

RICKS, SHAWN ARANGO, Ph.D. *Tight Spaces, Contextualizing the Journey of My Experiences: Black Feminist Scholars Negotiating Power, Navigating Oppression, and Resisting Domination While Dismantling This Old House*. (2011)
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The purpose of this study is to “make sense” of how Black Feminist Scholars negotiate power, navigate oppression, and resist domination while dismantling the institutional structures of the academy in order to engage in liberatory practices. Utilizing Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism, and Critical Discourse Analysis, I conduct a secondary and textual analysis of the following works: *Sister Outsider* (2007) by Audre Lorde, and *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) by bell hooks. Because it serves as the foundation to Black Feminist Scholarship, I utilize *Black Feminist Thought* (1990, 2009) by Patricia Hill Collins as the central Black Feminist Epistemological framework for this inquiry project. The words within these texts have multiple meanings within global, social, political, and historical conditions and are interwoven within psychological, sociological, and historical frameworks that are not bound by fixed apparatuses. Utilizing these selected works as primary sources, I generate a framework for Black Women to successfully negotiate their multiple marginalizations (tight spaces) within hegemonic institutions of domination—the academy. Many additional works from these and other scholars are interrogated and included in this project; however, these specific writings serve as the foundation for exploring areas of convergence and divergence within my own professional and personal lived experiences. Critical Discourse Analysis provides the researcher with clear connections between the use of language and the exercise of power (Thompson, 2002).

By engaging in Critical Discourse Analyses of these texts, I believe the intersectionality of their radical feminist rhetoric(s) presented will provide intellectual, spiritual and pedagogical constructs for Black Feminist Scholars who serve in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and particularly, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Finally, by engaging this inquiry project; it is my hope new knowledge is not only consumed; but transformational knowledge is produced and utilized as a roadmap for other Black women in the academy as they journey along their path of the unfamiliar.

TIGHT SPACES, CONTEXTUALIZING THE JOURNEY OF MY EXPERIENCES:
BLACK FEMINIST SCHOLARS NEGOTIATING POWER, NAVIGATING
OPPRESSION, AND RESISTING DOMINATION WHILE
DISMANTLING THIS OLD HOUSE

by

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To my husband, Darrell Ricks,
whose love, patience and support made this project possible.

To my children, Imani, Nia, and Nathan
my faith, purpose, and gifts from God.

APPROVAL PAGE

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

When I dare to be powerful,
to use my strength in the service of my vision,
then it becomes less and less important
whether I am afraid

(Audre Lorde)

My mother and grandmother valued education. Although limited in their knowledge and exposure to the formal system of education, they believed that if I, or any Black child, was going to “make it” we needed an education. In pursuing the goal of achieving an education, I attended twelve schools in 10 years (ranging from “low-performing” neighborhood schools to “private” and Montessori). This unique experience gave me my first real lessons in conscious duality and my first experience with tight spaces—the psychological residue of my multiple marginalizations.

The writing of this dissertation is in response to my experiences in academe. Although I feel the pursuit of being educated should be liberating, it continues to bind me with new-sophisticated chains such as: ‘scholarship,’ ‘minority,’ ‘disadvantaged,’ and ‘token.’ To preserve my sanity, I undertook a paradigm shift that demanded a certain amount of self-confidence and security. My journey has taken me from being a “round the way” girl to grassroots activist to carpooling mom to my present position: tenure-track faculty member.

My experiences as a student at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), and a professor at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) have inspired this work. I have experienced “chilly classrooms” and hostile working environments.

Because of these experiences, I have learned how to create community nets of safety, protection, and activism to guide me through these perilous journeys. As a professor, I have observed the dynamics of Black faculty women who “get it done” to prove that they can; and sat stunned at faculty meetings dominated by white male voices who have referred to my current employment location in the past, as “The Plantation.” I am continuously in a fight for survival! As a mentor, I spend countless hours training, advising and guiding students along this treacherous path, hours most of my white counterparts do not spend. Yet there is no line on the faculty evaluation form for mentoring. As I grew weary in my journey, I felt confident that I was not alone in my need for new and creative coping mechanisms to deal with my marginalization. I have exhausted all possible resources, and have come to realize that I am no longer able to utilize my grandmother’s kitchen table for advice, comfort, or even respite. Therefore this dissertation was never optional, it is indeed necessary to preserve the “mutiplexities of myself” as I navigate the tight spaces of the academy. This work is also a tool to explore the usefulness of this information and its application to the lives and scholarship of future Black feminist scholars. As Evans (2007) notes:

Black women’s claimed space, negotiation of social contracts, contributions of ideas, and upholding of social hierarchies all must be explored in future research. Considering marginalized perspectives is essential to evaluation in higher education; alternative narratives offer engaging solutions that address complexities, in new, old, and significant ways. (p. 197)

This work speaks to navigating and negotiating my multiple selves—the roles that are required and expected—as well as my own psychological “conversations” with myself which will allow me to remain sane in an insane world.

EXPLANATIONS AND TERMS

African-American, Black, and white: Throughout this dissertation (inquiry project), I utilize African American and Black interchangeably. Both terms are commonly accepted; however, I prefer using Black when connecting the historical significance of Slavery to people who self identify as Black within the United States. This is keeping in line with the legal definition by the United States Census Bureau; however, I also believe because of the socio-cultural dynamics of integration to utilize the terms interchangeably goes in keeping with the spirit of this project. I utilize the term white often in its lower case form to refer to white people, white women, white groups, and white communities as a reminder of the scope of this project: dismantling the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy inherent in our institutions of domination.

Capitalization: One author in this dissertation does not capitalize her name. I follow the APA 6th edition guidelines for capitalization; however, in this case, I follow the wishes of the author.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): a type of discourse analytical research which studies the way dominance, inequality, and social power abuse are reproduced, enacted, and resisted by talk, text, and speech within political, historical, and social context.

Researchers who utilize CDA strive to expose, understand, and resist social inequality.

Critical Legal Studies (CLS): a radical movement started by white male members of legal academia in the 1970s. This movement focused on postmodern critiques of hierarchy, privilege, and consumeristic individualism in modern Western society. This

movement challenged modernist ideology regarding women and people of color; particularly within the construct of the objectivity of laws that oppressed individuals who were not members of the dominant culture.

Critical Race Feminism (CRF): a genre of scholarship evolving from the writings of three hundred women of color who teach in legal academia. This work examines the intersection of gender, race, and class within a legal and/or multidisciplinary context. It has roots in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Legal Studies (CLS).

Critical Race Theory (CRT): a movement with its intellectual underpinnings found in the works of Derrick Bell, Robert Cover, A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., Kimberle Crenshaw, and other progressive intellectuals. The development of CRT grew out of the works of legal scholars and researchers of color who embraced some tenets of CLS. Its focus: to confront critically the historical complicity and centrality of law upholding white supremacy and hierarchies of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation.

Domination: the use of power, perceived and/or rule; institutional practices/structures; laws/policies/rules; and systems to reify hegemony and the values of the white dominant culture to create a sense of “normalcy.” People who are different (white male protestant) are “othered” and viewed as “less than.” Oppression is at the core of domination.

Feminist Rhetoric: the language, text, speech, and/or discourse of the collective social, historical, cultural, political, and/or academic movements that make us aware of gender, its privilege and inequity. It move beyond speaking to women but to all groups (male, female, queer, transgendered, Black, Latina, white, gay, straight).

Marginalization: the social process of being made or becoming marginalized (relegated to the fringes, made to seem unimportant, out of the mainstream).

Black Feminist Scholar: This term is used throughout this dissertation to refer Black women who have demonstrated an interest in “locating [them]selves” (Villaverde, 2008, p. 10) to create counter-hegemonic discourses that allowed them to explore their positionality. Although the term “scholar” is utilized to refer to the three women researched, this term is used to refer to the commonality of knowledge that has been created by Black women for survival and recognizes that “scholars” does not refer to only those with a formal education, but also those Black women that have created “commonplace and specialized” knowledge (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 38).

Oppression: the inequitable and unjust use of power and authority resulting in the privileging of the white dominant culture over individuals, groups, and/or communities who non-members.

Power: I utilize Foucault’s (1979) definition of power:

[Power] is the moving substrate of force relations, which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. [It] is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength that we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (p. 93)

CHAPTER I

SETTING THE CONTEXT: MY JOURNEY BEGINS

But teaching was about service, giving back to one's community. For Black folks teaching—educating—was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle. (bell hooks)

Black women have participated in American higher education for more than one hundred years. Despite enduring personal and professional barriers, many have made significant advances and many have reaped the benefits of their contributions (Gregory, 2001). The history of Black women in the United States is best described as a struggle for identity and survival paired with the desire to protect and support the family. Currently, Black women have successfully emerged from a threefold shroud of oppression consisting of sexism, classism, and racism (Hudson-Weems, 1989). Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 2009) in her groundbreaking work, *Black Feminist Thought*, situated Black Feminist epistemologies into the following three themes:

- Oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation are intersecting, mutually constructing systems of power.
- Because Black women have unique histories at the intersections of systems of power, they have created worldviews out of a need for self-definition and to work on behalf of social justice.

- Black women’s specific experiences with intersecting systems of oppression provide a window into these same processes for other individuals and social groups.

These barriers have often been coupled with low socioeconomic status and limited resources; however, Black women as a group have been resilient.

Psychologists, jurists, and scientists have documented the multiple types of oppression Black women have experienced in America, however few studies have investigated the impact of Black Feminist Rhetoric on Black Feminist Academicians. Over the last 20 years Critical Race Feminism and Critical Race Theory has provided scholarship for engaging in anti-oppressive practices. These movements have also created different ways of knowing, thinking and being in both academic communities and the black public sphere. According to Holt (1995),

the contemporary Black public sphere is partly the creature of the political economy of a global, advanced capitalist order, but in the past it has offered—and may yet again offer—space for critique and transformation of that order. If not, then all this is only idle talk. (p. 328)

The Black public sphere is a critical space where emergent diasporic negotiations and articulations of new democratic forms bombard one another and create synergistic quantum leaps. Robbins (1993) argues:

Theorists have sought to pluralize and multiply the concept. Thus we now speak of alternative public spheres and counter publics . . . This move, which reflects the realities of identity politics in an age of mass media, pulls us away from Habermas, but also pulls us away from any simple rejection of Habermas or “republican virtue” . . . Unlike “hegemony,” the public sphere is less on the side

of rule, more open to opposing views. Unlike creature it is more obviously a site of intersections with other classes and cultures. (p. xvii)

The black public sphere continues to be impacted by popular culture and various discourses, which is often viewed as monolithic by the white establishment. I believe this has created more difficulty for critical pedagogues and scholars who operate from social justice and anti-oppressive frameworks. Issues of power, or the lack thereof, are evident in the black public sphere; however issues of influence on the American psyche by the black public sphere is evidenced via the entertainment and sports arena. This further exacerbates the historical significance and tropes of slavery and hegemony. What is most problematic is the use of the black female body in the black public sphere by black females and black males who claim independence from entertainment executives and self-ownership as tools of consumption. This goes to the very nature of the tight spaces black women continue to negotiate. When they are empowered and in-power, they are yet powerless.

