dialogue somewhat inhibited the establishment of mutual trust in the classroom with a "community of faith" learners. In this particular situation, the basis of mutual trust as faith initiates with the shared values of knowledge in the classroom. On the other hand, dependent upon the regional context in the USA, one's actions with faith as trust correspond to one's religion beliefs.

More specifically, in the South, the phrase "community of faith" is expressed and understood quite literally. To participate in a "community of faith" suggests one's active participation with an organized religion, particularly in a church, mosque, or synagogue. In the South, Christian principles generally dominate in language expressions for most persons. Furthermore, today's southern Christian culture has a tendency to focus more on the New Testament explanation of faith solely as a belief system similar to some of the Christian students in Small's (2009) study. Rotenstreich and Mendes-Flohr (1998) point out the Latin and Greek origins of faith. In Latin, faith originates from the word "*fides*" meaning "surmising, conjecturing, but also trusting" (Rotenstreich and Mendes-Flohr, 1998, p. 5). In Greek, faith is translated from the word "*pistis*" meaning "belief" or "trust" (Rotenstreich and Mendes-Flohr, 1998, pp. 5-6). Consequently, in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, the word faith is referenced more in terms of one's Christian belief and trust in the power of God and Jesus, God's Messiah.

However, in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, faith is mentioned as both human and divine attributes. First, in the Old Testament, the word faith is used as a divine descriptor of God's "faithful" covenant actions with the people of Israel (Exodus 34:6). Alternatively, in the Book of Proverbs, a "faithful" person is described as one who

is prudent, truthful, trustworthy, and loyal. Generally, these persons are sincere friends who avoid acting deceitfully to other people (Proverbs 12:17; 12:22; 14:5). In this description, one dimension of the word faith is described in terms of one's human character actions similar to the term trust. Furthermore, the description of the word faith in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible bears a resemblance to Freire's (1993) explanation of the term trust with references to one's character actions. Hence, the words faith and trust have interrelational characteristics in both theological and non-theological contexts.

It is important for Christians to identify the human and divine characteristics of faith as outlined in the Old and New Testament Books in the Christian Bible. The expressions of faith for Christians should evoke an understanding of the vertical (i.e. God-Human Beings) and horizontal (Human Beings-Human Beings) interrelationships of faith within the Christian traditions (Lynch, 1973; Rotenstreich and Mendes-Flohr, 1998). Thus, as much as faith translates as belief, faith is also interpreted as trust. Unfortunately, in the academic classroom understanding faith as trust can be difficult for many students. As mentioned previously, some Black/African-American people have difficulty with trusting other persons due to the social control slogans of faith as trust during slavery. Moreover, numerous Christian students are uncomfortable with questioning and/or expanding their thoughts of faith beyond one's belief system.

As a southern-raised Christian, I have always believed that faith is something that one solely has in God. Consequently, my daily actions in life resulted from my faith in God's guidance. During one of my graduate school classes, I became intrigued with the

broader definitions of faith. In an attempt to understand the term faith in more detail, I wrote my final paper on the topic of “What is Faith?” In this paper, I essentially questioned the dimensions of my faith in regards to Caputo’s (2001) theoretical outline of faith in his book “On Religion.” By questioning my faith, in some ways, I became skeptical of my Christian training and retreated to silence about my beliefs. For that reason, writing this dissertation chapter on the various terminologies of faith assists me with establishing a voice on the term faith in connection to other scholarly writers. Furthermore, my relationships with my professors and peers continually foster mutual trusts in my ability to construct an extensive framework of faith without abandoning my Christian faith practices.

Smith (2013) communicates, “It is important to establish a relationship of trust between students and professor and among peers in a class if they are going to learn and find a voice of their own” (p. 147). When teaching Christian scriptural texts in his higher education religion courses, Smith establishes mutual trust by utilizing a variety of teaching methods throughout the semester. Some of the teaching techniques include having student-centered small group discussions online and in the classroom, teaching students to investigate religion concepts through critical historical analysis, and providing examples for students on how to question their religious traditions through his personal inquiry strategies (p. 144). In addition, Smith uses small-group discussions to increase student participation for those students who may remain quiet during whole-class interactions.

Smith then encourages the quiet students to express their thoughts before the whole-class as articulated during small-group activities. One of Smith's goals involves assisting the quiet students with discovering their voices on personal topics in the classroom (p. 145). Thus, the formation of mutual trust in Smith's class initiates through the inclusion of both professor and student voices. This is also an example of faith as trust based upon humility in the academic classroom. Palmer (1993) discusses humility and faith as spiritual teaching practices. He defines humility as "the virtue that allows us to pay attention to 'the other'—be it student or subject—whose integrity and voice are so central to knowing and teaching in truth" (p. 108). The actions of humility require teachers to recognize when it is appropriate for them to speak and when it is appropriate for the students to speak (p. 109).

If the teacher neglects to include her voice, then she establishes a classroom environment premised on the viewpoints of her students. On the other hand, if the teacher neglects to include the students' voices, then she establishes a classroom environment premised on the singular viewpoint of the teacher. However, according to Palmer (1993), humility in the classroom is a balancing of voices—teacher and students speaking and listening to each other (p. 109). The process of humility in the classroom is also applicable to the writing methods for educational research. Using any type of qualitative research methodology necessitates the active balancing of the researcher's personal voice with the perspectives of other researchers. When incorporating diverse viewpoints in one's research study, the researcher may learn to value the various thoughts and ideas of other researcher's.

Similarly, in the academic classroom, trust is established through the mutual sharing of teacher and student experiences. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) point out that for teachers “To trust means not just to tolerate a variety of viewpoints, acting as an impartial referee, assuring equal air time to all. It means to try to *connect*, to enter into each student’s perspective” (p. 227). Likewise, students are called to connect with the voices and experiences of their teachers. Again, humility and faith support connections of interrelational trust between teachers and students. Palmer (1993) states, “... the humility that enables us to hear the truth of others must stand in creative tension with the faith that empowers us to speak our own” (p. 109). In reference to Freire’s (1993) definition mentioned previously, faith is an action of belief in a person’s capability to learn, speak, and/or change through dialogue.

Preston-Roedder (2013) refers to the moral character of faith with the terminology “faith in humanity” (p. 1). She defines “faith in humanity” as

An attitude, or stance, that she adopts toward the particular people she encounters, or whose circumstances she considers, and it helps determine how she thinks about and interacts with them. We might say that someone who has such faith tends to believe in people, trust in them, make presumptions in their favor, or see them in a favorable light, morally speaking. (p. 3)

Thus, one’s faith in humanity has a basic belief in people’s willingness to participate as moral agents in the world. Preston-Roedder (2013) describes the words and actions of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as someone who demonstrated “faith in humanity” (p. 1). Reverend King is given worldwide recognition for his commitment to social justice for Black/African-American persons, particularly in the South. Harriet Tubman is

another person who demonstrated “faith in humanity” through her actions with helping Black slaves gain freedom.

According to Karenga and Karenga (2007), the Black/African-American community has always demonstrated faith in each other. In their construction of the “Nguzo Saba” or seven principles of Kwanzaa, Karenga and Karenga name the last principle “Imani” meaning “Faith.” In the principle of “Imani” (or faith), Black/African-American persons are “To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle” (p. 24). This principle serves as a reminder for persons with African ancestry of the communal values based on interdependency for the global betterment of all Black persons. From a historical analysis, the Black slave community generally designated their faith as trust in God. But, according to Karenga and Karenga and numerous other notable leaders within the Black/African-American community, “faith in humanity” is a prime component of our ancestry traditions.

In education, dialogue facilitates a “faith in humanity” through the continued interactions of faith as trust between persons who are willing to speak and listen to each other. Within a Black feminist standpoint, dialogue gives voice to marginalized students (Sheared, 2006, p. 274). Dialogue is also the second component of Collins’s (2009) Black Feminist Epistemology. As an educator, Sheared (2006) believes an approach to give voice to all students is through the active inclusion of dialogue through the integration of Collins’s Black Feminist Epistemology. Thus, dialogue is one method most Black/African-American women utilize to articulate and assess their knowledge

constructions. However, there are occurrences when dialogue may decrease one's "faith in humanity" for the development of mutual trust.

For instance, Delpit (2006) recalls the difficulty that most minority women educators have with establishing their voices in liberal academia (p. 19). In Delpit's experiences, minority women teachers often indicate feelings of not being listened to by other liberal educators. Thus, Delpit communicates,

It is vitally important that non-minority educators realize that there is another voice, another reality; that many of the teachers whom they seek to reach have been able to conquer the educational system *because* they received the kind of instruction that their white progressive colleagues are denouncing. (p. 19)

One's feeling with not being listened to during dialogue adversely affects one's ability to connect in a form of trust with other persons. Whereas the person speaking is attempting to engage their perspective in a faith in dialogue, the person not listening is unable to connect with a perspective other than her own. Consequently, some Black/African-American women educators incorporate their shared values of faith through the explicit naming of their lived experiences.

Faith as Naming

In the field of Educational Leadership, Dantley (2005), an African-American male scholar, describes one aspect of faith as "the performance of construction or creation, naming and defining. It is the audacious calling into existence of ideas, abstractions and essences that had not been previously expressed in the physical or tangible world" (p. 7). From Dantley's point of view, the initial steps of faith begin with the person who is willing to name her reality through self-definition. Naming one's reality is an act of faith

because one becomes the qualitative “creator” (Dantley, 2005, p. 7) of her own faith, not as a transcendent being, but as an active participant in the world. Dantley’s idea of faith challenges educational leaders to engage a faith in the personal naming of lived educational experiences in our society.

As mentioned in my discussion of a fragmented self (Chapter Two), I have struggled with naming my research and educational realities since the initiation of my dissertation process. Some of my resistance with naming my educational experiences are a consequence of the negative labeling of Black/African-American women. For example, as an effect of slavery, the Black woman became a centralized figure within the Black slave community. However, this centering of the Black slave woman within the Black community resulted in the negative social positional naming of the Black woman as the “matriarch” of her family. Consequently, in social documents such as the Moynihan Report (1965), the position of the Black woman within the Black family has been discussed as a detriment to the community.

Nonetheless, Dantley’s (2005) argument reminds me of the more positive aspects with naming my reality. Because the process of naming my reality begins within me, I am able to take ownership with how I choose to name my experiences. Naming one’s reality through self-definition is a pivotal element with understanding one’s educational standpoint, particularly for Black/African-American women (Collins, 2009; Dillard, 2000, 2006). Historically, in academia, most women educators have chosen to identify their standpoints as feminists. The identification of oneself as a feminist allows one to name her reality as a woman in a society that generally esteems the scholarly work of

men. Thus, naming oneself as a feminist is one way to self-define one's standpoint as an educational researcher.

Traditionally, the dominant interpretation of feminism by many white female scholars generally occurred through the discussion of male gender domination in the home and work environment. In contrast, the primary concern for numerous Black/African-American feminist scholars, centers on understanding the navigational intersections of race, gender, social class, and so forth (Collins, 1998, 2009). Because the intersections of race and social class were being omitted from the dominant feminist discussions, several Black/African-American women scholars decided to redirect their personal navigations of feminism through the explicit naming of their standpoints as Black feminists (Collins, 1998, 2009; Guy-Sheftall, 2000). Thus, the naming of oneself as a Black feminist is an act of faith.

Fowler (1981) explains,

Faith is a person's or group's way of moving in the force field of life. It is our way of finding coherence in and giving meaning to the multiple forces and relations that make up our lives. Faith is a person's way of seeing him- or herself in relation to others against a background of shared meaning and purpose. (p. 4)

Based on Fowler's statement, it appears that one's actions of faith are always in correlation to one's personal and communal experiences. For example, Sojourner Truth is well cited in feminist documentaries for her speech to the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851. In her speech, Truth (1995) utilizes her personal lived experiences as a Black woman to question the dominant white social ideals of femininity. She brings attention to the color of her skin when she exclaims to the audience, "Look at my arm!"

(p. 36). The audience not only had to recognize the color of Truth's skin, but they also had to acknowledge the evidence of bruises on her arm from slavery. Truth's (1995) speech is an example of an "audacious" naming of experience during her time (Westfield, 2006, p. 131).

While Truth does not explicitly name herself as a feminist in the speech, Black feminists refer to Truth's "And a'n't I a woman?" speech as a resource of justification and support for the emphasis on the intersections of race, gender, and social class for Black/African-American women. Furthermore, Truth's speech, in general, is revered by most Black/African-American women inside and outside academia. As a little girl, I remember citing segments of Truth's speech for various talent presentations in the community, but typically in the church. Even though, at the time, I did not have a vast understanding of the role of feminism in the world or in the Black Church, I did recognize the evident gender leadership inequities within the church. For the most part, men were the leaders and women were the followers. It's sad to state, although some progress has been made with attaining more women leaders in the church, male dominant leadership is still very apparent in most instances.

In effect, the Black church is probably the first place where I began to name myself as a feminist somewhat unknowingly. The explicit naming of oneself as a feminist in the Black church and even the Black community is generally avoided because most Black/African-American persons, especially those living in the South, did not identify with the social feminist movements. Traditionally, in the Black church and community, the issues of race and/or racism dominate the discussions and actions of

persons within the community. Therefore, as an African-American woman parishioner, if I am going to name myself as a feminist within the Black church, then I will need to acknowledge the intersections of my race and gender identities.

Actually, there are several Black/African-American women scholars in theological settings who identify their scholarly positions similar to Black feminist scholars in non-theological settings. However, akin to the reasons that most Black/African-American feminists do not identify with the dominant white feminist movements, a large amount of Black/African-American women theologians do not agree with the dominant white feminist critiques of the church. Whereas the dominant white theological feminist movement typically focuses on dismantling the patriarchal system within the church, the Black/African-American women theologians tend to focus more on the theological dilemmas within the Black/African-American community; but they do recognize the contradicting patriarchal system within the church (Grant, 2003; Douglas, 2005).

In order to differentiate themselves from the dominate white feminist theological movement, Black/African-American women theologians use the word “womanist” instead of “feminist” to name their theological standpoints. The name “womanist” was actually presented by Alice Walker, a literary scholar, in 1983. Although Walker (1983) derived the term “womanist” inside a non-theological framework, the majority of Black/African-American women scholars who identify their scholarly practices as womanists are Christian theologians (Floyd-Thomas, 2006, p. 7). Hence, the womanist interpretative thoughts of most Black/African-American women theologians originate

within a Christian faith perspective. Several womanist theologians acknowledge the significance with naming their lived experiences as Black/African-American women scholars.

Williams (1993), a womanist theologian states,

My exposure to feminist studies had convinced me that women must claim their experience, which has for so long been submerged by the overlay of oppressive, patriarchal cultural forms. And one way to claim experience is to name it. Naming also establishes some permanence and visibility for women's experience in history. (p. 4)

Like Williams, womanist theologian Terrell (1998) articulates, "The proper naming of things or persons call them into existence or brings them to light so they may be seen in their proper relationship to other things or persons" (p. 131). Furthermore, womanist theologian Charles (2006) communicates, "... the process of naming is integral and imperative to a society that dreams of development" (p. 373). In other words, naming for these womanist theologians is very similar to Dantely's definition of faith as naming those real lived experiences that are deemed invisible to other people. Womanist theologians not only name their personal realities as Black/African-American women scholars, but also name the theological struggles of persons within their communities. Thus, naming oneself as a "womanist scholar" or "womanist theologian" is an act of faith.

Caputo (2001) points out, "... all faith is a way of seeing, construing, knowing" (p. 112). In this way, one's naming faith is likened to the conceptual position as a "road map" in defining one's scholarly position. In an earlier example, the term "road map"

was described using a more literal reference to the actual guidance of maps for driving directions. From a different perspective, the term “road map” serves as a metaphor for the self-definition of Black/African-American women. For instance, during the 1970s, the well-cited feminist slogan, “the personal is political,” implicitly served as a metaphor to facilitate the collaboration of feminist thoughts and actions (Collins, 1998, p. 46). More recently, the phrase “the personal is political” has been substituted with the current feminist metaphor of “coming to voice” (Collins, 1998, p. 46). Collins (1998) believes that the phrase “coming to voice” links directly to the historical struggle of African-American women in seeking a self-defined communal voice (p. 46). Once again, the ongoing desire for self-definition among African-American women is a form of naming faith.

To this end, Black/African-American women scholars have always desired to have a personal, yet collective voice in naming their lived experiences. The naming faith of Black/African-American women scholars occurs in both theological and non-theological academic settings. Hence, the naming actions of faith for both womanist theologians and Black feminist scholars in the academic environment are very comparable. Both groups seek to redefine the standards of feminism and/or womanhood in relationship to one’s race, ethnicity, gender, social class status, religion, sexual orientation, and so forth. Both groups also define their standpoints in association to other women scholars within their respective fields of study. Furthermore, there are some women scholars who choose to name and define their standpoints using more concrete terminology within the scholarly practices of Black feminism and womanist theology.

Several of these women scholars identify as “Africana womanists” (Weems, 2006), “Muslim womanists” (Majeed, 2006), “Latina feminists” (Machado, 2006), or “Black lesbian feminists” (Clarke, 1995; Lorde, 1995, 2007).

The “coming to voice” for numerous Black/African-American women scholars entails the centering of our lived experiences through the concrete naming of our standpoints. According to Tillich (1957), “Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality. It happens in the center of the personal life and includes all its elements. Faith is the most centered act of the human mind” (p. 4). Based on Tillich’s explanation, faith as naming cannot occur without a centering of one’s experiences. Hence, for my research purposes, I center my lived experiences through the naming of my standpoint as an African-American womanist educator. My womanist educator identity is established on the following three premises:

(1) Womanists understand that oppression is an interlocking system, providing all people with varying degrees of penalty and privilege; (2) they believe that individual empowerment combined with collection is key to lasting social transformation; and (3) they embody a humanism, which seeks the liberation of all, not simply themselves. (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p. 72)

In accordance to this definition of womanism, I will now explicate how each of the three points connects to my naming faith as an educator.

First, a naming faith involves investigating my oppressions relative to my race/ethnicity and gender; while also exploring the privileges of my social class status, religion affiliation, ability status, and other “points of privilege” (Douglas, 2006, p. 150). The expression of my oppressions and privileges requires awareness to my naming faith

as a womanist educator. If, according to Tillich (1957), “faith is the state of being ultimately concerned” (p. 1), then my “ultimate concern” is centered through my self-defining faith as a “conscious act” of the mind (p. 5). For instance, my naming faith as a womanist scholar is relative to my identification as a practicing Christian. The purpose with identifying my Christian faith heritage is to acknowledge the underlying framework of my faith beliefs and practices.

In my research, I do not intend to use the tenets of Christianity to disparage the belief systems of other people. I do realize, however, that to ignore the influence of Christianity on my ideas and practices may unconsciously perpetuate the dominant Christian thoughts on the term faith in the USA. My consciousness to the term faith as a Christian womanist educator correlates more to the creation of a new understanding of the term faith in both non-theological and theological aspects. Dillard (2006) speaks of the necessity for educational researchers to express the spiritual interrelationships between their research and personal lives (p. 40). Dillard explains,

[her] solace is found in embracing a paradigm that arises from a world view that is personal and cultural, a unique combination of what it means to be alive, as an African American woman scholar who is deeply attuned to the spiritual nature of [her] life and work. (p. 36)

Similar to my naming faith as a womanist educator, research paradigms should assist educational researchers with naming the privileges and oppressions of their spiritual frameworks. Even in my attempt to define the term faith in a non-theological manner, the term faith is generally associated to Tillich’s theological explanation of faith as an “ultimate concern” which some persons may reject.

Hence, the second aspect to my naming faith as a womanist educator includes acknowledging the empowering nature of communal standpoints in conjunction with one's self-defining perspective. Westfield (2006) communicates, "there is power in naming, renaming, defining the worlds we inhabit" (p. 130). Providing a self-definition of the term faith is a form of self-empowerment for me. Instead of defining the term faith using a singular perspective, I am attempting to define the term faith using a variety of resources. Nevertheless, my self-definition of faith is within a tradition of Black feminist and/or womanist scholarly work. As a womanist scholar, I recognize the disapproval of the traditional "universal white feminisms" (Machado, 2006, p. 271) by most Black/African-American women in the academy. The standpoints of "Black feminist" and "womanist" are terms derived in response to the exclusion of race and social class matters in the "universal" white feminist movement.

As a result of naming one's standpoint within a self-empowering communal framework, most Black/African-American women scholars do not publish their research with universal themes (Phillips & McCaskill, 2006, p. 89), but with themes relative to the Black/African-American community. In this same way, as a womanist scholar, I cannot promote the term faith as a "universal" or "ultimate concern" for all persons even within the Black/African-American community. My dilemma with the term faith resolves from the classically given explanations of faith using dominant religion terminology. Thus, as a Christian, I have an "ultimate concern" of how other Christians define and talk about the term faith, but as a womanist scholar in the academy, I seek to explain the term faith using both theological and non-theological standpoints in association to the experiences

of Black/African-American women. Generally, self-definition leads to moral autonomy which, for many womanist scholars, “is a woman’s ability to define and celebrate herself and her people as agents of human community” (Townes as cited in Sanders, Cannon, Townes, Copeland, hooks, and Gilkes, 2006, p. 139).

Finally, the third point to my naming faith as a womanist educator centers on the education of all women, men, and children in public educational institutions. While my research mostly includes the voices of Black/African-American women, I use our experiences as examples to the development of self-defined voices within a communal aspect. Although some persons may or may not relate to the presented examples, the goal is for persons to become more aware of how naming and self-definition are intricate processes of faith for some educational scholars. Freire (1993) states, “to exist humanly, is to name the world, to change it” (p. 88). This naming brings self-awareness to one’s educational standpoint in the research world. Moreover, although naming is a personal process, naming should also speak to the experiences of a larger group of people.

In the university classroom, Bettez (2011), a mixed raced feminist educator, uses naming to connect her scholarly thoughts with her emotions (p. 92). For Bettez, the naming of her emotions creates associations within teacher-student relationships. Because of Bettez’s openness with naming her emotions, she is able to understand the difficulties her students may encounter with completing classroom assignments; while, her students are able to recognize that she, too, has challenges with meeting all deadlines as a professor. Likewise, hooks (1994), a feminist theorist, acknowledges the development of her feminist standpoint within a naming process of pain and struggle (p.

74). In addition, hooks identifies the initial naming engagement of her pains and struggles within a tradition of other feminist scholars who were willing to name their pains too. Thus, naming is a connection between one's scholarly thoughts, emotions, and lived experiences.

To this end, the hallmark of a naming faith involves the personal and communal expressions of ideas and emotions that facilitate change in our thoughts and actions.

Womanist theologian Floyd-Thomas (2006) comments,

More than a century and a half after Isabella Baumfree changed her name to Sojourner Truth, a small cadre of Black female students of religion claimed a similar power of naming and called themselves womanists. In both cases, much more than names changed—minds changed. (p. 3)

Furthermore, the actions of these Black women students of religion correspond to portions of Walker's (1983) definition of a "womanist." In Walker's perspective, a "womanist" is someone who is "outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful [in] behavior" (p. xi). In other words, a "womanist" boldly names and defines her world through self-definition. Once again, faith is an action with naming and self-defining the unexpressed realities of one's lived experiences (Dantley, 2005, p. 7). Thus, womanism is the practice of putting one's naming faith into actions of hope within one's community.

Faith as Hope

In Hebrew, the word "hope" is translated into the words "meekveh" and "teekvah" that are derived from the verb root "kavah." The original meaning of "kavah" referred to the tension caused by twisting or stretching a cord or rope. Currently, the word references the tension of enduring or waiting for something. In Greek, the word

“hope” originates from “elpis.” The meaning of hope in Greek suggests a confident desire or expectation of a positive future outcome or result as the goal of one’s endurance or waiting. Thus, the interpretations of hope in both the Hebrew and Greek languages seem to mean the confident desire or expectation of a positive outcome or result as goal of one’s endurance and waiting. In Christian theology, hope is actualized through one’s belief to the coming fulfillment of hope in God through Jesus Christ.

In contrast, within a non-theological standpoint, Rorty (1999) discusses the word hope in regards to the potential of a better humanity (p. 52). Though Rorty talks about hope in terms of human relationships, the realization of hope entails futuristic expectations of something to achieve. For Rorty, the hope of a better future is only achievable through the actions of social justice work in one’s community (p. 204). According to Collins (1998), social justice is an article of faith for most Black/African-American women (p. 248). She explains, “Justice constitutes an article of faith expressed through deep feelings that move people to action” (p. 248). Women such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman are examples of Black/African-American women who were inspired to action on behalf of social justice for other persons in their community.

Because these two women engaged their personal lived experiences to name their realities, social justice became a component of their faith. Some persons may refer to their social justice actions as opportunities to “step out on faith.” In southern Christian vernacular, the phrase “step out on faith” suggests one’s willingness to act on an idea or belief that may or may not benefit one’s personal achievements. Social justice actions of faith in the Black/African-American community were not intended for the benefit of one

person, but for the benefit of an entire group of people. In essence, to “step out on faith” is a social concept of justice for most Black/African-American women. Dillard (2000) regards her “endarkened feminist epistemology” as an opportunity for Black/African-American women educators to “step out on faith” (p. 674). This “stepping out on faith,” for Dillard, relates to the presence of the Black/African-American woman in the university setting where numerous women scholars contend with race and gender inequities (p. 674).

As educational leaders, numerous Black/African-American women utilize their race and gender experiences to assist with the development of other potential educators. Horsford (2012) discusses the leadership skills of Black/African-American women educators as a type of “*bridge leadership*” (p. 17). She explains bridge leadership in terms of social justice work in education where Black/African-American women educators act “as a bridge for others, to others, and between others in oppressive and discriminatory contexts over time” (p. 17). Another similar concept to “bridge leadership” in education is educator as “cultural mediator” (Gay, 2010, p. 45). The educator who serves as a cultural mediator encourages multicultural dialogue through the reduction of stereotypes and prejudices (Gay, 2010, p. 45). While the concept of cultural mediator is not limited to Black/African-American women educators, most Black/African-American women educators inherently function as cultural mediators in correlation to their bridge leadership positions.

The educational leadership practices of bridge leadership and cultural mediator are two examples of educational standpoints based on the premises of social justice, as an

article of faith, for Black/African-American women educators. These educational perspectives permit Black/African-American women educators the opportunities to engage their lived realities with their colleagues and students. Dantley (2005) points out,

Hope is grounded in the reality of faith. In fact, faith is the essential ingredient for hope to flourish. If faith is creative and constructive then hope is liberating and emancipatory. Faith legitimizes hope. It gives hope a spiritual context in which to thrive. Faith provides the courage from which hope springs. (p. 12)

According to Dantley's explanation, faith and hope are mutually dependent variables – one cannot exist without the other. Furthermore, courage results from one's actions grounded in faith and hope.

For numerous Black/African-American women educators, our naming faith leads to courage for the naming of our lived realities. However, even in our effort to name our realities, our educational standpoints necessitate both courage and humility. Due to the limits and possibilities with naming one's faith, one's courage depends upon one's humility to remain open to the critiques and advice of other educational researchers (Tillich, 1957; Deutsch, 1963). For instance, in my research analysis of the term faith, though I have attempted to enumerate the various definitions of faith, I acknowledge the incompleteness of my research because it is impossible to include or expand upon every available definition or explanation of faith. Consequently, it is very likely that when I review my manuscript in 10 years or so, I probably will have developed a more extensive outlook and understanding of the term faith pertaining to the Black/African-American community.

Hudak (2010) believes, "... our actions are not grounded in the 'truth' but rather the 'best' interpretation we have at the moment. All actions are guided by a moment of faith, 'hoping' that our interpretations yield a desired result" (p. 252). In another perspective, Parks (2011) defines one's interpretation skills as a process of "faithing" (p. 34). Parks describes "faithing" as "putting one's heart on that which one trusts as true. It is a bedrock trust that the pattern one sees is real. Faithing, in other words, is the ongoing composing of the heart's true resting place" (p. 34). For Parks, the process of interpretative "faithing" centers one's mind and purpose in life (p. 36). Tillich (1957) also explains the term faith as a centering action of one's mind and personality (p. 4). Moreover, according to Parks (2011), one's social actions are in correlation to the "faithing" centering of one's purpose in life (p. 36).

In the Black/African-American womanist/feminist communal traditions, the content of our faith (Tillich, 1957, p. 10) rests within the hope of our faith – the education of our children. Essentially, the way we live out our faith as womanist/feminist educators becomes evident in our social justice actions for children. For example, Cooper (2007) identifies the implications of school-choice as "motherwork" for low-income and working-class African-American mothers. In her study, Cooper determines three intersecting variables involved with the actions of motherwork: power, care, and political resistance. The notion of power for the mothers in the study related closely to self-definition through their personal decisions to choose appropriate schools for their children. While some of the mothers chose to keep their children in traditional public

schools, other mothers chose to enroll their children in charter schools, private Afrocentric schools, and/or private Catholic schools (Cooper, 2007, p. 496).