Educators and the institution of education operate from and are constructed by social and historical relations of power. Because of this, privileged narrative spaces are constructed for some social groups (dominant culture) and a space for inequality and subordination are constructed for the “other.” I agree with Foucault (1979) that power is not imposed from above, but that operations of power and their success depend on consent from below. Power is produced and reproduced in the rituals of everyday life and is ubiquitous. Black Feminist Educators, Scholars and Academicians daily negotiate power, navigate oppression and resist domination. I am not denying that other women of

color and white women do not have similar struggles; however, within the socio-cultural, political, and historical framework of American society and given the intricate ramifications of slavery within this country, our positionalities are often situated within “tight spaces.”

Description of the Problem

The African proverb, “She who learns must also teach,” speaks to the importance attached to the role and responsibility of Black women faculty in sharing their knowledge regardless of any oppositions or challenges they may have faced. Education has been an integral part of the survival and liberation of African Americans since their arrival in the Americas in the 1600s (Bennett Jr., 1988; Camp, 2004; Franklin & Moss, 1994; Gaspar & Hine, 1996; Giddings, 1984; Harrison, 2009; Kolchin, 1993; Lerner, 1972; Morgan, 2004; Sterling, 1984; Takaki, 1993). Although education was ruled illegal, slaves recognized the importance and need for basic skills (such as reading and writing) to their freedom and survival. Many slaves risked their lives and created underground schools and systems to teach one another and the next generation.

Black women, familiar with the blatant oppression of slavery and post anti-bellum oppression; began to wrestle with being ostracized by white women and Black male movements. In addition, their relationships with Black men were tainted by the dynamics of sexism, creating an additional barrier for Black women to hurdle. Time and history reveals the intersectionality of oppression for Black women to include: racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism. This matrix of oppression (Hill Collins, 1990) has Black feminist scholars caught in the crossfire.

From a long history of advocacy and support, I propose the role of Black women in the academy is shifting due to an increase in the number of Black women receiving Doctoral degrees over the past 25 years. Although at many institutions, Black women appear to be an integral part of the Ivory Tower, they continue to deal with the repercussions of their inclusion. I am not suggesting other faculty of color or white faculty from historically impoverished backgrounds are not experiencing levels of repercussions; however, I have witnessed via personal and professional experiences the heightened level of scrutiny via the tenure and promotion process, as well as the insurmountable service and teaching requirements many Black female faculty have to endure at both PWIs (Predominantly White Institutions) and HBCUS (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). This along with the socio-cultural and political dimensions based on gender “norms” and expected traditional familial roles has presented complex challenges to Black women. The level of anxiety we experience as we began to learn to navigate our role as “outsiders within” is insurmountable for some of my sisters. They finally decide to just give up. Surviving hegemonic institutions of domination will require Black women to learn strategies of resistance to deal with their “tight spaces.”

Research Question

How might a Critical Discourse Analyses of *Sister Outsider*, by Audre Lorde and *Teaching to Transgress*, by bell hooks create a framework for Black women to be successful in the academy, as well as within a global community context?

How might the Black Feminist Rhetoric(s) of Lorde and hooks create a framework for Black Feminist Scholars at HBCUs to engage in liberatory practices?

Would the selected works of Lorde and hooks be conducive to create a Professional Toolkit for Black Feminist Scholars' survival at HBCUs?

Description of the Study

Throughout history, in order for Black women to survive their multiple marginality and the resulting tight spaces of their oppression they relied upon faith, social support, body ownership, and unique defense mechanisms (Daly, Jennings, Beckett, & Leashore, 1995; Howard-Vital, 1989; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; St. Jean & Feagin, 1998; Terhune, 2007; Wilson, 2009). These coping methods and strategies were vital in the lives of Black women. They created spaces of support and encouragement within faith communities, sewing circles, civic/social organizations, and in learning communities. These strategies were typically handed down generationally utilizing the rich oral tradition of our ancestors (Bennett Jr., 1988; Daly et al., 1995; Giddings, 1984), and were often included in kitchen table talk, where Black women shared formal and informal warnings and tips on how to navigate the “other” world. These coping methods are now problematized by the shifting nature of oppression; increased class mobility; greater educational achievement; geographic isolation; and a decline in the sense of community being experienced by some African American scholars as a result of their class mobility (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Tatum, 1987). This has created a void for Black women; particularly, young black women, like myself, who are in the academy and other professions to bring about change, without a foundation in Black Feminist Rhetoric, Critical Race Feminism, Critical Race Theory, and/or Black Feminist/Womanist

epistemologies. Many of these women are serving in the role of educator with decreased access to the wisdom and influence of their elders as a guide.

This study, through Critical Discourse Analyses (CDA) of selected works from hooks and Lorde seeks to create a framework and toolkit for pre-service and in-service Black Feminist Educators in the public sphere—the academy. I consider educators who are living out their practice and mission as “agents of change” in the public sphere. The public sphere is the arena of learning communities that are common to our society. Regardless of the Black Feminist Educator’s locale; her work impacts the public. The difficulty of meeting the demands on her in the multiple roles she inhabits impacts how she situates the importance of her liberatory practice. Whether it is in the academy, while striving to meet the demands of the tenure-track, or serving in the role of caretaker, the Black Feminist Educator continues to negotiate power, navigate oppression, and/or resist domination.

Recognizing the limitations of attempting to research experiences on the surface that many believe to be monolithic, I engage an inquiry project that focuses on the works of three Black Feminist scholars who are well read and notable across multiple communities. What I find interesting is that although hooks, Hill Collins, and Lorde have defining experiences unique to their own circumstances and conditions, collectively they offer a Black Feminist Rhetoric that is transforming, engaging, and powerful. Clearly there is no one experience in the United States or globally, for Black women; however, the rhetoric of these women offer a criticality that transcends times, space, and difference. The commonality of their vision and the intersection of their ideologies, provide a space

for engaging inquiry to discover a “truth telling” that serves as the road map to the journey of Black women within the Global Diaspora. Yet, it is understood that the diversity of our experiences (based on class, sexual orientation, education, employment) shape the understanding of our identities and lived experiences; however, what is more important, specifically to this work is the standpoint of Black women which continues to create spaces for global transformation. This cannot be overlooked. So, through analyzing the works of hooks and Lorde at my disposal is a key feature of Black feminist thought: “asking the right questions and investigating all dimensions of a Black women standpoint” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 37)

Significance of the Study

Black women since the inception of *Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Essence* have engaged their elders via popular text. We have filled our kitchen tables with the works of Black writers, and specifically Black Feminist writers who have responded to our marginalization through their counter-hegemonic discourses. However, since the dawn of the Internet and World Wide Web, since the explosion of social networking sites, and mediated imagery that’s presented across streaming video at the command of the “point & click,” of a mouse; many young Black Feminist Scholars who find themselves as social agents are continuing to experience barriers (Cooper & Gause, 2007; Roseboro & Gause, 2009).

There are significant contributions from scholars of color, and I believe hooks, Lorde, and Hill Collins, who are considered to be exemplars and luminaries in the field of gender studies, sociology, and the humanities, offer considerable rhetoric(s) in

developing a tool kit for negotiating power, navigating oppression, and resisting domination within institutional structures that are filled with white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 1994). Utilizing critical discourse analysis, these responses are analyzed for their current relevance and potential in creating a toolkit for African American women to dismantle this old house. Black women are continuously looking for their footing in shifting ground. This, in and of itself, is not unique to Black women; however the significance of how Black women have had to deal with the shifting nature of oppression does possess some unique elements.

Creating new ways of knowing and being is not a new phenomenon for Black women. The work of Alice Walker (1983) and the Combahee River Collective (1983) are examples of attempts by Black women to create new ways of dealing with their marginality. For me and many other young Black Feminist Educators/Scholars we look to the works of other Black Feminist Educators/Scholars for tools and strategies for surviving the marginality that we experience in institutions. As Hill Collins (2009) opines, “as social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them” (p. 43). It is my contention to develop a toolkit through this dissertation/inquiry project that will assist Black Feminist Educators/Scholars in negotiating power, navigating oppression, and resisting domination within institutional structures while seeking to engage in liberatory practice.

The result of the discourse analysis is compared to my lived experiences as a Black Feminist Scholar, and areas of convergence and divergence are explored. Finally, these works will be explored to see how they inform the intellectual, spiritual and

psychological development of Black women navigating the politics inherent in institutions of domination. This work is also important because it is about me. The beauty of writing about this topic is that the results will not only inform the larger academic community, but will inform my professional and personal development.

The importance of this work is supported by the vast amount of research conducted on the challenges faced by U.S. Black women in the academy. Research studies have examined the current challenges faced by Black female faculty (Bambara, 1970; Beoku-Betts & Njambi, 2009; Brown-Glaude, 2010; Evans, 2007; Gregory, 1995; hooks, 2004; Hill Collins, 1990, 2000; Lerner, 1973; Sterling, 1984), while personal narratives have shared stories of survival and resistance (Brock, 2005; Carter-Black, 2008; hooks, 2004). One study of Black women in the Academy working in the United Kingdom grounded their research in the work of hooks, Lorde, and Hill Collins (Burke, Cropper, & Harrison, 2000). Yet, no similar research has been conducted in the United States, the home of the aforementioned authors. As Black women are being researched our experiences continue to change, making it critical that researched be continuous. Evans (2007) notes: “African American women’s experiences and ideas, though in many ways timeless, are significantly challenged by the complexities of twenty-first century institutions; as problems change over time, so should solutions” (p. 195).

With an increasing number of Black women receiving doctoral degrees, the illusion of progress continues to paint a picture of equality and equity in America. Yet closer examination reveals a hidden picture. Although Black women are increasing in the number of PhDs acquired, there still exists a lack of racial parity. In 2010, 7.1% of Black

women received their terminal degree; yet Blacks make up about 13% of the population in the United States. The fields in which Black women receive their terminal degrees (primarily education) and the institutions they work in upon completion continue to be disproportionate in comparison with their white counterparts. Black women work at less prestigious institutions; receive tenure at a rate much lower than their colleagues; and are often clustered in clinical, assistant, instructor, and other “academic apartheid” positions (Gregory, 2001). This has led to Black women being utilized as what Harley (2008) terms “maids of academe” and has created “one of the most isolated, underused, and consequently demoralized segments of the academic community” (Carter, as cited in Harley, 2008, p. 21).

Recognizing “language is also a place of struggle,” each woman explored in this research project wrote to create spaces of resistance. hooks states “spaces can be real or imagined. Spaces can tell stories and unfold histories. Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice” (as cited in Harding, 2004, p. 159). For bell hooks it was issues of class, belonging, and liberation. She was selected for this study primarily for her work on reclaiming the margins as spaces of resistance for African American women. Patricia Hill Collins was selected for this project because of her work on Black women as “outsiders within,” and her theoretical framework of Black Feminist Thought. Finally, Audre Lorde was selected in part for her work on the “many layers of selfhood” as well as the emancipatory nature of her writing. All three scholars contributed unique points of views, yet their common research interests address an area I have been burning to explore: the navigation and preservation of self.

Rationale

A Critical Discourse Analyses of the work of Lorde, hooks, and Hill Collins can provide additional lenses through which Black women in the academy can view themselves. Research continues to support the struggles of Black female faculty at both the micro (tenure and promotion, etc.) and macro (institutional barriers) levels. The thoughtful critique of works done by African American feminist scholars can create an additional way of being and knowing the world for Black women in the academy. This dissertation recognizes that “black women intellectuals have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society, and in doing so, create a multifaceted, African American women’s intellectual tradition” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 5). This standpoint can assist Black women as we develop our consciousness, and could potentially add to the “collective group consciousness” of African American women.

This work is also important as the survival strategies discussed earlier above, and in more detail in the literature review, seem to be reactive, and at times pathological. Black women cannot continue to survive by reacting to oppression with tools that do not eventually allow us to use, or understand, our condition in a more psychologically healthy way. Black women are in search of survival strategies that are liberatory, allowing us to transcend the psychological constraints we may find ourselves in, and engage the real issues we are struggling with in our daily lives. Part of this liberation will demand an understanding of the critical role voice plays in the struggle from the

oppressor, it is a starting point at which many Black women stand, afraid and silenced.

In the poem, *A Litany for Survival*, Lorde (1978) addresses this fear:

and when we speak we are afraid
 our words will not be heard
 nor welcomed
 but when we are silent
 we are still afraid
 So it is better to speak
 Remembering
 we were never meant to survive. (p. 32)

In an attempt to answer more sophisticated questions, questions our aunts, mothers, and grandmothers may not be able to answer, Black female scholars have searched the literature of those they emulate. As hooks (1996) recounts,

many times readers come up to me and say, ‘I was sitting at home, asking myself those questions and asking myself how I would deal with them, and then I come to something you’ve written, and you help me understand not only how I got to where I am but how I can move further on.’ (p. 818)

This type of critical engagement of literature helps create a standpoint for Black feminist scholars solidifying the importance of theory as it relates to action, and beginning to shake the foundation of fear.

I approach this research utilizing an interdisciplinary theoretical framework including Critical Race Theory, Critical Race feminism, Black feminist thought and Critical Discourse Analysis. All of the above theoretical orientations have one major commonality—the role and influence of power in the creation and maintenance of systems that support the status quo. The role of power, from a Foucauldian perspective,

will be explored more in depth in the literature review. This interdisciplinary method was the best approach for this inquiry project because it created “the net that contain[ed] the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 33). Lincoln and Guba (1985) also discuss the need for flexibility within and between methodologies, “inquiry methodology can no longer be treated as a set of universally applicable rules or abstractions. Methodology is inevitably interwoven with and emerges from the nature of particular disciplines . . . and particular perspectives” (p. 16). Lastly, this research project acknowledges,

Black women’s claimed space, negotiation of social contracts, contributions of ideas, and upholding of social hierarchies all must be explored in future research. Considering marginalized perspectives is essential to evaluation in higher education; alternative narratives offer engaging solutions that address complexities, in new, old, and significant ways. (Evans, 2007, p. 197)

Examining Black Feminist Scholars

The examination of Black Feminist Scholars can inform African American women who are numerically increasing in areas (school, work, etc.) in which they have been traditionally underrepresented. The thoughtful critique of works done by African American feminist scholars, and the revelations born from careful self reflection, can act as a buffer to the latent hostility and racism filling the arenas in which we live, play and work. This project recognizes that “black women intellectuals have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on self, community, and society, and in doing so, create a multifaceted, African American women’s intellectual tradition” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 5). This standpoint can assist Black women as we develop our consciousness,

and potentially add to the “collective group consciousness” of members within our global community.

Challenges

Within this inquiry project, the researcher acknowledges there is no monolithic experience for Black women in Academia, as institutions vary in size, location, and demographics; creating nuances within campus cultures. However, research has demonstrated enough similarities between experiences to justify a standpoint for the experiences of Black women in academia. The following section will explore the research regarding the current climate for Black women in Academia today.

According to hooks (1996) “Academe is, essentially, a competitive corporate structure. Many of us academics now operate competitively within feminist circles. In an atmosphere of competition, people become more guarded, more defensive, and, frankly, more paranoid” (p. 824). This type of environment, one which creates defensiveness, competition and paranoia, is not healthy for most individuals; however this environment takes an especially hard toll on Black women in academia (Gregory, 1995; Moses, 1989). Black women in academe experience additional challenges such as: feelings of alienation/isolation; tokenism; cultural taxation; mentoring; service work; internalized oppression; role strain; and psychological and physical health issues (Gregory, 2001).

Chapter Summary

The marginalization of Black women has been well documented throughout history. In response, Black women have created ways of knowing to allow them to

survive hostile environments. This multiple marginalization has led to tight spaces Black women are forced to navigate in order to survive. Coping strategies are now problematized by the shifting nature of oppression in America, geographic isolation, increased class mobility, and greater educational achievement. Grounded in the distinguishing features of Critical Race Feminism (CRF), Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Feminist Rhetoric and utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), I explore the selected works of three well-known Black Feminist Educators/Scholars; Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, to examine and develop a critical framework and tool-kit for Black women in the twenty-first century. All of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks and scholars situate much of their scholarship in Critical Theory. A foundational premise of Critical Theory is social theory regardless of whether it is reflected towards educational research, philosophy, literature, art, or business; should play a vital role in changing the world and not heavily concerned with just recording information.

The historical marginalization of Black women across multiple domains in their lives (work, social institutions, academia, and interpersonal) has been well documented, and has created tight spaces in which African American feminist scholars must learn to navigate (Bambara, 1970; Camp, 2004; Carroll, 1982; Carter-Black, 2008; Evans, 2007; Giddings, 1984; Hill Collins, 1990; hooks, 1989, 2004; Lorde, 2007). Although the scope of this dissertation is limited to Black feminist scholars in the Academy, it is crucial to recognize two important points. First, many of the issues facing Black feminist scholars in the academy overlap with issues facing *all* Black women. However, the role

of power in the academy has created a unique culture that demands a variation to established coping methods. Secondly, all Black women in the academy deal with oppression and marginalization, from professors to administrative and janitorial staff. Although the scope of this dissertation was limited to scholars, I am guided by the words of Angela Davis (1994): “Self-preservation demands that [educated Black women] go among the lowly, illiterate and even the vicious, to who they are bound by ties of race and sex . . . to reclaim them” (p. 423).

Chapter II provides a framework for understanding the historical development of coping methods utilized by Black women both inside, and outside, the academy. This chapter begins with a brief history of Black women and education, Black women in academia and discusses coping methods utilized in both arenas.

Chapter III provides the reader with the qualitative frameworks that serve as the foundation of this dissertation. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) will be explored because of the intersectionality of both theoretical orientations within the context of power. In general terms, power, as a linguistic term, has a variety of interpretations and meanings. What does it mean to have power? Is power based on perception? How does power influence ideologies? For this research project, I will be operating from a Foucauldian perspective on the definition and role of power in shaping social practices and creating dominant ideologies. Black Feminist Thought and Standpoint Theory are explored for the theoretical foundation they provide for exploring the commonalities of oppression and resistance for all Black women.

Chapter IV will explain the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology, and describe the methods selected for this study utilized to understand the selected texts of Audre Lorde and bell hooks, as well as provide a biographical “snapshot” of these phenomenal Black Feminist Educators/Scholars. An in-depth section on my positionality and methods are also included in this chapter. Chapter V provides the analyses of Audre Lorde and bell hooks. Chapter VI examines the knowledge gained for its usefulness as a teaching tool and in developing a framework for dismantling, this old house—the academy. The coping strategies Black women utilize as while engage in their liberatory practice are presented within a developed toolkit. I believe the results presented and discussed will provide Black women a framework to fight against their “tight spaces,” particularly at HBCUs.

CHAPTER II
CONTEXTUALIZING AND THEORIZING THE JOURNEY
OF MY UNFAMILIAR

Black Women: Oppression and Resistance

This chapter provides a framework for understanding the historical development of coping methods utilized by Black women both inside and outside the academy. This historical backdrop is needed to assist the reader in developing a comprehensive picture of the multiple challenges faced by Black women, and the creative responses they formed. Coping methods utilized by Black women in the academy have been learned, passed down, or observed in a variety of settings. Therefore this chapter provides an opportunity for the reader to increase their understanding of the depth, breadth and scope of Black women's experience in America.

This chapter contains an abbreviated history of the oppression of US Black women, and including resistance strategies created for survival. With the understanding that such an undertaking is a dissertation in and of itself, this chapter will not be an exhaustive review of the oppression and resistance strategies of US Black women. Instead it will provide an overview of some of the pivotal moments of the oppression of Black women; and highlight the ways Black women resisted their marginalization. This exploration includes an overview of Black women in the Academy, including coping strategies utilized as tools of resistance

Female Slave Narratives

The use of female slaves narratives as a means to provide a snapshot of the types of atrocities experienced during this period of US history has become more popular in Black Feminist Scholarship. Although some well-known names have begun to make it into classroom instruction and mainstream culture (Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth), there are several other less known narratives that provide an accurate view of the life of female slaves. Among my favorite are *Harriet Jacobs: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Jacobs, 2001) and *Our Nig: Sketches from the life of a Free Black* (Wilson, 2009). It is primarily from these accounts that I have begun to piece together the depth of oppression facing US Black women during slavery.

Linda Brent uses the pseudonym Harriet Jacobs in the retelling of her life as a slave. Her narrative, like many of that time, includes an introduction by a white woman to add credibility for her intended audience, white women, with the hope of galvanizing them into action against slavery. New to Harriet Jacob's slave narrative was the introduction of the

so-called sentimental novel (sometimes known as the novel of seduction) in order to dramatize her theme of virtue under siege . . . Her story focused on the plight of enslaved black women who, as material possessions, were subject to rape by their masters. To satisfy the sexual desires of these men and to increase their wealth by producing more slaves, these hapless women were deprived of any semblance of family, as well as denied a place in the Victorian 'cult of true woman hood' where piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity would affirm their proper place in the moral and social order. (Jacobs, 2001, p. vi)

Jacob's story follows her from her childhood (around the age of seven) until she recognizes that she is, indeed, a slave. Having lost her carefree life, Jacob spends her teen years cleverly circumventing the advances of her master, Dr. Flint.