The utilization of personal power by the mothers to decide school attendance for their children is also a form of care. In the mothers' school-choice actions, they became the voices of care for their children's education. Their voices were in response to race- and class-based systems that typically depict low-income and working-class African-American mothers as uncaring towards their children's education (Cooper, 2007, p. 475). However, the actions of care by African-American mothers and/or educators is not a novel concept. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) defines the caring and risk-taking actions of Black/African-American women educators as "womanist caring" (p. 80). According to Beauboeuf-Lafontant,

Womanist teachers see themselves as dynamic agents for social justice precisely because they define themselves as having a sense of connection with and responsibility to the human struggle for freedom and justice. In other words, the hopefulness of the ethic of risk keeps people from falling into the numbness and self-absorption of despair. (p. 84)

For this reason, "womanist caring" as a form of "motherwork" has both personal and social implications for Black/African-American women educators.

Relative to the work of social justice, "womanist caring" and "motherwork" operate as forms of political resistance to race-, class-, and gender-based systems of oppression and domination for Black/African-American women educators and/or mothers. One's language of faith and hope is also integral to one's political resistance actions in education. Lerner (2006) differentiates one's language of faith as either being

a “voice of fear” or a “voice of hope” (pp. 77-92). He portrays the “voice of fear” and the “voice of hope” as being opposite ends on a scale (p. 78). According to Lerner, we all can locate ourselves at different locations on the scale dependent upon our personal interpretative frameworks (p. 78).

In Lerner’s analysis, the “voice of fear” framework is equated to the faith language of religious conservatives, whereas the “voice of hope” framework is compared to the faith language of religious liberals. Moreover, Lerner believes at the base of the faith language for most religious liberals is the language of women’s experiences (p. 87). This language utilizes the relational interactions traditionally experienced between a mother and her child filled with love and care. Generally, the “voice of hope” does not seek to dominate and/or oppress other people. Thus, similar to the actions of “motherwork” and “womanist caring” in the Black/African-American community, the “voice of hope” seeks to dismantle historical oppressive structures through one’s actions and language of care.

Therefore, our language gives insight to our visionary images of faith. In terms of theology, because the term faith has both vertical and horizontal dimensions, one’s faith is actualized in accordance to the visionary images of human beings (Lynch, 1973, p. 13). The visionary images of faith, for most Black/African-American women educators, occur within the visual representations of other Black/African-American women. In a biblical viewpoint, womanist theologian Williams (1993) utilizes the story of Hagar, a slave woman of color in the book of Genesis, to explicate the lived experiences of most African-American women living in the USA. According to Williams, both Hagar and

African-American women make use of their “wilderness” experiences to cultivate a personal faith of belief in the power of God to deliver them from their current oppressive situations (pp. 108-109).

As slaves, Hagar and Black/African-American women chose to put their faith in God rather than in other people or institutional systems. This same faith in God exists for numerous Black/African-American women today. In review of a General Social Survey (GSS) conducted in 1988, Harris-Perry (2011) concludes the visual representation of God for Black/African-American women affects their responses to social justice actions in the world. For most Black/African-American women participants in the study, the image of God, as mother, increased their overall social participation (Harris-Perry, 2011, p. 250). Sojourner Truth is an example of a Black woman who employed her faith in God to assist with the freedom of numerous Black slaves. Similar to the biblical story of Hagar, Sojourner Truth’s social deeds orient the faith of some Black/African-American women in a motherly image of God that links to the heritages of our grandmothers and mothers in the Black/African-American community.

Walker (1983) refers to the lineage images of Black/African-American women as a process of being the essay, “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” (pp. 231-243). Walker describes the search of her mother’s garden through the positioning of stories in her written work. In her writings, Walker realizes that her mother’s stories are her stories too (p. 240). Dixon and Dingus (2008) utilize Walker’s metaphor “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens” to determine reasons why Black/African-American women become educators. In their study, Dixon and Dingus report three prominent explanations: “that

teaching is tending our mothers' gardens, teaching as community work, and teaching as nurturing our mothers' spiritual gardens" (p. 818). Therefore, working in the field of education is one way for Black/African-American women to serve as social justice advocates for their students in relationship to the efforts of other Black/African-American women educators, specifically their mothers.

My story about desiring to be a teacher since childhood, relates to "tending to my mother's garden" as affirmed by Dixson and Dingus. As a little girl, I noticed how my mother's students always showed her the highest respect in school and community events. Yet, it was not until I actually became a student in one of my mother's high school classes that I was able to observe her consistent advocacy for all students in her classroom. My mother's teaching actions for and with her students remind me that teaching is very much a social responsibility to meeting the educational needs of your students. Womanist theologian Terrell (1998) also mentions the significance with having an understanding of her mother's garden through the memories of her mother's life (p. 127). Terrell believes the lessons of her mother's life provide daily instruction for her faith as a theological scholar (p. 127). As a result, the images of Black/African-American women correlate to the "tending of their mothers' gardens" through voices of faith and hope.

Harris (2011) discusses the current practices of womanist teaching in terms of "keeping the light" (p. 131). Harris explains, "Keeping the light signals a decision in one's teaching, activism, and scholarship to live out one's faith in the way of justice" (p. 131). Personally, "keeping the light" represents the hope of womanist teaching in

relationship to the naming of our faith as womanist-feminist educators. For Harris (2011), “keeping the light” denotes having an understanding of being “one in the number” of many women of color scholars in the academy (p. 130). For instance, since 1921, there have been numerous Black/African-American women scholars who have successfully completed their doctoral degrees in the USA. In fact, the first three Black women to receive their doctorate degrees were Eva B. Dykes, Georgianna R. Simpson, and Sadie T. Mossell Alexander (Evans, 2007, p. 127).

Each of these women wrote dissertations that centered on their scholarly lives as Black women educators in the fields of English philology, German, and economics (Evans, 2007, p. 127). It is personally interesting that since 1921 Black women educators have included the intersections of their raced and gendered lives within their doctoral research. In some regards, the active inclusion of my race and gender experiences in my dissertation is an action of my faith to the historical practices of other Black/African-American women doctoral educators. The images of other Black/African-American women educators who have achieved their doctoral degrees inspires me to complete my dissertation to become a beacon of hope for other graduate scholars. More importantly, the integration of my standpoint as an African-American woman educator, hopefully, socially benefits other educational scholars with similar experiences.

Historically, in the South, the purpose of higher education sought to instruct Black men, in particular, on becoming “social guides” within their communities (Anderson, 1988, p. 239). However, when the idea of training young Black males as “social guide” leaders became popular during the 1900-1935 time periods, the concept of universal

education became prevalent in most southern public schools for Black children. The hidden intentions with establishing a universal educational system, in the South, involved maintaining “social stability and economic prosperity” for southern White philanthropists (Anderson, 1988, p. 80). Likewise, Black college educators, who were responsible for preparing other Black college students as “social guides” within the Black community, struggled with the realization that the industrial philanthropists, who financially supported the colleges/universities, also believed in the continued social subordination of Black people (Anderson, 1988, p. 278).

Furthermore, in southern rural areas, Black public schools were not receiving the same financial support as white public schools. In fact, studies conducted reveal that tax money received from the Black community for new public schools was often redirected to the establishment of more public schools in the White community (Anderson, 1988, p. 156). Again, social divisions were evident in the appropriation of funds for public school education. This funding separation continues to be evident today within the frameworks of “urban schools” versus “suburban schools.” Though “urban schools” are comprised of mostly low-income families of diverse race and ethnicity, “suburban schools” are populated largely by middle and upper class families. Consequently, “suburban schools” generally receive more financial support than “urban schools.” Similar to the hidden social reasons for the education of Black people in the South, low-income families have become susceptible to an educational system that seeks to maintain status quo.

During my tenure in the public school system, I have developed more doubt in the equalizing of services between urban and suburban public schools. Having worked in

both school settings, the funding differences overwhelmingly affect the staffing needs of the school. When a school is understaffed, persons become physically and mentally exhausted with meeting the daily expectations of school administration, parents, and students. Under these conditions, students frequently receive inconsistent teaching instruction in the classroom. Despite the expression of concerns by teachers and parents to governing officials within state and county departments, it appears our voices continue to be disregarded in policymaking decisions. Even in the initial establishment of public schools in the Black community, a man named Charles L. Coon attempted to uncover the misappropriation of tax funds for Black public schools without much success (Anderson, 1998, p. 154).

Because of the history with the allocation of public school funds, I seriously doubt there will ever be any significant changes to increase the funding of urban schools, especially when the hidden intentions of education have always been to maintain social class order. But, as a practicing Christian, I am sometimes conflicted on having doubt in connection to my faith. Based on Christian biblical scripture in the New Testament, doubt is referenced in opposition to faith. For instance, in the book of Mark, Jesus is quoted saying, “Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done to you” (11:22). The doubt mentioned in this scripture communicates having a belief in the power of God through Jesus as the Christ. Therefore, if one believes in the power of God for earthly manifestations, then

one should simply have faith and believe. Nevertheless, divine belief is only one aspect of faith and doubt.

Tillich (1957) discusses three types of doubt: existential doubt, methodological doubt, and skeptical doubt (pp. 18-22). Tillich defines methodological doubt as a type of scientific doubt in facts and conclusions, skeptical doubt as disbelief in certainty, and existential doubt as uncertainty in one's actions (pp. 19-20). My doubt with witnessing change in the funding structures of the public school system is more of a skeptical doubt based on my viewpoint of the public school system. Methodological and skeptical doubts are thoughts in opposition to any theories of faith. Of the three examples of doubt, existential doubt, for Tillich, operates in conjunction with faith (p. 22). Hence, having doubt in my ability to become an agent of change within the public school system is an example of existential doubt where "serious doubt is confirmation of faith" (Tillich, 1957, p. 22).

Caputo (2001, 2007), too, affirms the coexistence of faith and doubt. He (2007) states,

When is faith really faith? Not when it is looking more and more like we are right, but when the situation is beginning to look impossible, in the darkest night of the soul. The more credible things are, the less faith is needed, but the more incredible things seem, the more faith is required, that faith is said to move mountains. (p. 45)

Essentially, one's actions of faith are directed by one's existential doubts (Caputo, 2001, p. 34). In other words, the word faith should serve as a substitution for one's knowledge as certainty. In contrast, from a non-theological perspective, Rorty (1999) recommends

the use of the word hope in replacement of one's knowledge, particularly when one is attempting to use knowledge to explicate one's philosophical standpoint (p. 24). Rorty's disdain for the word hope occurs within religious assurances in predictions of the future (p. 294).

Womanist theologian Townes (1995) discusses the interrelated meanings of "apocalyptic vision" and "eschatological hope" for most Christian womanist scholars. Hope, for most African-American Christian womanist scholars, is formulated on their belief in the power of God through Jesus Christ. Their understanding of the life and death of Jesus substantiates the vision of their hope in connection to the social oppressions within the Black/African-American community (Townes, 1995, p. 121). Townes (1995) states, "Womanist spirituality dawns from the apocalyptic visions of hope and salvation in the midst of our inhumanity. It is the lived experience of faith that is grounded in the context of struggling for faith and justice" (p. 139). In many ways, the current hope of most womanist Christian scholars was the same hope of numerous Black men and women during slavery.

The majority of Black slave persons communicated their hope in terms of their imagination for social freedom. Proctor (1995) states, "With nothing but faith, they [Black slaves] *imagined* the future" (p. 6). Lynch (1973) points out,

The imagination, and the images it forms, is the mode in which we experience and manage the world. That is not all that it is, as we shall see, but to imagine the world is to experience the world. If faith, therefore, is indeed a way of imagining the world, it is also a way of experiencing the world. (p. 7)

Therefore, the experiences of slavery framed the images of hope and faith within the Black community. In the South, Black preachers were often the designated foreseers of hope through the retelling of biblical narratives, especially the stories pertaining to freedom and justice in the Old Testament. Additionally, the establishment of higher education institutions in the southern Black community also became an image of hope for numerous persons (Proctor, 1995, p. 6). Even though the hidden intentions of higher education included keeping the Black community in subservient positions, some Black men and women continually pursue higher education in response to their self-awareness of the educational dilemmas for persons of color and persons in lower socioeconomic status groups.

Moreover, imagination is a form of self-awareness. In order to imagine a better world for all people, one must have a self-awareness of the present realities in the world. For Black/African-American Christian womanist scholars, the terms hope and faith are generally communicated in connection to their Christian faith perspectives. Thus, the word faith relates more to one's Christian belief system. The word hope often coincides with the biblical explanations of hope as an expectation in the power of God on earth. Essentially, one's hopeful expectations, as a Christian, hinges on one's faith in God. Rotenstreich and Mendes-Flohr (1998) point out,

Expectation, too, presupposes awareness. The latter is an attitude of cognizance, while the former is an attitude of anticipation. ... Expectation goes beyond the present moment and is reinforced by awareness since the latter opens the horizon for that which is expected. (p. 137)

Although hope, as an expectation, is typically defined in theological terms, most Black/African-American women educators utilize their awareness of social realities to engage in dialogue with their colleagues and students.

Since, according to Freire (1993), dialogical engagement involves having a faith in people, awareness as a component of faith is an underlying factor of dialogue. Self-awareness for some Black/African-American women scholars occurs in the process of naming oneself as a feminist or womanist educator. The feminist/womanist interpretative frameworks facilitate active awareness to the historical oppressions of various groups of people. Hence, in a non-theological perspective, the dialogical engagement of faith in people sustains our hope in humanly transformations. Feminist educator hooks (2003) comments,

My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness. As teachers we believe that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know. (p. xiv)

Somewhat similar to hooks, my hope as an educator derives from a personal transformational experience in thinking during my graduate school tenure.

As mentioned previously, my thoughts and ideas about the term faith have changed significantly since my first graduate school course. Writing a dissertation on the term faith within both theological and non-theological frameworks has enlightened my inquiry to the inclusiveness of faith in education, specifically for Black/African-American women educators. While some persons may declare an absence of religious

faith practices in public educational institutions, the practices of faith are very much an integral component of our interactional skills as educators and students. In educational institutions, the practices of faith entail educators and students developing relationships of mutual trust for the naming of realities in expressions of hope. Furthermore, because of my personal transformation in thinking on the term faith, I also believe that other persons can change too.

When we are able to witness our own personal transformations in relationship to the transformations of our students, then our hope is reassured through our faith in people that “everything will be all right” (Akbar, 1996, pp. 44-45). Akbar discusses faith as the belief that “everything will be all right” (pp. 44-45) despite the present circumstances. Akbar believes this is the type of faith Black slave men and women utilized to envision a future of freedom. Even though Black slaves primarily expressed their faith as trust in God for eventual freedom and justice, some Black slaves engaged their faith with their doubts in dialogical interactions with other people. This faith developed the inner courage of numerous Black women and men to seek justice through their actions with persons within and outside their local communities.