Harriet Jacob's personal narrative is a palatable tale of the atrocities of lives of black women during slavery. The oppression during this critical time period came in the form of blatant physical domination and control of women's bodies. Harrison (2009) notes that

under his control her body became a lucrative tool for his personal, political, and economic gain . . . the American dream depended upon the sweat of her brow, the bend of her back, and the incarceration of her vagina. *Her back*, as feminist of color and womanist scholars have argued, became *his bridge* into his New Frontier. (p. 54)

This oppression was physically and psychologically aimed at breaking the spirit and souls of black women through lack of basic needs (food, clothing) as well physical abuse. Harrison (2009) places acts of violence against female slaves into five categories: domestic, sexual, sisterhood, 'sistah'-hood, and self. Domestic and sexual violence involved the intimate violence by the slave owner towards the female slave, including the most frequent form of violence, rape. Sisterhood violence describes violence against women (such as mistresses) towards female slaves. 'Sistah'-hood violence explores the violence that occurred between female slaves. Self violence describes the lasting piece of domination against female slaves—internalized violence and fear. Harrison's categorization, although helpful, is not all-inclusive. Her categories are an easy way to view a system whose atrocities and impact are still felt to this day. Objectification of

Black women occurred as part of the multiple attacks towards female slaves. This system of objectification created and maintained images of black women as “mammies” and “jezebels.” This system continues to be reified through the imagery provided by the black public sphere and popular culture.

Resistance strategies during slavery. It would be naïve to think that all African women endured slavery with strength and resiliency as yet unmatched. Indeed, many female slaves were unable to stand the brutality of the system of slavery and resorted to suicide and others acts of self-mutilation (Bambara, 1970). It is those that chose to resist that the author is interested in, and how they chose resistance. Resistance came in many forms, and began creating counter-narratives to the hegemonic ideology of slavery. Harrison (2009) discusses five counter-hegemonic tactics in her book *Enslaved Women and the Art of Resistance in Antebellum America*: reclaiming dignity and value; fighting back; thinking of ways to escape; consulting religious practitioners; and using herbs, etc., for wellness and protection. Acts of resistance also included spirituality, individual and collective revolution, the use of herbs, and acts of subversion (such as learning to read and write). Part of the strength that allowed female slaves to resist came from strength and knowledge gathered in intimate interactions and support groups, which allowed the resistance to occur. Harrison (2009) writes:

The women were their own antidotes, the healing agents of one another. Deep within these enslaved daughters of Akan, Igbo, Bambara, Temme, Mende, Fon-Ewe-Yoruba, and Congolese-Angolan women born-free was the cure to the trickster’s sugarplum poison. At the core of their being, beneath the layers of multidimensional oppression and violence was a river, and indigenous wellspring of womanist vitality. Domestic, sexual, sister-hood, sistah-hood, and self-violence may have damned these resilient, healing, protesting waters to a trickle;

however, it was enough for the women to draw onto push through, press on, and transcend any obstacle in their path.

This wellspring was most evident in them when they gathered at night down by the riverside and away from the watchful eye of their masters . . . power was best reflected and energized in them when they sang, danced, ring shouted, drummed, conjured, root-worked, educated themselves, affirmed one another, and contemplated and strategized their way to freedom . . . they communed with this world, and pulled from themselves and others resources and strategies to resist and transcend violence and oppression . . . They became a river, transforming and resilient, signifying to the world that the river of the human spirit could neither be contained nor forever damned by human oppressors or violence. A restless contained and violated river eventually unleashes itself in subversive, protesting, and rhythmic ways. (pp. 147-148)

As Harrison points out, the resistance efforts of Black women were often fueled by the camaraderie of the group. Black women shared with each other ways to get through the unthinkable, and most managed to do so.

The importance of these tactics and what ultimately made them useful is that black women shared with each other the knowledge they gained over the years (Davis, 1983). This method of resistance, the shared wellspring knowledge gained, was invaluable to the survival of slaves. For female slaves choosing to resist in more subversive ways, there are numerous examples of resistance through education, in which slave women recognizing the importance of reading and writing, found ways to teach others whatever information they learned. Sometimes this information came in less organized gatherings, and other women went as far as to organize schools:

In Natchez, Louisiana, there were two schools taught by colored teachers. One of these was a slave woman who had taught at a midnight school for a year. It was opened at eleven or twelve o'clock at night, and closed at two o'clock a.m. . . . Milla Granson, the teacher, learned to read and write from the children of her indulgent master in her old Kentucky home. Her number of scholars was twelve at a time, and when she had taught these to read and write she dismissed them,

and again took her apostolic number and brought them up to the extent of her ability, until she had graduated hundreds. A number of them wrote their own passes and started for Canada. (Lerner, 1973, pp. 32-33)

Milla is just one of example of how female slaves went to extraordinary lengths to reach out and change their environments. Her simple, yet terrifyingly brave, act of educating slaves left an impact on hundreds of slaves. Her method of resistance was subversive and methodical, yet very effective.

Black female slaves faced physical, psychological and spiritual oppression at the hands of their masters. The oppression was clear, and often smothering, forcing mothers to make hard choices regarding the politics of their bodies. The ideology of racism based on color was beginning to create the backdrop for the Country for years to come. In response to the oppression during slavery, female slaves: fought back; planned and executed escapes; participated in rebellions; reclaimed their dignity; created supportive groups; used the legal system; called on their religious upbringing; and utilized education. This shotgun approach to resisting oppression was necessary during this time period, as female slaves could and were assaulted on a daily basis. The use of groups, to support each other, share information and strategize was made possible by the close quarters in which slaves lived. Freedom, and the type of oppression it brought, began a geographic shift within the African American community that called for adjustments in resistance tools, and has had long-term implications.

Cult of True Womanhood

Freedom presented a different set of challenges for Black women, who struggled to find their role in the overall advancement of Blacks. The oppression of Blacks began

to shift during this period from the physical or geography of containment (Camp, 2004) to forms of bondage, such as indentured servitude that gave the illusion of freedom; therefore, during this period, a shift from paternalism to patriarchy occurred by whites, who felt like they no longer had to implicitly

justify what seemed only natural, namely, hierarchical societies . . . Their culture and politics expressed the established social values of the ruling elite; they did not seek to impart those values to the lower classes and to the enslaved or to coerce these populations into sharing their assumptions and priorities. Political discourse and everyday culture . . . expresse[d] but did not justify social place. (Camp, 2004, p. 17)

This period in history has historical significance. While engaging in this inquiry project, I realized this period really sets the stage for the types of long-standing oppression and marginalization that I expand upon and investigate throughout this dissertation.

During the highly religious post-bellum period, while White women were forming religious groups, Black women formed mutual aid societies to assist other free Blacks. Forty Massachusetts women who formed the Colored Female Religious and Moral Society of Salem formed one of the first of such societies. The group wrote their own regulations, and charged dues of a penny per week. These organizations continued to multiply over time and “as a second generation of free women matured, their ‘African’ societies became ‘colored’ and ‘mutual relief’ was broadened to include ‘mutual improvement’” (Sterling, 1984, p. 110).

Mutual aid and literary societies. Mutual aid societies acted collectively to provide relief and financial assistance to free Blacks. There were multiple societies that popped up throughout the North with the simple notion that in order to move ahead

through these treacherous times, Blacks needed to support each other and become accountable for their role in securing a more stable future. The mutual aid societies were supported in this mission by literary groups, such as the Ohio Literary Ladies Society, whose main purpose was to educate white women about the plight of blacks in hopes of creating change.

These literary groups allowed for “calls for action” by several well-known Black women including: Frances Ellen Watkins (Harper), Isabella Baumfree (Sojourner Truth), and Maria Stewart. All three women, in similarly distinct ways, challenged the status quo of the time period and encouraged Blacks and challenged Whites with impassioned speeches.

Maria Stewart was the first Black American born woman to speak freely, albeit for a short period of time (one year). Her speeches acknowledged the contradiction between the Victorian ethic and biases based on current practices. Her main points called for a recognition of the existence of racism; the encouragement that free Blacks become more active; the importance of the role of mothers as tools to develop the future and impart tools for survival; and the belief that Black women did belong to the “cult,” noting that the “cult of true womanhood” started in the Majestic history of African Kings and Queens. Stewart openly challenged this notion that the “cult of true womanhood” only applied to White women. Her impassioned pleas challenged free Blacks to begin whatever small movements towards change that they could. In one particular speech, Stewart stressed the importance of action and education. She states

it is of no use for us to sit with our hands folded, hanging our heads like bulrushes, lamenting our wretched condition; but let us make a mighty effort, and arise. Let every female heart become united, a let us raise a fund ourselves; and at the end of one year and a half, we might be able to lay corner-stone for the building of a High School, that the higher branches of knowledge might be enjoyed by us. (Sterling, 1984, p. 154)

The discourse created through Stewart’s speeches laid the foundation for the research I plan to conduct. Her “assumptions—what would later become known as modernist thinking—gave Black women a freer rein to express and act upon ideas that liberated them from the oppression of both sex and race” (Giddings, 1984, p. 52). And although the ideas formed did not directly “liberate” Black women from the oppression of both sex and race, they did begin to plant seeds for new ways of being, thinking and knowing.

A more commonly known woman of this era is Isabella Baumfree, a former slave who changed her name to Sojourner Truth, based on her “calling” to go wherever the truth needed to be told. She did not travel along planned routes instead she went wherever she felt “the Spirit” called her (Sterling, 1984). In a dialogue with Harriet Beecher Stowe, Truth shares how she received her new name:

The Lord has made me a sign unto this nation, an’ I go round a’testifyin’, an’ showin’ their sins agin my people. My name was Isabella; but when I left the house of bondage, I left everything behind. I wa’n’t goin’ to keep nothin’ of Egypt on me, an’ so I went to the Lord an’ asked him to five me a new name. And the Lord gave me Sojourner, because I was to travel up an’ down the land, showin’ the people their dins, an’ bein’ a sign unto them. Afterward I told the Lord I wanted another name, ‘cause everybody else had two names; and the Lord gave me Truth, because I was to declare the truth to the people. (as cited in Sterling, 1984, p. 151)

One of Truth's more well known speeches, "Ar'n't I a woman," directly challenged the gender roles and expectations being created by the "cult of true womanhood." Truth asserted, as only she could, that she too had plowed fields; worked as hard as man; enduring lashings; and yet, wasn't she a woman?

The Evolution of Black Citizenry

The period following reconstruction presented unique challenges for Blacks. From 1914-1960, the Black community would deal with issues and opportunities surrounding World Wars I and II, the great depression, the Harlem Renaissance, Northern migration, and the nineteenth amendment. Blacks in general found themselves hopeful about their chance to fully become integrated into American society, as full members and citizens.

Both World Wars greatly impacted this time period. Blacks, who were hopeful for a chance to become full citizens, found themselves fighting in segregated units, regardless of their eagerness to willingly serve the Country. This fight still did not include the rights of Black women who still found themselves on the margins of society. A greater picture was beginning to emerge: that of Black women realizing that not only did they have to fight for their basic human rights based on race, but *within* their race they had to fight for their rights as *women*. As Beale would later write extensively about, "double jeopardy" was in full effect.