While there has always been an underlying expectation of hope with one’s faith in the Black/African-American community, the actions of faith and hope are very much a reality of daily struggle for numerous persons. In his book, *Hope on a Tightrope*, West (2011) offers his philosophical opinions on the term hope in relationship to his standpoint as an African-American male educator who affirms his faith beliefs through the practices of Christianity. West remarks,

Yet hope is no guarantee. Real hope is grounded in a particularly messy struggle, and it can be betrayed by naïve projections of a better future that ignore the necessity of doing the real work. So what we are talking about is *hope on a tightrope*. (p. 6)

Interestingly, West's phrase of "hope on a tightrope" connects to the initial biblical meaning of hope as defined in the verb root "kavah." In the Old Testament, "kavah" originally referred to the tension caused by twisting or stretching a cord or rope.

Maybe hope is more relative to the daily balancing actions as tension walking on a tightrope. In this framework, one's lived experiences of hope relate to being able to balance oneself in the realities of life, while working to decrease social injustices and inequities. Thus, hope depends upon one's social awareness to name one's realities as an action of faith. During slavery, hope and faith were actions of the Black women and men who pursued freedom and of persons who chose to remain enslaved (Akbar, 1996, p. 44). It took the same balancing actions of faith and hope for persons to fight against slavery whether living on the plantation or not. All slaves probably had to contend with personal and social voices of fear and hope towards the eventual abolishment of slavery. Instead of allowing the voice of fear to hinder social progress, many Black slaves used their existential doubts to name their faith as change agents.

If, according to Tillich (1957), faith is the centering of one's conscious and unconscious actions (p. 5), then the actions of faith may balance the tension of one's existential realities between one's hopes and doubts. Even as educators, we are constantly shifting on a continuum either more towards our existential doubts or hopes. Fortunately, our faith, particularly our naming faith, keeps us centered between our hopes

and fears (or doubts). For many Black/African-American women educators, our naming faith as womanist or feminist educators, provides a visionary framework of hope in social justice as the “not yet” (Dantley, 2005, p. 13) with our colleagues and students.

Additionally, Black/African-American womanist educators are called to live out their experiences of hope and faith with other Black/African-American womanist scholars in various communal settings – the academy, church, social clubs, and so forth.

In these diverse faith communities, womanist educators are responsible for “articulating their own understandings of their faith” (Terrell, 1998, p. 135).

Accordingly, one purpose for me writing this explanation on the term faith is to communicate my understanding of faith in relationship to my standpoint as an African-American womanist educator. In adherence to womanist methodological practices, my construction of the term faith has occurred within an interdisciplinary explanation of theological and non-theological faith definitions that has centered on the lived experiences of Black/African-American women (Mitchem, 2002, p. 63). Despite the variances between naming oneself as a womanist or feminist educator, naming as a component of faith is an interpretative process of the self that is communal in actions of faith and hope.

Instead of thinking of the terms faith and hope within dichotomous theological or non-theological language expressions, we need to understand the interdependency of the terms within theological and non-theological constructs. Some may even question – Is hope the foundation of faith? Or, Is faith the foundation of hope? My answer is faith and hope are both standpoints with mutually defining interconnections that give meaning to a

group of persons “shared realities” (Fowler, 1996, p. 22) in this world. Sharing one’s reality of lived experiences with other people facilitates having hope as an expectation, while actively seeking to live the hope of justice on a daily basis. Fishman (in Fishman & McCarthy, 2007) explains the process of “living in hope” when he states,

By living in hope, I mean having an ultimate hope or goal toward which one works that gives one’s life significance in relation to nature and the human community. Living in hope means that one has a sense of belonging, purpose, faith in one’s ideals, and unification. (p. 4)

Though Fishman discusses the interconnections of “living in hope” with having faith as belief in one’s existential agency, “living in hope” also necessitates having faith as a type of commitment to one’s existential actions and beliefs (Deutsch, 1963, p. 232).

Therefore, in the next chapter, I investigate my actions of faith as a special educator in a public educational setting. First, I define the purpose and intentions with using “engaged pedagogy” (hooks, 1994) in educational settings. Then, I discuss the practices of “engaged pedagogy,” “critical pedagogy,” and “queer theory” as actions of faith in one’s teaching and learning practices. In addition, I utilize a “prophetic imagination” (Brueggemann, 2001) as a womanist special educator to bring awareness to the language and experiences of persons with disabilities. Hopefully, this “prophetic imagination” will also provide new structures of interactions for persons with and without disabilities.

CHAPTER IV

AN ENGAGED PEDAGOGY OF FAITH: CONNECTING THEORY TO PRACTICE

There is no faith without participation!
(Tillich, 1957, p. 100)

The primary research question for this dissertation is “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?” To respond to this query, I outlined three significant aspects of faith as an African-American womanist educator in Chapter III: Faith as Trust, Faith as Naming, and Faith as Hope. In association to the field of education, faith as trust relates to the integration of one’s voice and lived experiences in the classroom. For numerous African-American women educators, the incorporation of voice and lived experiences results in the naming of one’s standpoint as either a womanist or feminist educator as a characteristic of faith. Additionally, the process of naming as faith involves identifying the realities of one’s lived experiences (Dantley, 2005, p. 7). Due to the historical exclusion of African-American women’s experiences and perspectives in education, a central article of faith is in the hope of an inclusive educational experience for all children.

More specifically, my faith as hope centers on the education of children in special education programs. As a special education professional, I continually struggle with the labeling and identification of children within disability constructs that generally separate them from their peers in the school environment. In my advocacy for the educational

needs of students with disabilities, Baker-Fletcher (2006) reminds me to interrogate my viewpoint as an able-bodied person. Instead of discussing the needs of students with disabilities from the lens of an “ableist” (Baker-Fletcher, 2006, p. 158) standpoint, it is my desire to activate consciousness to the lived experiences of persons with and without disabilities. Thus, in order to make connections with my standpoint as an able-bodied person, I will discuss my educational perspectives and experiences using a “prophetic imagination” (Brueggemann, 2001) as a special educator in the public school system.

Brueggemann (2001) defines “prophetic imagination” as being “intensely concerned with matters linguistic (how we say things) and epistemological (how we know what we know)—all of which may be to engage simply in verbal distinctions” (p. 21). As someone who does not currently have a disability, I desire to bring attention to the significance of language within the socially contrasting ability and disability frameworks. However, instead of perpetuating the language divide between persons with and without disabilities, one of my objectives in this chapter is to gain understanding of the interconnections between ability and disability standpoints. Brueggemann (2001) states, “In our utilization of sociological insight concerning the social dimensions of knowledge, language, and power, we must not be inattentive to our very own sociology and the ways in which it commanders both our faith and our scholarship” (p. 22).

Specifically as an educator, it is sometimes difficult to directly talk about one’s ideas of faith with persons in the educational environment. Particularly, in most non-theological educational institutions, the word faith is often avoided due to the mainstream connotations of faith solely within religion contexts. However, Palmer (1993) points out,

“the original and authentic meaning of the word ‘professor’ is ‘one who professes a faith’ (p. 113). Palmer’s explanation of a professor refers to one’s participation in a community of learners inside and outside educational institutions (p. 113). Hence, in order for professors to “profess a faith,” then one’s lived experiences become paramount within the development of community in the classroom (Palmer, 1993, p. 113). To begin this discussion, I will define and make practical connections to the theoretical intersections of “Engaged Pedagogy” (hooks, 1994) and “Queer Theory” (Meyer, 2007) as pedagogical frameworks of faith.

Engaged Pedagogy of Faith Defined

The idea of “engaged pedagogy” for this chapter centers on hooks’s (1994) explication of the term in her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. Hooks defines “engaged pedagogy” as a process of self-actualization for students and professors in the University setting (p. 15). This teaching method entails the integration of academic content in connection to one’s personal lived experiences. Engaged pedagogy includes the narrative voices of both students and professors. In fact, hooks advises professors to be open to sharing their personal lived experiences with their students first (p. 21). The active inclusion of the professor’s narrative voice facilitates the development of mutual trust between professor and students. Thus, the professor is challenged with incorporating the narrative voices of students and her own personal voice during class discussions.

Consequently, the teaching method of engaged pedagogy necessitates awareness to the inclusion of one’s personal voice. The naming of one’s lived experiences occurs as

a result of one's consciousness to social realities in the world. Hooks formulates her notion of "engaged pedagogy" on Freire's (1993) standpoint of "conscientization" in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (p. 14). According to Freire, consciousness formulates within the intentional actions of persons in communication with each other (p. 79). For persons who are oppressed, consciousness facilitates the process of liberation in one's thinking and actions (p. 67). Thus, hooks (1994) situates the teaching practices of "engaged pedagogy" as a method of liberation for professors and students.

The precepts of liberation and "conscientization" are foundational concepts of critical theory in academia. Giroux (2001) explains one aspect of critical theory as "the nature of self-conscious critique and to the need to develop a discourse of social transformation and emancipation that does not cling dogmatically to its own doctrinal assumptions" (p. 8). Essentially, one's self-consciousness to social realities informs one's personal analysis of the world. In academia, the teaching actions of "engaged pedagogy" permit the sharing of personal realities in class discussions. The engagement of one's self-conscious experiences has both literal and abstract connotations for some persons. For instance, historically, "queer theory" generally referenced the concrete experiences of gay and lesbian persons (Meyer, 2007, p. 15). Furthermore, when used literally in derogatory connotations, the word "queer" related to persons who act and/or live differently from dominant social norms (Meyer, 2007, p. 15).

In contrast, Meyer (2007) offers an expansive definition of "queer theory" for the educational environment. Meyer states,

Queer theory goes beyond exploring aspects of gay and lesbian identity and experience. It questions taken-for-granted assumptions about relationships, identity, gender, and sexual orientation. It seeks to explode rigid normalizing categories into possibilities that exist beyond the binaries of man/woman, masculine/feminine, student/teacher, and gay/straight. Queer theory offers educators a lens through which educators can transform their praxis so as to explore and celebrate the tensions and new understandings created by teaching new ways of seeing the world. (p. 15)

Meyer's definition of "queer theory" correlates to my standpoint of teaching and learning as an interconnected process for both teachers and students. In this study, I also reference the term "pedagogy" as the daily practices of teaching and learning (Freire, 1998; Palmer, 1998). This reason simply means that in some situations, I may interact as a teacher or as a student with other persons. This way, the position of teacher becomes interrelated with the position of student in a classroom setting. In other words, my teaching practices are contingent upon my willingness to learn from and with the students in my class.

Likewise, my standpoint as an able-bodied woman influences my engaged teaching and learning interactions with persons who may or may not have disabilities. Using a "prophetic imagination" (Brueggeman, 2001) will provide opportunities for me to reflect on my personal interactions with persons who have disabilities, while also presenting a new space to construct mutual relationships of identity between persons with and without disabilities. It is through self-reflective dialogue that I will seek to understand the intersections of my standpoint as an African-American womanist educator with a detailed "queer theory" investigation of the ability/disability social construct. More specifically, in the educational environment, "queer theory" is a form of "engaged pedagogy" between teachers and students.

It is through communicative dialogue that teachers and students are able to explain and deconstruct self-conscious realities while formulating new constructions of thought. Hence, “queer theory” also derives within the foundations of “critical theory” similar to “engaged pedagogy.” When used as a teaching tool, Neumann (2011) identifies the tenets of critical pedagogy as a form of faith. In religious contexts, critical pedagogy emphasizes the personal and social liberation aspects of theology with demonstrating one’s faith in one’s actions (Neumann, 2011, p. 609). Furthermore, critical pedagogy, as a form of faith, engages the concerns of people living in the world within religious and non-religious perspectives (Neumann, 2011, p. 603). The teaching methods of “engaged pedagogy” and “queer theory” are also pedagogical actions of faith in the classroom.

Due to the liberation aspects of critical pedagogy, engaged pedagogy seeks to put the faith of professors in action with their students. If, according to Neumann (2011), “Critical pedagogy struggles with life as it is, with manifest realities” (p. 609); then, “engaged pedagogy” and “queer theory” assist the professor’s actions of faith in a form of concern (Neumann, 2011; Tillich, 1957) with engaging the lived experiences of the professor and students in the class. Although I am currently not a professor in the University setting, I consider my current role as a speech-language pathologist within the realm of “educator” in the public school setting. As a public school educator, I continually seek to make practical connections between pedagogical theories and my interactions with students and colleagues. To illustrate these connections, I will provide six self-reflections pertaining to my experiences as a special educator in an elementary

school setting in the remaining sections of this chapter. The first self-reflection discusses the interrelationships of the term “care” for African-American womanist educators.

Self-Reflection #1: Womanist Interactions of Care

In some African-American communities, the notion of care centers on the female interactions of care with the children (Collins, 2009, pp. 192-198). However, in my family, my mother and father share the responsibilities of caretaking in the home. Thus, my parents demonstrate their actions of care in forms of *caring about* and *caring for* other persons (Gay, 2010, p 48). Gay (2010) explains, “*Caring about* conveys feelings of concern for one’s state of being, *caring for* is active engagement in doing something to positively affect it” (p. 48). In other words, if you truly *care for* someone, you will demonstrate your care through your actions for the other person. Gay’s clarification of *caring about* and *caring for* other people is relational to teachers being culturally responsive to the needs of their students.

According to Gay, student achievement in the classroom is generally associated to the actions of care by the teacher (p. 49). The more a teacher *cares for* her students, the higher her expectations for student success in her class (p. 49). Even with students who have intellectual disabilities, teachers should establish high expectations for students to achieve at or above their current academic level. In most instances, students with intellectual disabilities are confined to learning within special education classes and ignored in the regular education setting. A culturally responsive teacher will seek to meet the learning needs of all her students in actions of care for student achievement.

In a study of Black women teachers, Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) determines three key womanist actions of care by the teachers for their students: embrace of the maternal, political clarity, and an ethic of risk. Beauboeuf-Lafontant expresses,

Being a womanist educator entails more than simply having a professed love for children: A womanist educator loves children, especially those considered “other” in society, out of a clear-sighted understanding of how and why society marginalizes some children while embracing others. (p. 80)

The students referenced as “other” in Beauboeuf-Lafontant’s study were either children of color or children living in homes within working-class to a lower-class socio-economic status. Nevertheless, this statement also seems applicable to students with disabilities, since most students placed within special education classes are also deemed as “other” in the world.