Resistance. As Black women continued to deal with physical and economic oppression, they worked hard to create acts of resistance that would enable them to move forward as group, including the club movement, education, literature, and opportunities

for employment. The founding of the National Association for Colored Women (NACW) is one of the best examples of Black women's ability to maneuver through double oppression. Not wanted in white female societies, and forbidden from some Black male organizations, such as the American Negro Academy, whose by-laws stated explicitly that only "men of African descent were to participate" Black women created their own spaces and communities of resistance (Giddings, 1984, p. 116).

The motto of the NACW was "Lifting as we Climb," and with Mary Church Terrell as its first president, the organization distinguished itself as one of the first National Black organizations to deal with the needs of the race. By 1916, with membership hovering near 50,000, the NACW set about its mission of being one of the few vehicles that allowed Black women to gain recognition as "a distinct social and political force" (Giddings, 1984, p. 96). This is a pivotal point in the development of the research and scholarship of Black women as a separate entity to be studied apart from white women and Black men. Anna Julia Cooper put it best when she discussed the opportunities and challenges facing "colored" women in the twentieth century:

The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country . . . She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both . . . to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me, unique in the ages. (as cited in Lerner, 1973, p. 572)

The NACW, like mutual aid societies, became part of the larger club movement of the time. Its founding members were very prestigious and included the daughter of Frederick Douglas, Ellen Craft, and Frances Ellen Harper. NACW, with all the good it

was doing, was still hindered by class. The organization's founding member subscribe to the moral and religious standards of that time, subscribing to middle class values that went largely unchallenged. Poor Black women still found themselves on the margins, without time, resources or connections to increase their involvement with organizations and have their voices heard. The NACW did not forget about the poor, they did conduct outreach projects, etc., but historians argue that this form of service was conducted largely because it was one of the few areas in which Black women's organizations were allowed to participate.

Black male/female relationships. The shifting economic ground exacerbated all marital relationships, but was extremely difficult on Black male/female relationships. With Black men searching for their elusive "manhood" and Black women making conscious choices to fight for the cause, sometimes at the risk of not marrying, those who did commit to each other struggled through very difficult issues.

Black women wanted Black men to stand up for their rights and the "vileness of White men," but it seemed as though on the topic of Black women's rights, Black men's attitudes regressed to a previous century. Anna Julia Cooper stated: "we need men . . . who can let their interest and gallantry extend outside the circle of their aesthetic appreciation; men who can be father, brother, a friend to every weak, struggling, unshielded girl" (as cited in Giddings, 1984, p. 114). As Black women searched for their role within the race struggle, and within the home, many took to writing as an act of resistance and liberation.

Literature. Black women writers during this time wrote with an intensity only matched by their yearning for equality and identity. Although there are many well-known authors of the time, three Black female authors that set the stage for that period and for this dissertation were Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston. Each of their unique works and genres contributed to the landscape of Black women’s “search for self.”

During the Harlem Renaissance, a period of re-birth and self-definition for Blacks, it was of ultimate importance that Black women begin the process of defining *themselves* for *themselves*. As Audre Lorde (2007) warned, “If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment” (p. 45). The definition of Black womanhood was whirling in a vortex of images and “it was particularly important that Black women answer the questions, for their image affected how they were perceived—and treated—by society and by their men” (Giddings, 1984, p. 194).

In artistic terms, the cultural renaissance of the twenties offered a whole range of choices. There the sensually hard-driving blues of Bessie Smith and the fine operatic arias of Caterina Jarbora. There were the sanguine portraits of Laura Wheeler Waring and the ‘street urchins’ of sculptor Augusta Savage. On stage were the exotic excitement of Josephine Baker and the classical concert dance of Edna Guy. (Giddings, 1984, p. 190)

Fauset, Larsen, and Hurston attempted to address issues of identity and image through their literature.

Jessie Redmon Fauset. Jessie Redmon Fauset (1884-1961) was born outside of Philadelphia to a working class family. Fauset attended the High School for Girls in Philadelphia, and hoped to attend the prestigious all women Bryn Mawr college. Bryn Mawr side-stepped this thorny issued by arranging for her to receive a scholarship to Cornell University. While at Cornell, Fauset became the first Black woman to obtain a Phi Beta Kappa key. Fauset’s four novels, *There Is Confusion* (1924); *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral* (1929); *The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life* (1931); and *American Style* (1933) were all written between 1924 and 1933, and tackled issues surrounding the Black middle class, belonging, and “color mania” in America.

As a precursor for this dissertation, her novel, *Plum Bun*, is most intriguing. It explores the complex issues surrounding a light-skinned Black woman who passes for White, raising, during that time period, and currently salient issues of skin-tone, acceptance (within and outside one’s community), belonging, and finally, survival. For the protagonist in *Plum Bun*, Angela Murray, passing for White becomes a way of surviving. At the same time it ostracizes her from the Black community, leaving her in some sort of societal purgatory—and creating a “tight space” which she must undoubtedly learn to navigate.

Zora Neale Hurston. Zora Neal Hurston’s (1891-1960) work technically falls outside of the years of the Harlem Renaissance, yet the impact of and style of her writing defined the period. Hurston grew up in the all Black town of Eatonville, Florida, and much of her worldview is reflected through this unique upbringing. Educated at Howard and Columbia University, Hurston’s style of writing, with characters whose identities

were not reactions to Whites, was not always well-received. Her most well known work, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), plunged readers into the rural South as the

followed Janie through her search for identity. Like Larsen's work, Janie, who is forced to marry by her grandmother for security, spends her life seeking the freedom in a relationship to just "be." She finds it during the latter part of the book, with a man (Tea Cake) who

loves her for herself, not for what she represents to him. This is more important than material security or social status, for it allows her sense of self to be freed at last. Her identity is finally able to take shape, critic Mary Helen Washington observed, because she is able to 'throw off the false images which have been thrust upon her.' (as cited in Giddings, 1984, p. 193)

Nella Larsen. Nella Larsen (1893-1964) was born to a Danish mother and a black West Indian father, who died when she was young. Larsen's mother remarried someone of like race, setting the backdrop for Larsen's novels . . . being the "only"—as Nella grew up as a Black woman in a White family. She attended Fisk University, and tried her hand at nursing, but it was her work in the Public Library system in New York that gave her the space to create her first novel, *Quicksand* (1928). Nella, much like her protagonist Helga Crane, struggled with "fitting in"; not feeling comfortable in the South, and yet, not quite fitting in with those in the North. Larsen fell into a category created by her reality—too much White to be Black, but too Black to be White.

Crane, like Larsen, is a product of an interracial relationship and

the circumstances of her birth present a double-edged identity crisis. Where does she belong? . . . She feels alienated from 'Negro society,' which, while professing

racial pride and disdain for Whites still imitates White values. She is left cold and unfulfilled by the Black bourgeoisie. (Giddings, 1984, p. 192)

When the man Helga loves marries another, she falls into despair and eventually marries a Black minister. Helga, experiencing for the first time emotional and sexual release, comes to realize over time that the freedom she thought she was living in is also an illusion—and she begins to feel trapped by the small town, religious mores, and yearly pregnancies. As with Fauset's characters, Larsen's protagonist feels as if “there is a part of [her] in all of the worlds she has confronted, but she belongs to none of them. And the reader assumes that she will live the rest of her life in mental anguish” (Giddings, 1984, p. 192).

These three Black female writers set the tone for future writers such as hooks and Lorde to explore their creative expression via literature as acts of liberation. Each author's characters assisted her in working out personal dilemmas in her life. The connection between these authors, and me, is also important for this inquiry project. Although I found connections with Fauset, Hurston, and Larsen, it was Fauset's personal story that I was most able to connect with, given that we are from the same area and attended the same High School.

Black women continued to show their ingenuity during this period of time. Faced with additional forms of oppression based in part on the Great Migration and Harlem Renaissance, Black women rose to the occasion. Economically marginalized, fighting sexism by Black men, and being assaulted by media images, Black women fought to take control of their own images and their lives. Acts of resistance included expanded club

movements such as the NACW, the use of education (this time expanded to schools and colleges), and the use of literature as a vehicle to be heard in the deafening silence of the period.

Civil Rights

The Civil Rights movement was a period of great change and turbulence for all Americans. Hegemonic practices and institutional racism and sexism were now being legally challenged. The role of Black women throughout this movement continued to involve participation in organizations (such as Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), NAACP, and National Council for Women); education; and literature. If Black women thought they were fighting hard against images a few decades ago, they found themselves under attack by the role of the media and popular culture, who began a new assault on Black women through the creation of images and stereotypes (made easier by the increasing access to media by the majority of Americans). Black women were in the middle of their own private war.

Who's your mammie? The same “fierce single-mindedness” that helped African American women survive through the decades is often labeled aggressiveness, and has become one of the negative stereotypes reinforced through popular culture. The representation of African Americans in popular culture ranges from omission to overtly and covertly negative stereotypes (asexual mummies, etc.). Although the increased visibility of Blacks in popular culture has been touted as progress, a more critical look reveals the potential negative impact of these images on the Black community. The commodification of Blacks impacts the identity of a culture on a personal and group level

(Gause, 2008; Giddings, 1984; Wallace, 1983, 2004). When Black men are represented as “bestial, hyperaggressive, and hypersexualized animals” (Gause, 2008, p. 2), they begin to internalize the lack of value society places on their worth and identity. Media’s portrayal of Black men as “less than” has put an additional burden upon Black women who must balance the skills they have developed for survival with the skills necessary to maintain their relationships. Black women began to shoulder another responsibility, the decline of the Black family and the subsequent poverty that followed. Adding to the media milieu was the release of the controversial Moynihan report which attributed Black poverty to the decline of the Black family structure, including a matriarchal family pattern that continued to break the spirit of Black men (Giddings, 1984; hooks, 1994).

Popular culture embraced the Black matriarch theme, as it reinforced messages of disempowerment for Black men and created the illusion of power for Black women. The now famous character of Madea (created and portrayed by writer and producer Tyler Perry) personifies some of these traits. Madea, a Black female character portrayed by a man, is a no-nonsense Black matriarch who leads her family in unconventional methods of comedic communication, relationship building, and childrearing. Madea is strong willed, assertive (or aggressive depending on your read), and asexual. Tyler Perry’s “drag” portrayal of this Black matriarch is one who needs no one’s advice or assistance and seems perfectly content being a one-woman show. Through largely comedic and humorous segments, Perry convinces his audience that Madea is filled with wisdom and has the uncanny ability to solve all the family problems. He also wants his audience to believe that Madea has no weaknesses. This portrayal of Madea by Perry adds to the

burden of the Black woman's psychological development by providing another image of a Black woman that does not need emotional, spiritual, or sexual support. Tyler Perry in interviews often states that Madea is a composite of the many women from his childhood. He has built a fortune over the past 20 years from this character's humble beginnings on small regional stages throughout the Southeastern part of the United States in the Black Public Sphere to now being a dominant screen presence in Hollywood's mediated popular culture. Madea has always challenged non-gendered conformity and racism.