Additionally, Beauboeuf-Lafontant’s study of womanist experiences of caring correlates to Collins’s (2009) theory of Black Feminist Epistemology. The second component of Collins’s Black Feminist Epistemology framework includes “The Ethics of Caring” (pp. 281-284). While Beauboeuf-Lafontant discusses the characteristics of caring for Black women teachers, Collins explains how most Black women utilize an ethic of caring to communicate their lived experiences. The key tenets of an ethics of caring are: personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy (Collins, 2009, pp. 281-282). Essentially, our personal expressions and emotions characterize our individuality as African-American women (Collins, 2009, p. 282). For instance, saying to my family and friends, “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7) resounds more as a testimony of experience than a mundane recitation of words. Likewise, my empathy with

the experiences of persons with disabilities motivates me to *care for* their needs through my actions with them.

Philosopher Noddings (1984) discusses the interrelatedness of persons who receive and/or actuate care. She explains,

The ethical self is an active relation between my actual self and a vision of my ideal self as one-caring and cared-for. It is born of the fundamental recognition of relatedness; that which connects me naturally to the other, reconnects me through the other to myself. As I care for others and am cared for by them, I become able to care for myself. (p. 49)

In connection to teaching, *caring for* one's students is a mutual relational process of caring between students and teachers. Moreover, *caring for* another person is also contingent upon one's feelings of *care about* the other person. This is why the actions of caring for most Black women teachers, are in response to our connected feelings about and for our students. As an able-bodied person, my care for other people always generally concentrates on my assistance to them. However, according to Noddings's (1984) description, caring for someone else is a shared action of giving and receiving for both persons, regardless of ability/disability status.

Conversely, in the elementary school setting, actions of care are more contingent upon how educators respond to the needs of their students. Due to the age of students in elementary schools, it is somewhat socially unacceptable to even expect a student to *care for* a teacher in terms of physical and emotional needs. Occasionally, some students express *care about* their teachers in words of concern for the teacher's wellbeing. In any teacher-student relationship, the bond of care is inherent within the responsibilities of the

teacher to the student. Particularly for students with disabilities, the teacher is responsible for not only actively including the student inside the regular education environment, but also serving as an advocate for all of her students in a variety of settings.

This chapter presents me the opportunity to advocate for students with disabilities as I make practical connections between theory and practice in our educational institutions. In theory, the concept of care should center on our interrelationships with other people; whereas in practice, specifically in education, the concept of care is a one-sided responsibility of the educator. Although my viewpoint as a womanist educator encourages me to care for the needs of my students, the social perception with being a Strong Black Woman sometimes hinders my willingness to allow other people to care for me.

Self-Reflection #2: The Strong Black Woman

In the African-American community, most women are cultured to believe that “The defining quality of Black womanhood is strength” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 1). As Black/African-American women, we are encouraged to conceal our need for care, especially in our public emotions. Crying is generally regarded as a sign of weakness, the antithesis of the “Strong Black Woman.” Historically, the expressive image with being a “strong Black woman” links to the oppressive experiences of Black women slaves. During slavery, Black women were subjected to the same labor codes as Black men, while also being the primary caretakers of the children and home (Davis, 1995). Because Black women often cared for their children and their slave masters’ children,

distinctions of strength were made between Black and White women in the dominant patriarchal codes of ideal womanhood.

Whereas Black women were viewed as being “strong” and “assertive,” “passivity” became a hallmark characteristic of ideal White womanhood (Collins, 2009, p. 81). Even though the expression, “strong Black woman” functions as a self-defining concept in the Black community, this image can be problematic to one’s social participation in the world. For instance, Woods-Giscombe (2010) points out that the 45 years and older Black women participants were the primary age group to discuss their responsibilities with maintaining the “strong Black woman” appearance at home and work (p. 672). For some of the Black women participants in Woods-Giscombe’s study, their decision to live within the image of a “strong Black woman” correlates to their caretaking actions with their children and elderly parents. In other words, these women could not appear weak in front of the family members who need their care the most.

Although this may be true, what happens when the person who is caring for other people requires care for her health needs too? Morgan, a 45-year old Black woman participant in Beauboeuf-Lafontant’s (2009) study offers this perspective:

... No one allows us [Black women] to rest And it’s, it’s like they want to penalize you for just being human. And I know in my own church, when I found out that I had lumps in my breast ... *no one* comes to me and says, ‘How are you?’ In fact, some people are actually insulted because I haven’t accepted this or that responsibility to the church. They’re like, ‘Oh well, you should just be superwoman and rise above it.’ (pp. 87-88)

Although Morgan does not explicitly state feelings of hurt or even anger towards people in her church, there is an implicit undertone in her comments of having those emotions.

Feelings of hurt and anger can potentially lead to a person's social isolation from the internalization with being a "strong Black woman." While Morgan appears comfortable with expressing her thoughts as a study participant, she does not indicate expressing her concerns to family, friends, and church members.

In the Black/African-American community, the image with being a "strong Black woman" is a "powerful cultural signifier" of lineage to other Black/African-American women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 25). Because most Black/African-American women, who live in the USA, have experienced some form of oppression and/or domination, the "strong Black woman" image generally functions as an emotional guard to such experiences (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009, p. 25). Thus, a "strong Black woman" does not express her needs of care from other people, even in times of illness. In these instances, the "strong Black woman" image discourages numerous Black/African-American women with using their voice to communicate personal desires of care. Consequently, a damaging social control effect of the "strong Black woman" image is the cultural silence of Black/African-American women's voices.

Brueggemann's (2001) concept of "prophetic imagination" creates personal awareness to "Oppressive Social Policy" (pp. 27-28) in the intentional exclusion of the Black/African-American woman's voice, specifically within educational institutions. If words such as "strong" are used to define the actions of Black/African-American women, then we, as Black/African-American women, define our self-worth based on our actions rather than the inclusion and acknowledgement of our voice. For example, some Black women undergraduates have found it difficult to practice their self-definitions with being

“strong Black women” on their college campus (Winkle-Wagner, 2008, pp. 189-190). Although some of the undergraduates prefer descriptors such as “strong,” “assertive,” and/or “aggressive,” they also recognize and discuss the negative effects of such labels for women in the classroom.

According to one undergraduate student, “Men are generally allowed to assert themselves, but women are taught or expected to not speak their minds” (Winkle-Wagner, 2008, p. 189). As a result of this dominant social expectation, most of the Black women undergraduates complied with being passive or quiet in their classes (Winkle-Wagner, 2008, p. 189). Despite their personal self-descriptions of “strength,” the Black women undergraduates explicitly and implicitly performed standards of proper White womanhood on the college campus (Winkle-Wagner, 2008, p. 191). Similar to most of the mentioned Black women undergraduates, I too, disassociated “strength” from voice for most of my college (undergraduate and graduate) years. While there were several underlying factors to my silence in college classrooms, I implicitly and explicitly obeyed the Southern ideals of womanhood.

As Southern-raised women, regardless of race/ethnicity, we are expected to be polite, quiet, and passive in most institutional settings. It was during my doctoral studies that I realized these Southern standards of womanhood are identical to the perceived standards of womanhood for White women. I now understand why my mother, a Black woman, asserted her voice, as needed, against social injustices in her high school classroom. It appears that my mother practiced hooks’ (1994) notion of “engaged pedagogy” before its conceptual definition. The practice of “engaged pedagogy”

involves the process of teaching and learning for both teachers and students, which is a vulnerable engagement of narrative experiences in the classroom (hooks, 1994, p. 21). In addition, “engaged pedagogy” not only reveals one’s lived experiences to other people, but the practices of engaged pedagogy necessitate the present connections of one’s mind and body during the teaching and learning process (hooks, 1994, p. 21).

In some ways, it takes strength, courage, and vulnerability to engage the presence of one’s mind-body connections through the expression of one’s lived narrative experiences. As a mentor to graduate speech-language pathology students, I seek to utilize my strength, in the form of courage, through the inclusion of my successes and failures as a practicing speech-language pathologist in the public school system. It is often difficult to acknowledge that I have not always openly expressed my concerns as an advocate for the teaching and placement needs of students with disabilities. However, as a result of my doctoral studies and years of experience in the public school system, I now have both the language tools and lived experience to explain the disproportionate practices between students with and without disabilities.

The acknowledgement of my failures to my mentees helps me to explain to them that mistakes are a part of the learning process. Belenky, et. al. (1997) suggest that “Women students need opportunities to watch women professors solve (and fail to solve) problems and male professors fail to solve (and succeed in solving) problems” (p. 217). Again, it takes strength and courage to expose one’s successes and failures, which essentially makes one vulnerable to the perceptions of other people. For some persons, failures and mistakes are a sign of weakness; whereas, strength is associated with always

making the right decisions. I am learning that it takes to strength to acknowledge my faults with my mentees, especially in regards to the educational practices of students with disabilities.

In my derelict of voice, I am now able to recognize the significance of serving as an advocate in the placement and teaching methods of students with disabilities. As an African-American woman, strength often became synonymous with being emotionless and independent of care and/or support from other people. However, my strength as a “strong Black woman” is demonstrated through the inclusion of my lived experiences (successes and failures) as a personal action of courage and faith. My mother is an example of a Black/African-American woman who has always included her voice through the teaching and learning practices of “engaged pedagogy” with her students. This teaching and learning practice is an engagement of one’s faith in people through courageous dialogical interactions. In academia, naming my realities of faith is also an act of resistance to dominant social expectations.

Self-Reflection #3: Naming as Resistance

In most non-theological settings, there is an implicit expectation for one to maintain separation between one’s faith (theological or non-theological) beliefs in one’s academic work. From a theological perspective for most African-American women, our faith in God sustains our narratives of strength in academia (Harris-Perry, 2011). Accordingly, naming one’s religious faith experiences within one’s “scholarly work” is a common framework of resistance to dominant standards of knowledge for numerous African-American women educators (Harris-Perry, 2011, pp. 222-223). Although

naming my religious faith in my academic manuscripts within a non-theological setting is a form of resistance for me, in the South, naming one's religious faith and beliefs, especially if one is a Christian, is somewhat of an expectation. For this reason, I have explicitly attempted to understand and explain the term faith from a non-theological perspective as well, which is an act of resistance with naming one's faith in the South.

On the other hand, because the naming of my religious faith is important to me as an African-American woman educator, I engage my faith practices through the inclusion of my narrative voice in the naming of my lived experiences. Whereas the church and religion function as organized institutions for African-American women to express their religious faith beliefs, the University setting facilitates the alignment of one's faith beliefs with one's teaching and/or research practices. As a womanist educator, my teaching pedagogy is based on the seminal work of other womanist educators and/or womanist theologians who seek to dismantle various systems of oppression and domination in the world (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002; Cannon, 2008; Williams, 1993).

Consequently, as advocates for social justice, some African-American women educators utilize their personal faith beliefs in opportunities to "step out on faith" for marginalized groups in dominant society. As an educator, one area for me to "step out on faith" is with the naming of the realities for persons (children and adults) with disabilities. For instance, in the public school system, students who are classified with various disabilities are commonly labeled as "disabled persons" or "persons with disabilities." Furthermore, students with disabilities receive specialized teaching instruction in "special education classes" within the structure of the "Exceptional

Children’s Department.” To determine special education eligibility, students are administered a battery of diagnostic assessments. As a member of the special education team, I participate in student placement meetings as warranted.

In one particular meeting, the parents were having a really hard time deciding whether to give consent for their child to begin placement within special education. After listening to the parents talk with the team members, I realized the underlying issue with placement for them was the actual naming and labeling of their child with having a disability. Due to the “special education” label, many teachers make false presumptions about their students with disabilities based solely on the designated educational label. In fact, the parents did express concern for the potential consequences with labeling their child at such a young age. In response to the parents’ concerns, one of the special education teachers ensured the parents that regardless of their decision to give consent or not for special education placement, the student would still receive the needed specialized services in the school environment.

However, I question the special education teacher’s comments to the parents. If the special education teacher could guarantee the provision of services without special education placement, then why do school systems enact special education eligibility guidelines? In reality, school systems are given funding according to the number of students placed in special education classes. This funding supports the teaching instruction of special education teachers to their students. Essentially, any student who is not eligible or whose parents do not give consent for special education placement does not receive those services. It appears that labeling and naming students with disabilities

benefits the funding of public schools rather than providing needed services without special education placement.

In my “prophetic imagination,” I must query if the funding intentions with the labeling of children in the public education system is an “oppressive social policy” (Brueggemann, 2001, pp. 27-28). Brueggemann’s (2001) idea of “oppressive social policy” includes awareness to the intersections of affluence and hierarchy within the development and implementation of governing social procedures. For instance, if only children from economically low-income backgrounds are only labeled with disabilities, then one may automatically recognize the explicit economic meanings with labeling persons with less financial resources as disabled. In my experiences in the public school system, children from economically low-income, middle-income, and high-income homes are labeled as disabled based on their current intellectual, behavioral, and/or physical condition.

During my tenure in both a suburban and low-income school, the only major difference I noted was in the parent acceptance and/or refusal of disability labels. In my opinion, most of the middle-higher income parents welcomed disability labels in recognition of the provided specialized services. On the contrary, most parents from low-income backgrounds had significant issues with labeling their children due to negative cultural perceptions with being disabled. Hudak (2001), however, contradicts my middle-high income parent interactions as he recalls his dilemma with the “special education” labeling of his son. Hudak discussed the damaging consequences of labeling and separation of children in “special education” classes with his local school board (p.

9). Though Hudak believes “labeling is a complex process of differentiation, identification, and separation,” he also admits that not all labeling is oppressive (p. 14).

For example, Hudak explains, “For the labeling process to be oppressive, ‘toxic,’ it must demonstrate a moment of exploitation where one’s ontological vocation – being fully human – is hindered” (p. 14). Although the labeling of children in “special education” classes may inhibit peer and teacher social interactions, the specialized classes are intended to assist students with learning needed academic and social skills for increased participation in the general school environment. In this perspective, “special education” classes are not designed to impede the social development of children as human beings. Nonetheless, there are obvious funding advantages for public school systems in the “special education” labeling and identification of children with disabilities. Despite the institutional benefits with labeling persons with disabilities, numerous women with disabilities utilize personal agency to name their identity. Accordingly, some women choose to acknowledge their status as women first with named identities as “women with disabilities;” while other women prefer to recognize their disability first through a communal identity as a “disabled woman” (Israelite & Swartz, 2004, p. 472).

For some persons, naming one’s identity is a process with utilizing one’s personal power of agency as “an act of resistance or even as an expression of a creative mode of cultural and social production outside the immediate force of domination” (Giroux, 2001, p. 108). As an example, Clarke (1995) expresses her lesbian identity as resistance to dominant patriarchal structures in the world. She communicates,

For a woman to be a lesbian in a male-supremacist, capitalist, misogynist, racist, homophobic, imperialist culture, such as that of North America, is an act of resistance. ... No matter how a woman lives out her lesbianism—in the closet, in the state legislature, in the bedroom—she has rebelled against becoming the slave master’s concubine, viz., the male-dependent female, the female heterosexual. This rebellion is dangerous business in patriarchy. (p. 242)

In some ways, Clarke’s viewpoint on her identity as a lesbian seems like “oppositional behavior” (Giroux, 2001, pp. 107-108) to patriarchal heterosexual norms. There are instances when “oppositional behavior” is deemed appropriate. In education, an oppositional standpoint seeks to bring conscious awareness to dominant social constructions of thought and practice (Giroux, 2001, p. 110).

In an examination of music lyrics by India Arie, Lauryn Hill, and Me’shell Ndegeocello, Stukes (2002) determines resistance as a key theme. The resistance lyrics of these three Black/African-American women typically create a consciousness of life against dominant expectations (pp. 14-15). In particular Me’shell Ndegeocello incorporates her social identity experiences as a bisexual Black woman (Neal, 2006, p. 632). Even in the music industry, Black/African-American women engage their personal agency through the inclusion of their narrative voice. Furthermore, as Black/African-American women, they speak to the realities of experience for other women. According to Hayes (2006), “woman-identified music emerged in the early 1970s as part of a sub-culture of lesbian feminism” (p. 541).

Stukes (2002) distinguishes the lyrics of Arie, Hill, and Ndegeocello within the frame of womanist ideology. Due to their “audacious” and “willful” womanish behavior (Walker, 1983, p. xi) with naming the realities of their lived experiences, each artist lives

out Walker's womanist definition in their lyrical actions. Additionally, this is an action of faith as naming for the Black/African-American women artists. For most Black/African-American women, naming one's standpoint in life fosters collective identity with other Black/African-American women. This collective identity resists the social labeling of our experiences as Black/African-American women. The process of naming one's perspective necessitates obedience to one's voice and the voice of other people.

Self-Reflection #4: Obedience to Voice

Whereas naming my personal perspective requires self-definition as an African-American womanist educator, obedience to voice is a process of listening and speaking with and from my personal experiences. Due to my quiet nature in academic settings, listening to the thoughts of other people without astute attentiveness to my viewpoint seemed routine for me. As a doctoral student, I have been continuously encouraged to retreat from silence and "find my voice." Silence, for me, is somewhat of a comfort zone area – I can listen without speaking. In contrast, "finding my voice" situates me outside my comfort zone with expressing personal thoughts and experiences in written and verbal forms of communication. However, reading Lorde's (2007) essay on "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" in her book *Sister Outsider* inspires me to "find my voice" as a listener and speaker of my thoughts.

In most of Lorde's essays, she is very open and voiced about her experiences as a Black lesbian poet. Though Lorde is effective with naming her standpoint, it is her recent

diagnosis of breast cancer that prompts her discussion of silence and language. While in self-reflection about her breast cancer diagnosis, Lorde states,

In becoming forcibly and essentially aware of my mortality, and of what I wished and wanted for my life, however short it might be, priorities and omissions became strongly etched in a merciless light, and what I most regretted were my silences. Of what have I *ever* been afraid? To question or to speak as I believed could have meant pain, or death. But we all hurt in so many different ways, all the time, and pain will either change or end. Death, on the other hand, is the final silence. (p. 41)

Lorde's words prompt me to ponder about the finality of my voice in death. While death is an eventual state of all human beings, I envision and/or hope to live a long life.

Unfortunately, in reality sudden illness and accidents occur daily. Due to the unpredictable timing of death, its nearness may be closer than presumed resulting in a "final silence" of my voice. Hence, it is important for me to use my voice, while I have a chance, to bring awareness to the significance of one's lived experiences in the world.

In general, the process with women "coming to voice" is a primary tenet of feminist scholarly practice. Inherent with women "coming to voice" is the centering of one's gender influenced experiences. However, some feminist scholars who have become disabled, communicate experiences of rejection within dominant feminist scholarship (Israelite & Swartz, 2004, p. 476). Although the women had a voice as ablebodied persons, it appears that after the onset of their disability the women's voices became marginalized in dominant ablebodied discourse (Israelite & Swartz, 2004, p. 476). Likewise, several Black/African-American women scholars have argued the same

exclusionary practices of the dominant feminist movement in regards to the intersections of race, gender, and social class status.

To this end, some Black/African-American scholars adopted Walker's (1983) "womanist" standpoint as an inclusionary practice of feminism to the voices and experiences of all people, particularly other Black/African-American women. In Walker's definition, she explains a womanist as "A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength" (p. xi). Based on this definition, a womanist should engage the narrative voices of women in her work. The integration of women's narrative voices necessitates listening to the voices of other women in connection to one's own voice.

In a male-dominated society, listening to one's own voice as a woman has been difficult for centuries, especially in organized practices of religion. During the 1830s, Rebecca Jackson was an example of a female preacher who listened to God through her own voice and the voices of other Black women (Walker, 2006, p. 15). As a traveling preacher, Jackson met with groups of women to assist them with developing awareness to their own voices in prayer and dialogue (Walker, 2006, p. 15). While on her ministry journey, Jackson developed a close relationship with another woman who she eventually lived with until her death (Walker, 2006, p. 15). Some scholars refer to Jackson as a lesbian because of her ministry relationship with another woman. However, Walker states,

Though women ministers, who worshiped and lived with other women were perceived by the male leaders of the early churches as ‘closeted lesbians,’ because they followed their own inner voices rather than the ‘fathers’ of the church, there is nothing in these writings that seems to make Jackson one (p. 17).

In Walker’s opinion, Jackson’s relationship with other women aligns to the social practices with being a womanist (Walker, 2006, p. 18).

This is why as a womanist educator, I have been compelled to include the narrative voices of other women in my dissertation. Personally, the beginning title of my dissertation “Order My Steps of Faith” relates to the acknowledgement of multiple voices in my Christian faith journey – women and men. Furthermore, using the perspective of a “prophetic imagination” directs my attention to the historical aspects of a “controlled, static religion” (Brueggemann, 2001, pp. 28-29) in the Christian community. A “controlled, static religion” seeks to restrict the accessibility of God’s kingdom, “so that no marginal person may approach this God except on the king’s terms” (p. 29). Hence, Rebecca Jackson’s ordeal as a female preacher was partially due to her not listening to the traditional voices of the “Fathers of the Church.” A primary goal of a “controlled, static religion” is the maintenance of social order through the hierarchal structures of power and control.

Whenever there are power differences evident among persons, obedience functions as a behavior technique to control the actions of another person (Townes, 1993, p. 183). In contrast, Womanist theologian Townes (1993) discusses the “discerning obedience” practices of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, an African-American woman who was a Christian social activist in the South (p. 184). According to Townes, Wells-Barnett

engaged her Christian faith beliefs in acts of justice for other women and Black/African-American persons (p. 178). Wells-Barnett worked with people to determine the common experiences of social injustice through interviews and data collection (Townes, 1993, p. 187).

Seeking to dismantle authoritarian models of obedience, Wells-Barnett listened to the voices of other persons in a “discerning obedience” of power. Townes explains,

Discerning obedience is power with others or power in the process. It is found in interactions that produce value and summon the agent to develop his or her capacity for empathy and interconnectedness. The agent operates through an understanding of God’s will for justice and truth. (p. 184)

Thus, as a practicing Christian, Wells-Barnett obeyed the voice of God in her actions of allegiance with the social needs of other people. Furthermore, social justice is a theme in relationship to one’s obedience to voice for most Black/African-American women scholars.

For instance, feminist hooks (2000) writes about the intersections of race, gender, and social class status in her book *Where We Stand: Class Matters*. In this book, hooks opines that social class issues are generally ignored in discussions of race and gender. Even so, for hooks apparent social class divisions are issues that people cannot continue to be silent about. Hence, hooks uses her voice to bring awareness to the systemic practices with maintaining social class differences in regards to one’s race and gender identity. From a disability standpoint, most persons with disabilities are also affected with the economic injustices of social class status. On the whole, most persons with

disabilities experience lower rates of employment and income than persons without disabilities (Israelite & Swartz, 2004, p. 471).

As a non-disabled person, I began working my first job at the age of 18 and have worked on either a full-time or part-time basis since then. Whereas most non-disabled persons are capable of completing job related duties without assistance, the majority of disabled persons are dependent on the help of other people to navigate their physical job environments. Bringing awareness to the social inequities for persons with disabilities is a personal concern that involves listening to the voices and experiences of persons with disabilities. In my interactions with friends and students who have disabilities, I have become more attentive to their thoughts and feelings about living with a disability. One commonality that I seem to share with most of my friends and students who have disabilities is our faith and belief in God.

In fact, “Religious beliefs, spirituality, and faith traditions provide structure that individuals with disabilities (and others) use to create meaning in their lives” (Blanks & Smith, 2009, p. 300). Thus, listening to the voice of God is important for most persons with disabilities and their families. Because God is a central authority figure of voice for some persons with disabilities, their families may resist participating in educational and/or therapeutic services that seek to modify the disability in any way (Blanks & Smith, 2009, p. 301). There are some families who believe the disability is a result of God’s divine will, and there are also some families who believe in God’s ability to heal the disability through prayer (Blanks & Smith, 2009, p. 301). I have vivid memories of having discussions with students and/or their families refusing speech therapy services

due to their obedience with listening to God's voice. In my respect for their decision, I acknowledged their voices as being significant within the educational system. In theory, special education placement is intended to be a democratic process that includes the voices of educators, students, and their families.

Self-Reflection #5: Democracy & Education

In the public school system, there is a variety of persons involved with the decision making process for special education placement. Some of the team participants include the regular education teacher, special education teacher, parents, school administration, guidance counselors, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and other school personnel as needed. Each person is responsible for gathering information pertaining to the student's strengths and needs within each specific discipline area. This team decision practice is designed to encourage dialogue among the team participants regarding the educational needs of the student. In some ways, the special education team process reflects one ideal of democracy through the inclusion of diverse viewpoints.

While one team member is usually designated as the official "case manager," all other persons are equally responsible with expressing their support (or not) of special education placement. Thus, the case manager utilizes her/his authority to facilitate the decision making process by ensuring that all team member voices are heard. Similarly, the classroom teacher generally guides the learning and practice of democracy through the inclusion and/or exclusion of student voices and experiences. During my elementary and secondary public school matriculation, I remember learning about "democracy" as

the governing system of the United States of America where the associated definitions of “democracy” usually referenced the enactment of rules, laws, and citizenship. The teaching and learning of “democracy” became relegated to the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government as well as my ability to “follow the rules” as a “good citizen.” From this understanding, the definition of “democracy” resonates more as “something that is” assuming status similar to a noun or object.

However, Philosophers such as Dewey (Kadlec, 2007) and West (2004) discuss the action tenets of democracy as “a way of life” or as “a cultural way of being.” Therefore, democracy is more about our daily inclusionary actions with other people than the hierarchy form of national and state government systems. Particularly in educational environments, democracy as a noun prevails when parents with the most economic resources dominate discussions and/or policy decisions. As a womanist educator, my “prophetic imagination” acknowledges the overwhelming respect of one’s voice in terms of one’s social “affluence.” Because “we live in a society where the poor have no public voice,” (hooks, 2000, p. 5) our aim as educators should be to develop democratic educational environments that recognize and value the varied voices of teachers, parents, and students.

For instance, in my previous discussion of the parents who struggled with labeling their children in “special education” programs, the apparent difference between the parents is their social class statuses. The parents in my meeting are from an economically low-income home, while Hudak (2001), the other parent, is from a middle-upper income home. Though both sets of parents had similar reluctances to the “special education”

placement of their children, Hudak used his voice as an advocate for his child (and other children) to the Local School Board. I'm not quite sure if the parents at my school had a desire or even knew how to advocate for their child beyond the school building. By and large, this is a failure of democracy as a noun in our public education institutions where parents and students from economically low-income homes are expected to "follow the rules" and/or have "trust" in the system without being heard.

Under those circumstances in the educational environment, democracy as "a way of life" becomes enacted through dialogue that facilitates trust between teachers and students. For example, Berry (2005) recounts her teaching experiences with majority Black/African-American students on a Historically Black College/University campus. Using critical autoethnography for her methodology, Berry explains the premise of her classroom "engaged pedagogy" interactions with her students. According to Berry, the initial sharing of her lived experiences with her students created a mutual trust within dialogue among persons in the class (p. 38).

To further enrich the dialogue between teacher and students, Berry implemented written class assignments that focused on the students' lived experiences such as educational autobiographies, memoir writing, and narrative response quizzes. Berry's "engaged pedagogy" action with the inclusion of teacher and student narrative lived experiences was an intentional or deliberative teaching method. Furthermore, hooks's (1994) concept of "engaged pedagogy" relates to Dewey's (Kadlec, 2007) idea of a "deliberative democracy." A "deliberative democracy," for Dewey, is one that encourages social dialogue among persons in the world (Kadlec, 2007, pp. 116-119). In

this dialogue, people will discuss topics of meaning to them, while asking questions to each other.

West (2004) opines, Socratic questioning is another ideal with living democracy as “a cultural way of being” (p. 16). Socratic questioning involves the inquiry of one’s personal actions and knowledge and of the actions of other people, especially of persons in positions of power (p. 16). Even in Berry’s intentions with engaging the narrative experiences of her students, she used self-reflection to investigate her teaching position of power in the classroom (p. 43). Berry reports recognizing that as teacher she dictated the writing themes of all classroom assignments (p. 43). Moreover, although Berry and the majority of her students were Black, she developed an understanding of the influence of her “master narrative” experiences that formed her expectations for undergraduate student writing skills (p. 44).

Because the majority of Black students in Berry’s class did not have the same foundations in writing as Berry, she essentially questioned the idea that all students receive the same teaching instruction. Another aspect of Socratic questioning is the analysis of social “master narratives.” For instance, the guiding question of my dissertation is “How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?” The meaning making process of faith entails the recognition of my standpoint as an African-American woman educator who lives in the South. According to West (2004), the inclusion of one’s individual perspective fosters the ideas of democracy as “a cultural way of being.” Therefore, the integration of my personal standpoint interrogates the dominant “master narrative” experiences of faith within mostly White male perspectives.

To ignore one's personal race identity and perspective as well as other people's through language such as "colorblindness" can be a form of covert racism (Dixson, 2011; Bonilla-Silva, 2006), particularly for persons in historically dominant race groups. The purpose with acknowledging someone's race identity relates to having an understanding of the particular oppressions and/or privileges for certain groups of people in the United States of America. Likewise, it is also equally detrimental to ignore the influence of gender and ability status on some student's class participation. The notion of "colorblindness" links to the visibility/invisibility paradox for women and persons with disabilities. Traditionally, women are socialized to be seen and not heard in the home and community.