The type of behavior exhibited by Madea could be part of the coping skills Black women have developed to deal with "gendered racism" (Essed, 1991). Gendered racism refers to the "racial oppression of Black women that is influenced by narrow and biased views of gender roles" (Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 410). This unique form of racism demands that Black women develop an "armor" to protect them from the outside world. One of my long-term research interests is to examine how this constant protection or "armor" that Black women wear impacts their psyche.

Black Women in Education

Education was, and continues to be, a recurring act of resistance across historical time periods. Black women found opportunities for change through education both as students in higher education, and as founders and teachers of schools. Education was being framed as a "way out" and a "way up." Black women found themselves on the periphery of the Black male movements of the time, and were forced into action both within and outside their race. Schools were founded by Lucy Laney, Nanne Burroughs,

Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Mary McCleod Bethune (Bethune-Cookman College), and teaching became one of the main occupations of Black women.

Education, although viewed as a necessary act of freedom and liberation by Blacks, was threatening to whites. As a result, many states created laws prohibiting the education of free blacks. In 1833, Oberlin College took a stand and decided to admit both women and Blacks on an equal basis. To take advantage of this educational opportunity, Mary Jane Patterson's family moved her and her siblings from North Carolina to Ohio to attend Oberlin. Their decision paid off when, in 1862, she became the first Black woman to receive a college degree (Perkins, 1983). Speculation about the amount of pressure, isolation and rejection she must have experienced during her collegiate career is based on the descriptions Blacks give of their experiences on White campuses today. Most students report feelings of isolation, exclusion, unfair treatment by faculty, and a lack of "social life" (Anderson, 1988; Beckham, 1988; Boyd, 1973; Burrell, 1980; Carroll, 1982; Dinka, Mazzella, & Pilant, 1980; Hughes, 1987; Kleinbaum & Kleinbaum, 1976; Willie & McCord, 1972). Mary Jane Patterson had a successful career as an educational administrator, but she and her sisters never married, perhaps attesting to the fine balance for black women of higher education, careers and relationships.

Black women continued to show their ingenuity during this period of time. Faced with additional forms of oppression based in part on the Great Migration and Harlem Renaissance, Black women rose to the occasion. Economically marginalized, fighting sexism by Black men, and being assaulted by media images, Black women

fought to take control of their own images and their lives. This fight was about to include the institution they had believed would free them—academia.

Black Women in Academia

The first three Black women to achieve doctoral degrees were Eva B. Dykes, Georgiana R. Simpson, and Sadie T. Mossell Alexander, all in 1921 in different fields—English, Philosophy, German, and Economics (Gregory, 2001). During this very difficult period in history, these women managed to navigate a system that was not designed for their success. These “collegiate black women injected their cultural mores into disciplinary epistemology and contributed sophisticated, practical knowledge” that set out to design a blueprint for Black women in academia to follow (Evans, 2007, p. 127). At the very least, it sent a message loud and clear, it CAN be done.

Between 1921 and 1954, there were “over 60 doctoral degrees awarded to black women” and it became clear that

Education mattered and African Americans sought to make it work for them, regardless of the various methods employed to attain it. The doctorate, in the right hands, became a tool for racial justice and equal human rights. When black women gained access to graduate degrees, they infiltrated the academy in hopes of redefining scholarship and rechanneling resources of educational institutions to benefit the historically disenfranchised. (Evans, 2007, p. 138)

This increase has been reflected in the current statistics regarding Black women in academia. Black women, though the most numerous of faculty of women of color in institutions of higher education in the United States continue to face challenges regarding tenure and promotion.

These statistics regarding Black women in academia continue to create the illusion of progress continues to paint a picture of equality and equity in America (Gregory, 1995; Harley, 2008). Yet closer examination reveals the broader picture. Although Black women are increasing in the number of doctoral degrees awarded, there still exists a lack of racial parity. In 2010, 7.1% of Black women received their terminal degree; yet Blacks make up about 13% of the population in the United States. The fields in Black women receive their terminal degrees (education) and the institutions they work upon completion continue to be disproportionate in comparison with their white counterparts (Carter-Black, 2008; Gregory, 1995; Hall, 2006; Harley, 2008). In addition, Black women work at less prestigious institutions; receive tenure at a rate much lower than their colleagues; and are often clustered in clinical, assistant, instructor and other “academic apartheid” positions (Contreras, 1998). Carter et al. (1998) has named Black women as “one of the most isolated, underused, and consequently demoralized segments of the academic community” (as cited in Harley, 2008, p. 21).

Challenges Facing Black Women in Academia

Alienation and isolation. The overarching theme of the research regarding challenges facing Black women in academia focused on feelings of alienation and isolation. Black women in academia describe the sense of loss and frustration they often find themselves facing. Alexander and Mohanty (1997) describe these problems of academy as “sense of alienation, dislocation, and marginalization, that often accompanies a racialized location with white institutions” (p. 68). Although a large portion of the research focuses on this phenomenon at PWIs, this feeling is also valid at HBCUs.

Billingslea-Brown and Gonzales De Allen (2009) found that HBCUs often privilege race over other identities, continuing to leave Black women feeling alienated and isolated.

hooks (1990) uses the term marginalization to describe the outer edges in which Black women live, and defines it as “part of the whole but outside the main body” (p. 149). She emphasizes, however, that “despite being located on the margins—an unsafe and risky position for any member of an oppressed group—Black women and other women of color need not consider their place in the academy as one of deprivation solely” (p. 149). hooks (1990) states:

[M]arginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation; in fact . . . it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose—to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center—but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds. (pp. 149-150)

In this interpretation, hooks has seamlessly crossed over from challenge to coping strategy, cautioning us that issues viewed from a deficit model can cause extreme psychological damage. Instead, reclaiming spaces may provide Black women the capacity to continue in their efforts to resist, and provide a new lens to see and create new worlds.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) frames this isolation as a result of Black women’s “outsider within” status in academia. This refers to the feeling of being let in to certain circles (academia), yet still pushed to the fringes because we have not been fully let in.

We have been given a glimpse into the lives of the “others”; but constantly reminded that we are not organically from that place. The concept is problematic if Black women view themselves as needing to be “let in” to other circles, etc., because this sets up oppositional thinking. In her book *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), Hill Collins explores this oppositional thinking in her three core themes (meaning of self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the construct of dichotomous difference).

According to Hill Collins (1990), “a careful review of the emerging Black feminist literature reveals that many Black intellectuals, especially those in touch with how they have been marginalized in academic settings, tap this standpoint in producing distinctive analysis of race, class, and gender” (p. 104). Referencing the work of Zora Neal Hurston, E. Frances White, and bell hooks, Hill Collins provides a theoretical framework to support hooks’ position that Black women reclaim their spaces and utilize the knowledge found there to re-imagine their worlds. According to Hill Collins, this type of knowledge creation has in fact been happening for generations, it just has not been viewed as “valid knowledge”—both in mainstream culture and in academia.

Describing knowledge production and validation, Hill Collins (1990) states:

These “radical perspectives” are often blocked within academia and not valued as knowledge. In institutions of higher education, knowledge claims have been traditionally validated by White men. Even though Black women have been producing similar knowledge for generations, the suppression of this knowledge through the continuance of a hegemonic discourse ultimately restricts Black women access to the true inner circles of academia. Black women included in the academy (those with “academic credentials”) find themselves caught between using their authority to attempt to promote new knowledge claims of Black women,

and recognizing their potential status as ‘tokens of the academy,’ put in place in an attempt to accept a few ‘safe’ outsiders. (p. 272)

A hegemonic discourse of knowledge production and validation creates a silencing of women that promotes “the cultural phenomenon of invisibility, both racial and gendered” (Wallace, 2004, p. 225). Women become relegated to the margins, instantly becoming the “other,” defined by Lorde (2007) as “the outsider whose experience and tradition is too ‘alien’ to comprehend” (p. 117). According to Wallace (2004), women of color have an additional layer of being an outsider, from men and from white women. This has left women of color as “the other of the other.” Lorde tackles the topic of “other” in her work *Sister Outsider* (2007), while recognizing the marginalized status of Black women, she demands that we not forget that Black women are ultimately responsible for saving Black women, and this work will be highly political.

Although slightly different in name, and with slight nuances in theory, no matter what you call it—the result is the same, Black feminist scholars in academe are in fight to save themselves, and by way of the NACW’s motto “Lifting as We Climb,” to provide safe locations and strategies for Black students on campus and for each other. We continue to be in a fight to find, define and defend ourselves.

Cultural taxation. Amado Padilla (1994) introduced the concept of “cultural taxation” to describe the extra burden of additional responsibilities placed upon minority faculty because of their racial, ethnic, and/or gender group memberships. These responsibilities include serving on numerous committees, mentoring larger numbers of students, and serving as the “departmental experts” for their particular gender or ethnic

group. These additional expectations for minority faculty, which are not placed as heavily upon white faculty, can impede career progress and may result in psychological problems.

This challenge is evident for Black women in academia, both at PWIs and HBCUs. Black women find themselves “targeted” as the expert, the representative voice for race and gender, the diversity on the search committee, etc. This phenomenon of cultural taxation has also been discussed as “racial tokenism” by Kelly (2007) during his study of Black teachers as “tokens” in school settings. His research expanded upon the work of Kanter’s (1977) theory of tokenism, delineating similar parameters for tokenized Black women in academia, in particular “performance pressure, boundary heightening, and role entrapment” (Kelly, 2007, p. 249); and by Turner (2002) as “race fatigue.” Tokenism of Black women in academia is problematized by the negative media images, further pushing Black women into the margins of the Ivory Tower, and compounding their alienation and isolation (Beoku-Betts & Njambi, 2009).

The effects of “cultural taxation” are also compounded by the amount of mentoring and service work Black women in academia must conduct. Black women faculty are often sought out by students to act as mentors, reducing the amount of time allotted for scholarly work and creating very tough choices (Carter-Black, 2008; Gregory, 1995; Harley, 2008). The historical ideology of collectivism held by most Black women in academe, is grounded in African and African American traditions (such as the NACW’s motto of “Lifting as We Climb”). This ideology forces Black women faculty to be available to others, as a moral choice. The predicament this creates, however, is one

of extinction of Black women faculty due to lack of scholarly progress. Thomas and Hollenshead (2001) note:

Another unwritten rule that Black women and other women of color faculty members often find difficult to address is that one protect one's time from service work and unlimited interactions with students at all costs, especially if one is not tenured. The conflict in this regard is particularly magnified for women of color when they feel that students of color need their assistance or that specific committees need their voice and representation. (p. 173)

Balancing expectations and navigating competing ideologies is psychologically and physically exhausting. Black women faculty also struggle with guilt associated with “protecting their time” because they recognize that someone “lifted them as they climbed.”