Similarly, persons with disabilities are visible, yet invisible in our public educational institutions. In most public schools, students with disabilities are separated from their peers without disabilities for either the whole or segments of the school day. When working with students who have disabilities, the special education teacher is responsible for determining the students who may need inclusion teaching instead of separate setting instruction. As a special education team member, I have always attempted to integrate the functional needs of my students in both instructional models for carryover and/or generalization in the regular education classroom. However, despite my efforts to provide inclusion services for my students with disabilities, it was often the regular education teacher who reluctantly obliged to inclusion teaching methods.

Unfortunately, some regular education teachers prefer for students with disabilities to receive teaching instruction outside their classrooms. As a result, the

students generally become excluded from classroom activities. The same exclusionary practices of persons with disabilities are evidenced within our society. For centuries, the marginalization of persons with disabilities has occurred in the family home, particularly with the delegation of housework to women with disabilities (Driedger, 2004, p. 461). In general, most women with disabilities remain illiterate in comparison to men with disabilities (Driedger, 2004, p. 467). Moreover, women with disabilities are socially relegated as domestic caretakers like women without disabilities. The education of women with or without disabilities is contingent upon the support of family members and teachers.

Nieto (2010) points out, “The way students are thought about and treated by society and consequently by the schools they attend and the educators who teach them is fundamental in creating academic success or failure” (p. 188). This statement correlates to the inclusion and/or exclusion of special education students within the regular educational environment. Educators are responsible with acknowledging their “authority” in the instruction of all students, not just a select few. “Authority refers to the power teachers possess to influence (direct) learning, thought, and behavior through their responsibility to educate students” (Darder, 2002, p. 113). Recognizing one’s authority as an educator is essential in the practice of democracy in one’s classroom. Similar to the “case manager” position on a special education team, educators are encouraged to facilitate learning within diverse student ability levels and perspectives.

Berry (2005) is an example of an educator who realized her authority with teaching to the writing needs of all her students. Though many of Berry’s students had

different writing abilities and experiences, she intentionally included memoir and autobiography writing activities for class assignments. These writing exercises gave students the opportunity to actively engage their narrative experiences within the learning process, another practice of democracy in education. Essentially, for educators, “democracy is ultimately about [our] action” (Shapiro, 2006, p. 112) with and for our students in the classroom. Therefore, it seems appropriate to surmise that educators facilitate democracy in our actions of inclusion rather than exclusion; in our recognition of the historic systemic practices of racism, sexism, ableism and heterosexism; and in the de-centering of mainstream narratives. As a result, these inclusive and engaged teaching practices will enable teachers and students to embrace education as a process with becoming whole.

Reflection #6: In Search of Wholeness

My matriculation as a doctoral student has been a process with becoming whole in making connections between theory and practice. The theoretical tenets of Black feminist epistemology encourage me to use lived experience, dialogue, ethics of care, and personal accountability to understand and explain the educational practices of Black/African-American women. For Brock (2010), educating the “whole person” involves teaching instruction based on the recognition of one’s “wholeness of being and spirituality” (p. 94). One’s “wholeness of being” refers to the understanding of one’s lived experiences in connection to dominant social constructions (race, gender, social class status, ability, etc.). Teaching to the “wholeness of spirituality” entails making connections with the student’s awareness of self (p. 98).

Brock expresses, “When in your heart you believe you are nothing you can memorize the facts in order to pass a test, but the information really does not and cannot transform beyond that” (p. 98). Under those circumstances, in Brock’s “pedagogy of wholeness,” she utilizes tenets of critical pedagogy to assist her students with understanding the relationships between class reading materials and their lived experiences (p. 95). Particularly for her Black/African-American women students, Brock engages the theoretical framework of Collins’s (2009) Black feminist thought with the experiential experiences of other Black/African-American women (p. 107). This teaching practice aids the Black/African-American women students with discovering their personal voice in regards to their race and gender experiences.

Specifically, in my dissertation reading, I have become more aware of the theoretical actions of several Black/African-American womanist theologians. For most of the womanist theologians, their Christian faith is more than a theoretical framework – it is “a way of life” (Kadlec, 2007) for them. In general, the majority of Black/African-American womanist Christian theologians recognize the significance of their faith in relationship to God and other people. For this reason, I have included theological and non-theological definitions and practices of faith in this dissertation. While some persons in the South may regard the inclusion of non-theological aspects of faith as “secular,” the inclusion of human experience is a relational conceptual theme within Christian womanist theology.

In a study of religious faith communities and the inclusiveness of persons with disabilities, it was determined that those religious faith communities with greater

inclusion practices were “those communities whose leaders were more committed to including people with disabilities” (Griffin, Kane, Taylor, Francis, & Hodapp, 2012, p. 387). Furthermore, the study also determined that social justice actions were more evident within the religious faith communities who deliberately desired to include persons with and without disabilities in their communal outreach programs (Griffin, et. al, 2012, p. 387). For most African-American women educators, social justice is an article of faith (Collins, 1998, p. 248) that assists with the connection between our educational theories and practices as a process of wholeness. In some ways, the theory and practice of wholeness for most Black/African-American womanist educators relates to the centering actions of our faith. Tillich (1957) defines one aspect of faith as the “most centered act of the human mind” (p. 4).

In the Black/African-American womanist tradition, the centering of one’s faith results in the naming of one’s lived experiences. Therefore, educators seeking to foster an inclusive educational environment will engage the faith of their students in the naming of their diverse realities. For example, to name the reality of her educational preparation as a Black woman teacher, Cozart (2010) expresses concern with being “miseducated” in a self-reflective letter. She states, “I was miseducated to value a static and dependable school culture and to uncritically navigate schools for my advantage; that is, I am miseducated to believe that ‘fitting’ the American social order should be my goal” (p. 24). Because of her miseducation, Cozart desires to serve as a mentor to other Black women in teacher education programs in a hope that they, too, will center their cultural experiences within personal teaching and research practices (p. 26).

Additionally, Cozart believes the silence of most Black women in the classroom hinders their pursuit of education (p. 24). Therefore, the acknowledgement and use of voice is a process with becoming whole as a Black/African-American woman educator. Palmer (1998) suggests that one's personal fears in life inhibit the development of connectedness with oneself and with other people (p. 36). For education to become a development of voice in wholeness, Palmer recommends teachers having an awareness of their own fears in order to recognize the fears of their students (p. 47). For instance, in the public school system, when discussing the academic concerns of students, educators are encouraged to think about meeting the needs of the "whole child." To consider the "whole child" includes understanding how the child's health, mental, physical, communication, and intellectual abilities all contribute to the academic achievements of each student.

However, according to Brock (2010), the process of wholeness involves educators assisting students with becoming more self-aware of their interactions and practices with other people (p. 98). Hence, one fear for me involves the potential mislabeling of students within special education, especially students who are identified as English as Second Language (ESL) Learners. Instead of giving ESL students more time to acquire the English language system or providing them with additional vocabulary assistance, some educators are quick to refer some ESL students for special education placement. In my research experiences, I am learning that some ESL students need approximately 5-7 years to gain an adequate understanding of the English academic language. Therefore,

determining if an ESL student is truly learning disabled entails collecting a variety of information beyond general standardized testing measures.

As a practicing speech-language pathologist, I incorporate the student's birth/developmental history, educational progress, native language strengths, second language strengths, parent's input, teacher's report, and standardized assessment results during the decision making process. My current practices are a result of my research awareness to the best practices with identifying some ESL students within special education populations. Moreover, my fears with mislabeling students have decreased through the practical connections of critical pedagogy in self-reflection. In critical pedagogy, self-reflection is utilized in a form of "self-conscious critique" (Giroux, 2001, p. 8). In my educational practice of self-reflection, one perspective that has changed for me is the use of my voice in the language of disability.

For instance, Israelite & Swartz (2004) point out the fluidness with identifying as a person with a disability, particularly women with disabilities. They state, "Some women are born with disabilities; others acquire them. Some are disabled for some portion of their lives, others for their whole lives. Virtually all women can expect to become disabled if they live long enough" (p. 477). From this perspective, the term disability will eventually signify the experiences of most persons in the world. In that case, it appears the term disability functions more as a social construct of language. In the language of disability, one becomes socially identified as being disabled in relationship to other people without disabilities. This designation of disability correlates to the medical model with identifying disabilities.

The medical model defines a disability in regards to social perceptions of “normal” pertaining to one’s physical and/or intellectual abilities (Israelite & Swartz, 2004, p. 472). In the medical model, some persons who are identified with having a disability may internalize the labeling of their disability as being socially deficient in ability (Israelite & Swartz, 2004, p. 472). There are inherent notions of power with labeling persons with disabilities. First, most medical health professionals who diagnose persons with disabilities are nondisabled persons (Israelite & Swartz, 2004, p. 472). In this case, one must question the social benefit with labeling persons with having a disability. Second, the medical model categorizes most disabilities in terms of medical illness, thus, designating persons with disabilities as having terminal sickness (Driedger, 2004, p. 462). Defining disability as an illness facilitates the continual social exclusion of persons with disabilities.

Due to the medical model of disability, most feminist disability studies seek to expand the social interpretations of disability within communal frameworks of persons with similar ability experiences (Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 1558). Thus, Garland-Thomson (2005) recommends using “precise language” terms to discuss the experiences of persons with disabilities such as: “people who identify as disabled or nondisabled,” or “people who are considered disabled” (p. 1558). The purpose with using more detailed descriptions in one’s language problematizes the social constructions of “normalcy” and “disability.” Based on Garland-Thomson’s language use suggestion, I must rethink the use of the phrase “people with disabilities” throughout this chapter. While my intentions

were never to emphasize disability as “abnormal,” I question my presumptuous categorization of disability identity.

Not all persons medically defined as having a disability may identify with that identity. I actually like Garland-Thomson’s recommendation with using “people who are considered disabled” because this description intrinsically questions the social constructions of ability and disability status. The labeling of disability status depends upon who is doing the naming – a person considered nondisabled or a person considered disabled. Consequently, the category of disability cannot be reduced to the medical and/or educational model of identification and labeling of disabilities. As a special educator in the public school system, it is my responsibility to acknowledge how one’s language use and ability status affect one’s perceptions of special education services. Meeting the needs of the “whole child” entails more than simply administering standardized assessments to determine special education eligibility. The process with becoming “whole” is a personal process of self-reflection in one’s actions to people whom we may share similar and/or different standpoints.

Summary

Since we teach and learn within the consciousness of dialogue between teachers and students in education, dialogue functions inside an “engaged pedagogy” of lived experiences in the classroom. Entering into dialogue with other people is a vulnerable and risk-taking experience that requires trust and care. The actions of trust and care are mutually interdependent concepts in dialogue. As a teacher, care is a culturally responsive teaching method to express *care about* and *care for* one’s students (Gay,

2010). In addition, the teacher's actions of care are contingent upon the teacher also receiving care from her students (Noddings, 1984). The notions of care can be expressed in dialogue through one's awareness of the self in relationship with other people. Hence, an educator enters into mutual trust with her students through the sharing of personal lived experiences.

For Freire (1993), mutual trust is a resulting action of dialogue and dialogue is an act of one's faith in people (pp. 90-91). When faith is applied to people in education, it may have a concern of one's existential responsibility to the lives of other people (Tillich, 1957). Since tenets of engaged pedagogy and queer theory center on fostering consciousness through dialogue, both teaching methods are actions of faith with one's students. Furthermore, one task of "prophetic imagination" is to "nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us" (p. 3). Accordingly, I have attempted to incorporate my lived special education experiences as an African-American womanist educator throughout my self-reflections in this chapter. In education, becoming "whole" is a process of teaching and learning within the paradoxes of life (Palmer, 1998).

In the next chapter, I provide a concluding analysis of my lived experiences of faith as a graduate student in a non-theological institution. The primary three themes derived from my graduate school self-reflections are: Faith is a Lived Experience, Faith is a Commitment of Hope, and Faith is Communal Awareness. The discussion of my lived experiences of faith begins with an overview of my decision to apply for my doctorate degree in a personal "stepping out on faith" action. Then, during the

dissertation process, I realize that my actions of faith are also dependent upon having a commitment of hope with completing the journey. Moreover, my lived experiences of faith are interconnected to the communal actions of faith for other Black/African-American women educators.

CHAPTER V

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: MY GRADUATE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES OF FAITH

To be a womanist is to be made whole—to be the continuation of the Black past and builders of the Black future. It encompasses the theological, yes, but also the political, cultural, social, and economic traditions of Black being in the world. It is a way of keeping faith, of renewing that faith, and of passing on the faith of Black folk to the strong Black women and men who keep “a’ comin’ on.

(Hayes, 1995, p. 54)

In Chapter IV, I discussed my self-reflective experiences as a special educator within the public school system. Using a “prophetic imagination” (Brueggemann, 2001), I became more aware of my language use when discussing persons who are considered to be disabled. Furthermore, my “prophetic imagination” kindled consciousness to how social affluence, static religion, and oppressive policies effect special education guidelines, particularly the voices of parents and students. Hence, in an effort to be more inclusive of my voice and experiences, I conveyed my thoughts within the pedagogical practices of “Engaged Pedagogy” (hooks, 1994) and “Queer Theory” (Meyer, 2007) which allowed me to bring voice to the contrasting ability and disability social constructs. Since “Engaged Pedagogy” and “Queer Theory” are integrated within “critical theory” educational principles, I also related both teaching practices as aspects of faith in education.

Neumann (2011) offers three justifications for critical pedagogy as a practice of faith in academia. He states, “critical pedagogy is faith *because* it looks through a glass darkly, *because* it holds an ultimate concern, and *because* it draws from the religious warrants of emancipation and transformation” (pp. 603-604). In Chapter IV, I discuss, in detail, my concern of hope in the education of children who are considered disabled in the public school system. While I also mention personal liberation as a potential affect with using critical pedagogy practices, I do not explicitly state how my thinking and actions have transformed in general as an educator. Furthermore, in Chapter IV, I omitted discoursing about Neumann’s (2011) claim that critical pedagogy is a practice of faith “*because* it looks through a glass darkly” (p.. 603) anticipating further analysis of this claim in this chapter.

Therefore, in this chapter, I will continue to provide a self-reflection of my lived experiences of faith as a graduate student during my doctoral studies in a non-theological setting. More specifically, I will give detailed clarifications to the secondary research questions for this dissertation that are: “How might faith impede my understanding as an educator? and, “How have I navigated faith in a non-theological institution?” Educational pedagogies such as critical theory, engaged pedagogy, and queer theory have facilitated personal awareness to the subjectivity and limits of my faith understanding and practices. In particular, in Chapter I of this dissertation, I indicate the theological scripture reference of “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7) as being somewhat problematic in my daily interactions with other people.