The role of Black women in academia, in particular as it relates to PWIs, has been characterized as the “maid syndrome”—based on the “mistreatment of and interaction of African American women as a label, thus devaluing the real person behind the stigma and encouraging self-fulfilling prophecies by the gender and race that hold power” (Kawewe, as cited in Harley, 2008, p. 20).

Balancing time and responsibilities is not limited to duties at work for Black women in academia. They also struggle with “role strain,” balancing the demands of multiple roles and expectations, such as career, family and church responsibilities (Wilson & Miller, 2002). Role strain can have an impact on Black women in academia as “we constantly have to ‘struggle to maintain an integrated sense of self’ whilst simultaneously making connections to the concrete material realities of being Black and female” (Burke et al., 2000, p. 307).

Internalized oppression. Black women in academia are also caught in what Evans (2007) terms the “politics of respectability.” Black women often feel additional pressure to prove themselves worthy or better than their colleagues. This viewpoint originates from the understanding that

excellence is at once repressive and compelling: while buying into ideas of excellence reifies the trappings of ego and merit, it is nonetheless necessary to demonstrate that achievement is commonplace in black women’s collegiate history so that when other scholars do excel, it is seen as normative rather than exceptional. (Evans, 2007, p. 210)

Interestingly, Black women are still caught in the conundrum of seeking liberation via the processes which oppress and bind. We need to be constantly reminded that “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 2007).

The desire of Black women to prove their equality is an indicator an internalized oppression, which has seeped so far into the psyche of Black women. Many Black women who claim to be “free” are instead courting the illusion of freedom. Carter-Black (2008) has noted in her research, that one remnant of this illusion is evidenced by the self imposed doubts of Black women, that last for years in spite of their accomplishments. The challenges raised above lead to serious physical and psychological health problems for Black women in academia. This passion for teaching, coupled with alienation/isolation, mentoring, role strain, etc. has resulted in a disproportionate amount of hypertension, heart disease and depression among Black women faculty (Harley, 2008).

Coping Strategies of Black Women in Academia

The challenges to Black women in academia have been met with creative forms of resistance. Some of these resistance strategies carry over from slavery, and have been adapted to fit new conditions. They include resiliency, building community, defiance, religion and mentoring (Gregory, 1995, 2001; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). I situate the coping strategies Black women utilize to survive within a historical, socio-cultural, and political context. Ultimately, I seek to alleviate the experiences young Black women have while reacting to power, oppression, and domination with tools that do not eventually allow us “make sense” of our condition in healthy ways. In no way, do I speak for all Black women; however, many of the Black women I encounter within my higher education community are in search of survival strategies that will be liberatory, particularly those that will allow us to transcend the multiple constraints that imprison our being.

Resiliency. One of the coping strategies utilized by Black women in academia has been their resiliency. Resiliency theory

focuses on the fact that individuals with multiple risk factors in their lives are able to triumph over their challenges and do well in spite of the predictions of experts. For African American women resilience is the ability to multi-task, to solve problems, to have a feeling of responsibility and able to make a difference (i.e. internal locus of control), and the use of spiritual beliefs as a support. To truly have resilience requires confidence and hard work, as demonstrated by African American women faculty. (Burke et al., 2000, p. 298)

Resiliency theory does an excellent job noting select traits that have created an over picture of competence and success to allow Black women to physically stay in academia,

but negates to probe further into the underlying mental and physical results of such “resilience.” This is an area in need of more, and continuous, research.

Building community. There is a portion of research that speaks to the creation and importance of communities as a tool for resistance and survival (Brock, 2005; Brown-Glaude, 2010; Shorter-Gooden, 2004). As noted earlier, evidence of black women establishing communities of resistance can be traced all the way back to slavery when women gathered by the river or in the fields to share strategies, sing spirituals and uplift one another. This strategy has been termed “coalition building” (Gregory, 1995), creating “alternative communities” (Brown-Glaude, 2010), and “support groups” (Gregory, 1995). Regardless of the name, the goal was the same—survival through sharing of information and knowledge in supportive environments. The opportunity to share while being supported is a critical part of the success of Black women in academia, while addressing the political nature of their oppression falls in line with Black feminism, especially if it translates into action.

Harley (2008) presents the importance of gathering being as therapeutic for Black women. She states:

They talk with each other about their experiences and challenges. Then, they strategize about ways to respond and how to examine the pros and cons of various situations. In many ways networking is therapeutic and African American faculty members act as “kitchen divas” (internal citation omitted) for each other in which they gather support and strengthen each other. (p. 27)

This type of support, rooted in slavery and trace throughout the history of Black women, is vital to their success, and mental and spiritual health. In addition, Black women have

undertaken “Courageous Collaborations” (Brown-Glaude, 2010) to transform the culture of a university. The study of Black faculty at the University of Maryland emphasized their use of “their intellectual commitments to intersectionality as a means to transform the campus climate by changing the campus curriculum and creating alternative communities” (p. 803). The responsibility of educating the oppressor, in this scenario, still lies with the oppressed—which is problematic. Another issue to consider is when they are not enough Black women on campus to sit at the kitchen table, what if the institution is geographically isolated?

Addressing this issue, Shorter-Gooden (2004) found that geographic isolation allowed for fewer opportunities to utilize the external resource she terms “leaning on shoulders.” “Leaning on shoulders” refers to “relying on resources outside of oneself [and is] a strategy of developing and using social support as a way of coping with the stress of racial or gender bias” (p. 417). Social support can come from partners, spouses, sisters, and/or close knit groups of friends. Support can be emotional, but it can also be an opportunity for political activism.

The Combahee River Collective (1983) is a group of African American feminists gathered together since 1974 that are “actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression” (p. 210). The members of the Combahee River Collective recognize what so many African American women attempt to brush aside, that “the psychological toll of being a Black woman . . . can never be underestimated. There is a very low value placed upon Black women’s psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist” (p. 215). Through their gathering they built a

critical community that provided the support necessary to address the attacks on their psyches.

Some Black women scholars seek refuge through spirituality and/or religion as another coping method carried over from slavery that persists in popular culture today (Gillespie, 2009). Black women in academia often report faith, spirituality, and/or religion are tools of survival. The role of religion has been also positively correlated to psychological wellbeing. Patriarchy is often the driving force within the Black church which interferes with the role of religion and spirituality as emancipatory tools for the Black community (Gause, 2008; Gillespie, 2009).

Defiance. Selecting when and how to defy the power structure has been an intergenerational tool of resistance throughout the Black community (Carter-Black, 2008). This has also been shown to be an effective tool of resistance, knowing when to speak and the power of words. Burke et al. (2000) describe defiance “as central to the process of change” (p. 307) and should be done with collaboration and support.

Mentoring. As mentioned earlier as a challenge, mentoring plays a large role for Black women in academia. What is taxing for them as mentors, can be helpful as mentees allowing them to develop “creative strategies to find and develop mentorship opportunities outside their academic units, thereby creating communities of resistance” (Thomas & Hoollenshead, 2001, p. 173), described earlier as necessary and productive.

The challenges facing Black women in academe include isolation/alienation, mentoring, and internalized oppression. In response to these challenges Black women have created communities, networked, exhibited acts of defiance, and utilized their faith.

These methods, although helpful, do not address the psychological residue of the resiliency of Black women. Additional coping methods will be necessary to deal with upcoming challenges.

Resistance. African American women continued to develop skills to assist them in their need to be constantly on guard. The impact of the historical marginalization and victimization of Black women is often overlooked, and adds to their unique psychological stress. The Black feminist movement allowed Black women a forum to share their unique stories and histories—stories and histories that were not being heard in feminist circles. Black groups such as the Black Panther Party and The Back to Africa Movement (MOVE), allowed Black women an opportunity to combat racism, but not through strong leadership roles. These roles were reserved for men. Living on the edge of two worlds, race and sex, demands creativity and ingenuity for survival, yet is often overlooked by the literature. The unique intersection of racism and sexism is explored in Beale’s work on what she has termed “double jeopardy.” Although Beale expanded the field of research on this “double jeopardy”—being Black and being a woman—the research is still limited on how African American women *cope* with their unique societal role.

Shorter-Gooden (2004) attempted to answer this question in her research on how African American women cope with the stress of racism and sexism. In a qualitative study done as part of the African American Women’s Voices Project, Shorter-Gooden and Jones distributed questionnaires to African American women hoping to find a clue to the answer of how they manage to cope with the “gendered racism” they encounter daily.

She uncovered several main themes: resting on faith; standing on shoulders; valuing oneself; leaning on shoulders; role-flexing; avoiding; and fighting back.

Faith. One coping method I was not surprised to read about was “resting on faith.” Throughout the literature I found several references on the importance of spirituality and/or religion as a coping method (Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Tatum, 1987; Terhune, 2007). It is important to distinguish between spirituality and religion, as they are very unique entities. Although they can overlap each other, they can also stand distinctly on their own.

The role of the church has always played a prominent role in the lives of African Americans. Historically, the Black church provided the only opportunities and information regarding political leadership, education, and finances for African Americans. Church-raised leaders often promised equality and “freedom” would come through non-violent resistance, or would be a reward on “the other side.” Demanding equality, not equity, early church movements pushed for basic civil rights. The role of the Black church has undergone a shift. Middle-class Blacks are generally less active and reliant on the church than their parents were, attributing their successes to meritocracy. There is still a pocket of African Americans who fully rely on the church to assist them in dealing with racism. For the “gendered racism” African American women contend with “resting on faith” has become a key coping mechanism.

For some Black women heavily involved in the church, Black theology begins to play a major role in their ability not only to survive, but to thrive. According to Cone (1970), “in Black Theology, Black people are encouraged to revolt against the structures

of white societal and political power by affirming blackness” (p. 44). This message of affirmation and Black liberation as “the emancipation of the minds and souls of black people from white definitions of black humanity” (p. 62) is crucial in Black women’s ability to continue to cope with their marginalization and oppression. As a theology “of and for the black community” (p. 23), Black theology believes in the importance of the community as a backdrop for liberation. This sense of community provides an opportunity for Black women to share their concerns and strategies regarding their oppression. Black women who live in geographically isolated areas face additional challenges in their search for coping methods.

Social Support. Terhune (2007) writes extensively about how African American women cope in isolation. In her study, she interviewed African American women living in Oregon about their experiences. Her findings indicated that African American women living in isolation face a variety of obstacles in their effort to cope and adjust to a potentially hostile environment. According to Terhune (2007), “Black women’s lives are inextricably linked to racism, sexism and classism . . . [which] becomes more prominent when positioned in a predominately White environment, specifically one with a history of exclusion and prejudice” (p. 561). Although Terhune was referring to the geographical location of her subjects, as mentioned earlier, this type of alienation is applicable to Black women in the academy.