Thus, I make specific references to my experiences of faith and how I have navigated (or not) “looking through a glass darkly” during my graduate studies as a doctoral student. Moreover, I probe the dissertation research and writing process as an experience of faith for me. In my journal self-reflections, three primary themes emerged of my faith experiences in graduate school. The first theme relates to the development of my understanding of faith as a lived experience positioned in dialogue and trust with other people. The second theme focuses on the lived experience of faith with being a commitment of hope in one’s daily educational practices. The third theme reveals the lived experiences of faith as a process of communal awareness in my educational journey. Accordingly, the next section of this chapter points to the first theme of faith for my graduate school experiences.

Faith is Lived Experience

In the Spring/Summer of 2006, I completed the enrollment paperwork to take a graduate level course as a VISIONS Student in the Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations (ELC) Department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. The VISIONS program enables persons to take a maximum of three undergraduate and/or graduate level courses without being an admitted student. Registering in one Educational Leadership course during the Fall 2006 semester provided me the opportunity to determine my interest with submitting application paperwork in pursuit of an educational doctorate degree. While completing the course, I became intrigued with the overall intersectional themes of education and social justice. To my surprise at the time, this

course affirmed and confirmed some of my thoughts pertaining to current educational policies and practices in public school systems.

Because I have characterized my thoughts as being different (in a not so good way) from other people for numerous years, I did not feel comfortable sharing my views with persons who had differing opinions. During this course, however, my thoughts and experiences were validated as an African-American woman educator. Hence, I submitted my Graduate School application for potential admission into the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program in the ELC Department by the end of the semester. Throughout my completion of the application process, I grappled with applying for either a Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) or a Ph.D. with uncertainty about future employment opportunities. With reliance on my Christian faith and trust in God, I “stepped out on faith” in a personal pursuit of higher educational training.

In the majority of my doctoral level courses, I have been encouraged to engage in dialogue with colleagues about class topics and/or readings. Conversations with peers and professors, inside and outside the classroom, have compelled me to think about certain life-long personal beliefs and practices such as faith. Although I have primarily learned about and discussed the term “faith” within Christian theological environments, my attendance at a non-theological educational institution actually inspired further interest with the term. Since my basic familiarity of the term “faith” occurred within Christian religion contexts, my dialogue also focused on the theological aspects of religion and faith during the initial graduate school stages. Writing this dissertation,

however, provides personal assistance to the understanding and practices of faith, particularly in education.

In fact, faith is a foundational component of our dialogical interactions with other human beings (Freire, 1993, pp. 90-91). Dialogue is a primary facilitator of trust between and among people, especially in academia. Trust is proven in the congruence of our words in dialogue and our actions with other people (Freire, 1993, p. 91). One's dialogic faith focuses on one's belief in the capability of social change through other people. Even though dialogue has prompted changes in my personal thoughts and actions, dialogue does not yield the same results of change for all people. This is why dialogue also requires a standpoint of humility and actions of trust in order "*to connect, to enter*" (Belenky, et. al, 1997, p. 227) into the perspective of another person that may generate personal viewpoint changes or not.

For example, when listening to the lived experiences of other people, I occasionally attempt to redefine, in my mind, their experiences through my perspective of faith. Entering into someone else's viewpoint, however, does not necessitate a redefinition of that person's experiences using one's personal interpretation of language, because some persons may feel more comfortable discussing their experiences in terms of hope instead of faith. As a result of dialogue and interdisciplinary reading materials, I now understand the historical connotations with using the word faith primarily within a Christian religion perspective. I acknowledged in the Introduction Chapter that my Christian faith practices might impede my non-theological understanding and applications of faith. Yet, in Chapter II, I discussed having awareness to the various

rejections of “universal faith” lived experience interpretations in terms with having an “ultimate concern” (Tillich, 1957).

Tillich (1957), a theologian, defines faith with having an “ultimate concern” (p. 1). Some persons reject Tillich’s idea due to the theological implications of “ultimate concern” being substantiated in one’s belief in God. While I do believe that all persons have some type of concern in life that gives them a sense of purpose and meaning, I do not think this concern needs to have an “ultimate concern” in connection to religion doctrines and/or belief systems. When the term faith is understood as “concern” in educational theoretical and pedagogical practices, in my opinion, one’s concern is associated directly to one’s daily teaching and learning experiences. As an educator, one of my concern focuses on the inclusion of experiences generally marginalized in mainstream culture, particularly women and persons considered disabled. My graduate school lived experiences, grounded in dialogue, in a non-theological institution have greatly benefited me with understanding the diverse perspectives and concerns regarding the term faith that encourage actions of commitment and hope to the learning process.

Faith is a Commitment of Hope

When I applied to graduate school to formally begin my doctoral studies, I did not have a particular topic focus, or even a topic idea, for my required dissertation research and writing study. In fact, I mentioned in Chapter III that my research interest on the term “faith” initiated in one of my graduate school courses during the 2009 Spring Semester. My research and writing experience on the term has been both enlightening and frustrating sometimes. On the whole, I have enjoyed learning about the varied

definitions and perspectives of faith using an interdisciplinary approach. Though I do not desire to regard myself as an “expert” on the term faith, I will disclose feeling more comfortable in my scholarly discussions and explanations of faith. In the Introduction Chapter, however, I discuss having pains of nausea during the initial research and writing stages on the term faith.

Similar to my initial graduate school application process, this dissertation study is another personally framed experience with “stepping out on faith” in learning more about the term “faith” in both theological and non-theological viewpoints. While this dissertation research process has been informative to my learning, there have been moments of personal frustration and even doubt with completing the final written product of the study. West’s (2011) explanation of “hope on a tightrope” has helped me to cope with balancing the demands of work, dissertation writing, family, and church activities. West discusses “hope on a tightrope” in association to the balancing of our daily actions, in terms of hope, for social improvements for all marginalized and/or oppressed persons. To live a life of hope in one’s actions involves the explicit naming of one’s world.

For instance, the personal naming of my dissertation joys and displeasures in my journal writings facilitates self-reflections on previous thoughts and emotions that have occurred throughout the dissertation process. Though I experienced several instances of emotional distress while writing this dissertation, I have always attempted to stay committed to my chosen topic within a qualitative writing method. Thus, in the forefront of my mind is the hope that the dissertation process will eventually be completed. Reading about the dissertation experiences of other scholars, like Harris (2011), also

offers support to persons who experience challenges during their dissertation process. In an article, Harris discusses her decisions with changing the intended dissertation methodology while reviewing and analyzing her narrative data.

Harris's explanation for changing her initial dissertation methodology framework permits an understanding that even though our research plans may require some modifications the goal is to stay committed to completing the dissertation process and not a particular methodology framework. Thus, naming one's lived experiences may benefit the actions of hope and/or faith for some people. Because of Harris's narrative account of her dissertation methodology adjustments, I am able to have hope in the anticipation of final dissertation completion even in the midst of revisions. Likewise, naming my lived experiences is an action of faith that situates me as the "qualitative author" (Dantley, 2005, p. 7) of my life. In fact, writing a qualitative dissertation about my lived experiences has been somewhat of a difficult process for me. Since my educational background and work experience focus on the interpretation of standardized assessment scores, I am more comfortable with analyzing data using quantitative descriptions.

Thus, writing a qualitative dissertation on the term faith is also an opportunity for me to step outside my quantitative analysis comfort zone; especially since the term faith is generally quantified in most contexts of religion. When faith is quantified, one becomes more consumed with "how much" or "how little" faith one cultivates as a possession. In contrast, qualitative descriptions of faith encourage one to understand the "lived realities" (Dantley, 2005, p. 7) of one's experiences. Due to the fact that all of my educational experiences have been within non-theological settings, it appears that my

transition to qualitative writing methods is a result of my department's commitment to the inclusion of qualitative writing practices. This action is a form of faith and hope in a departmental commitment with assisting student's to name their "lived realities" of despair and hope that foster collective awareness to our interactions with other people.

Faith is Communal Awareness

In the discussion of faith and lived experiences, I acknowledge that the beginning stages of my doctoral studies initiated as a personal action with "stepping out on faith." Now, at the near end of this dissertation process, I recognize this doctoral journey has never been solely about my personal "stepping out on faith" actions. Although the phrase "stepping out on faith" had a very Christian religion language undertone for me, Dillard (2000) reveals the "stepping out on faith" expression as lived experience actions of Black/African-American women educators in public educational institutions (p. 674). In other words, my action with "stepping out on faith" should have both personal and communal implications of significance. According to Fowler (1996), one aspect of faith involves having "shared centers of meaning, value, and power" with oneself and other people (p. 22).

Thus, in the Southern Christian community, "stepping out on faith" is relative to one's lived experiences of trust and belief in God and Jesus, God's Messiah. In contrast, in the educational leadership community "stepping out on faith" for most Black/African-American women educators, conveys trust and belief in one's interactions with other people. Hence, my experiences of faith are relational to other persons who have nurtured the development of my thinking and writing skills as well as my African-American

ancestors. Many of my African-American ancestors endured extreme social injustices based on their race (Black) and/or gender (woman) identity. The “Nguzo Saba” principle of “Imani” or “Faith” encourages African-American persons “to believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness of victory of our struggle” (Karenga & Karenga, 2007, p. 24).

The “Imani” or “Faith” principle is also mindful to the necessity with centering one’s communal identity in one’s actions of faith. According to Tillich (1957), actions of faith occur in the “center of the personal life and includes all its elements” (p. 4). For numerous African-American women educators, our faith in naming our standpoints as feminist or womanist educators results within the centering of our personal identities. Naming our particular educational womanist or feminist standpoints also relates to our actions of care for and with our students. As a womanist educator, my actions with “stepping out on faith” bring awareness to the communal responsibilities of my faith experiences with other people. In other words, I should continually ask myself – Who benefits from my actions of faith?

In general, most African-American women educators “step out on faith” in their educational practices for and with other marginalized and/or oppressed persons (Dillard, 2000, p. 674). For this reason, I included a dissertation chapter on the education and placement of persons considered to be disabled in public school settings. My professional experience in the special education department facilitates consciousness to the labeling and identification of students with having “special needs.” The labeling of students with having disabilities can have detrimental effects on the schooling

experiences of both students and their parents. Thus, pedagogy practices such as critical theory reassure me of the need with being self-critical of my faith actions on behalf of my students.

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to be self-critical with personal actions of faith in my self-reflective experiences. Self-reflection promotes awareness to the connections between the understanding of various theoretical/pedagogical frameworks and the practical applications of my actions. Freire (1993) explains, “the teacher-student and the students-teachers reflect simultaneously on themselves and the world without dichotomizing this reflection from action, and thus establish an authentic form of thought and action” (p. 83). In my chapter analysis of a fragmented self, I conclude the chapter by defining the characteristics of an authentic researcher. Guignon (2004) believes authenticity derives with the connections of one’s thoughts and actions in the world (p. 146).

Furthermore, authentic interactions help to establish faith as trust in one’s dialogue with other people. The engagement of dialogue requires having an awareness of one’s faith in people to express their thoughts while also “entering into” the perspective of another person (Belenky, et. al, 1997, p. 227). Hence, one’s personal lived experiences of faith are relational and interdependent in one’s actions with other people. As an African-American womanist educator, my lived experiences of faith are established upon the communal naming actions of other Black/African-American women educators. Having awareness to my actions of faith within a communal network provides a sense of “shared meaning” (Fowler, 1996, p. 22) in my interactions with other people.

Conclusion

In this dissertation study, I integrated theoretical principles (i.e. lived experiences, dialogue, ethic of care, and ethic of personal accountability) of Collins's (2009) Black Feminist Epistemology using self-reflections as the primary methodological process. More specifically, the incorporation of self-reflections facilitated the inclusion of my lived experiences throughout the dissertation. For this self-inquiry of the term faith, there were three research questions. The primary research question was "How does faith assist me with making meaning as an educator?" To answer this question, in Chapter III, I outlined three themes of faith relevant to the lived experiences of Black/African-American women educators. The three themes of faith include "Faith as Trust," "Faith as Naming," and "Faith as Hope."

In the "Faith as Trust" section, the terms faith and trust are discussed as being interdependent within our dialogical interactions. Having faith in people is essential for the conversational engagement of thoughts with other people (Freire, 1993). In dialogue, trust results when our words become akin to our actions (Freire, 1993) with and for other people. In the "Faith as Naming" section, faith is described as an action with naming one's "lived realities" (Dantley, 2005) in the world. For most Black/African-American women educators, the naming of one's lived experiences of faith develops within the feminist and/or womanist scholarly traditions. Accordingly, I participate with faith as naming through the explanation of my standpoint as a womanist educator. Within the womanist scholarly traditions, our faith as hope generally focuses on the educational

needs of children, women, and men. Thus, our faith as hope is a lived experience with being advocates of social justice inside educational institutions.

One of the secondary research questions queried, “How might faith impede my understanding as an educator?” In my educational practices, the term faith might impede personal understanding and explanations of lived experiences outside the framework of faith. Though I acknowledge the rejection of “universal” and/or “ultimate” faith experiences for all people, my daily actions of faith are supported in my Christian faith beliefs and practices. Writing this dissertation on the term faith using both theological and non-theological perspectives has assisted me with becoming more comfortable in my actions of faith with other people in a variety of settings. However, regardless of the setting, I recognize the establishment of my actions often corresponds to my faith in God and people, which may impede the personal understanding of lived experiences at times.

The other secondary research question probed, “How have I navigated faith in a non-theological institution?” In Chapter V, I gave a brief synopsis of my lived experiences of faith in a non-theological institution. Based on my graduate school self-reflections, I discuss faith in terms of my lived experiences, actions of commitment and hope, and communal awareness. My lived experiences of faith are usually in connection to the lived experiences of faith with other Black/African-American women educators that is demonstrated in our social actions of commitment and hope to a more inclusive education for all marginalized persons. As a result, I believe my attendance in a non-theological institution has fostered further understanding on the term faith that is reflected in my lived experiences of faith in dialogue, naming, commitment, hope, and trust.

Furthermore, to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7) implies being comfortable with not understanding the resulting implications of our faith actions with and for other people. As a practicing Christian womanist educator, my actions of faith are rooted in my belief in the power of God to guide my personal and communal interactions. From a critical theory standpoint, “to look through a glass darkly” (Neumann, 2011) involves recognizing the uncertainties of our knowledge in the teaching and learning process. Thus, while I have provided a self-reflective interpretation of faith in this dissertation, I recognize that my interpretations of faith will continue to evolve in connection to my personal and communal lived experiences of faith. Moreover, it appears that “walking by faith” and “looking through a glass darkly” are best understood in self-reflections of our lived experiences that inform the uncertainties of our present and future faith practices.

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