One of the challenges of living in isolation is that it provides fewer opportunities to utilize the external resource reported by Shorter-Gooden (2004) of “leaning on shoulders.” “Leaning on shoulders” refers to “relying on resources outside of oneself

[and is] a strategy of developing and using social support as a way of coping with the stress of racial or gender bias” (p. 417). Social support can come from partners, spouses, sisters, and/or close knit groups of friends. Support can be emotional, but it can also be an opportunity for political activism. The Combahee River Collective (1983) is a group of African American feminists gathered together since 1974 that are “actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression” (p. 210). The members of the Combahee River Collective recognize what so many African American women attempt to brush aside, that “the psychological toll of being a Black woman . . . can never be underestimated. There is a very low value placed upon Black women’s psyches in this society, which is both racist and sexist” (p. 215).

The need for social support extends to African American mothers who may be dealing with an additional layer of stress regarding the tough choices they have made for their children. Choices regarding preschool, neighborhood, playgroups and afterschool activities are heavily weighed decisions for most mothers. For African American mothers, however, these decisions are additionally layered with concern regarding the psychological well being of their children. Hill Collins (1990) discusses the unique role of Black mothers as it relates to raising their daughters, when she notes that “Black mothers of daughters face a troubling dilemma. On one hand, to ensure their daughters’ physical survival, mothers must teach them to fit into systems of oppression” (p. 123).

Passing it on. Beverly Daniel Tatum (1987) has examined the tough choice of housing in her landmark book, *Assimilation Blues: Black families in White communities: Who Succeeds and Why?* Black mothers who choose to live in White neighborhoods

(primarily for safety and quality of schools) must deal with the trade off of a potential lack of cultural rootedness, and the fallout of assimilation. Tatum (1987) discusses this price of assimilation for African American families noting that many African Americans struggle with the concept of biculturalism daily, adjusting or assimilating to both worlds in which they must function. She asserts that “black parents have to guide their children through conflicting developmental tasks during which the child must internalize the dominant views of our society and at the same time learn to recognize and reach his own potentialities” (p. 14). In short, black parents (most often Black mothers), have the tasks of “providing for the child’s basic needs . . . but in addition Black mothers are almost always involved in socializing their girls and boys to cope with the reality of racism . . . particularly if they are raising children in predominantly non-Black areas” (Tatum, 1987, p. 10).

Chapter Summary

Black women have a well documented history of oppression and resistance. During slavery, Black women found creative and subversive ways to resist, including education, community, and slave narratives. These acts of resistance morphed slightly to fit the changing times, and expanded to include the use of literature, the creation of mutual aid societies, and calls for action. Once allowed into the institution of academia, Black women continued to carry over well-known and trusted coping methods to assist them in navigating this unknown territory. Over time, however, they developed additional coping methods specific to academia.

Threading all these themes are the common denominators of resiliency, determination, community, and sharing. Through their discourse, Black women provided the foundation for the theoretical foundations of Critical Race Feminism, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought and Standpoint theory to emerge. Chapter three explicates these theoretical orientations and describes how they set the foundation for this inquiry project.

CHAPTER III

MY THEORETICAL ORIENTATION AND FRAMEWORK

Over the last 20 years Critical Race Feminism and Critical Race Theory has provided scholarship for engaging in anti-oppressive practices. These movements have also created different ways of knowing, thinking and being, which have acknowledged the creativity and determination of Black women. These theoretical orientations provide the frame for the house I am attempting to build through this inquiry project. Although some may be explained in more detail than others, each piece is an important part of the larger picture. This chapter opens with Critical Race Feminism and Critical Race Theory, and follows up with an in-depth discussion of Black Feminist thought and Standpoint theory.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a movement with intellectual underpinnings found in the works of Derrick Bell, Robert Cover, A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., Kimberle Crenshaw, and other progressive intellectuals. The development of CRT grew out of the works of legal scholars and researchers of color who embraced tenets of CLS. Its focus: to confront critically the historical complicity and centrality of law upholding white supremacy and hierarchies of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. Learning to look critically at race relations is a key part of critical race theory. Examining everyday interactions, and finding the racial component in them, can help move the racial equality

cause forward perhaps more than a simplistic “color blind” approach. Looking carefully at what sociologists call micro-aggressions can help to see the true extent of racism in the United States, and through critical analysis, it is hoped people can begin to work past issues of race, hegemony, oppression, and domination. Although critical race theory began within the legal profession—and legal professor Derrick Bell, easily the most important thinker within the movement—it has since spread to many other disciplines. Educators may find critical race theory very important to their understanding of classroom dynamics, academic testing, and curriculum bias. People involved in the political sphere may find critical race theory useful in understand voting discrepancies, race-based campaigning, and other issues.

One of the more interesting recent developments in critical race theory is a questioning of the normative acceptance of “whiteness.” Critical race theory looks at such things as how certain groups—the Irish, for example—began as an “othered” category, before “becoming” white. It looks at how racial pride in being white can manifest in acceptable ways, and how it can manifest as white superiority. Additionally, it may consider what whites can legitimately do to assist the critical examination of race, without abusing their position of power.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) seeks to examine policies and laws on the juridical administration of justice, as well as the “ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and, more generally, in American society as a whole” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii). Although there are subtleties within CRT, there are two distinct features which unify it: the creation

of White supremacy as a tool in the hegemonic oppression of people of color; and, the importance of not just understanding systems of oppression, but working towards changing them. Hill Collins borrows for Black Feminist Thought the notion within CRT that we must be working against systems of oppression, to change the status quo.

Critical Race Feminism

Critical Race Feminism (CRF) is a genre of scholarship evolving from the writings of three hundred women of color who teach in legal academia. This work examines the intersection of gender, race, and class within a legal and/or multidisciplinary context. It has roots in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Legal Studies (CLS). According to Austin (1989),

The intellectual product of the minority feminist scholar should incorporate in a formal fashion the ethical and moral consciousness of minority women, their aspirations, and their quest for liberation. Her partisanship and advocacy of a minority feminist jurisprudence should be frankly acknowledged and energetically defended. Because her scholarship is to be grounded in the material and ideological realities of minority women and in their cultural and political responses, its operative premises must necessarily be dynamic and primarily immanent; as the lives of minority women change, so too should the analysis. (p. 426)

The above quote is extracted from legal scholar Regina Austin's 1989 article, "Sapphire Bound!" In the article, Austin calls for minority female scholars in the legal field to straightforwardly, unapologetically, and strategically use their intellectual pursuits to advocate on behalf of poor and working class minority women. At the risk of being stereotypically identified and labeled as overly aggressive, overbearing, loud, audacious, or in other words, the "angry Black woman" (e.g. a bitch), Austin encourages minority

female scholars to redefine the Sapphire stereotype to testify to the social and political circumstances impacting minority women. She believes that legal scholars, like herself, embody the necessary attitude and agency it takes to bear the burden of collective struggle alongside, with, and on behalf of other minority women. The legal scholar suggests that collective struggle is overdue considering the marginalization of poor minority women, especially of Black women, in the U.S. political economy.

Even though Austin is arguing from the perspective of a woman of color, with experience and interest in the legal field, her comments are also relevant to conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical efforts in the field of education. This is the essence of Critical Race Feminism.

Black Feminist Thought—Critical Social Theory

Patricia Hill Collins: Black Feminist Thought

Dealing with the historical oppression and marginalization of Black women demands an emancipatory theoretical orientation—one which recognizes that Black women have shared experiences navigating the world, from slavery to present.

According to Hill Collins (1990),

all African American women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent. This commonality of experience suggests that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in a Black women's standpoint. (p. 22)

This suggests there are elements of a Black woman's life that she will have in common with another Black woman based solely on their lived experiences. Again, recognizing and acknowledging that there is no monolithic Black experience for women; Black

feminist thought asserts the validity that portions of a collective experience have impacted the epistemological and ontological viewpoints of Black women.

One of the core themes Hill Collins elaborates on is “legacy of struggle,” which refers to the idea that all Black women should have some idea of what it is like to struggle in a White male-dominated world. She goes on to acknowledge that in spite of the core themes Black women will share, it is prudent to acknowledge that “diversity among Black women produces different concrete experiences that in turn shape various reactions to the core themes” (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 23).

These shared experiences create an epistemology which is defined as Hill Collins (1990) as “the study of the philosophical problems in concepts of knowledge and truth” (p. 202). Part of the need for a Black feminist epistemology is based on how knowledge and truth have been set up. Typically white males have determined what is valid as knowledge, and what the world will consider to be true. This hegemonic ideology has subjugated the voices of *all* women, as well as the unique experiences of Black women. In her quest to study Black women, Hill Collins (1990) shares her frustration at not being adequately prepared as a researcher to study “the subjugated knowledge of a Black women’s standpoint” because Black women “like other subordinate groups . . . have not only developed a distinctive Black women’s standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge” (p. 202).

Black Feminist Thought was birthed from Black movements, such as Black Nationalism, and critical social theories, such as Feminist Theory, Critical Race Feminism, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Standpoint Theory. Black Nationalism

(which views Black people as a “nation”—or one “people”) helped inform Black Feminist thought, through omission of Black women. Recognizing this omission, Black Feminist Thought realizes the importance of celebrating, owning and sharing the talents of groups that has been historically ignored. Main leaders and supporters of Black Nationalism are historically sexist, and cannot see their heterosexual, male privilege as they attempt to re-write Black history through their lens. Feminism, CRT and Standpoint theory each contributed heavily to the formation of Black Feminist Thought, because even though the foundation was shared, each theory, in and of itself did not adequately meet the unique needs of Black women. Feminist theory developed in resistance to male domination, and began with Betty Friedan’s well-known work, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In this work, Friedan compares the lives of housewives to that of prisoners, confined in gilded cages but with no freedom to act or make decisions. Friedan’s work ignores women who were not middle-class, which at the time included the majority of Black women. Her views on domesticity and being “kept” did not apply to the women who *needed* to work outside of the home.

Black Feminist Thought as a critical social theory is still much needed as Black women continue to struggle within and against several movements whose very wording is under attack (Afrocentrism, Feminism, Black). Within this backdrop it becomes perhaps even more crucial that Black women recognize “that we are a unique group, set undeniably apart because of race and sex with a unique set of challenges” (as cited in Hill Collins, 2009, p. 25). Black Feminist Thought does not seek to be separatist; indeed it recognizes that there exists overlap between Black Feminist Thought and other theories.

However, the distinctive nature of Black Feminist Thought is shaped by the convergence of its six distinguishing features: the dialectical relationship between Black women's oppression and activism; U.S. Black women's standpoint; connections between Black feminist practice thought and Black feminist practice; dialogical practices and Black women intellectuals; Black feminism as dynamic and changing; and the relationship between Black Feminist thought and other social justice projects (Hill Collins, 2009).

The six distinguishing features of black feminist thought.

The dialectical relationship between black women's oppression and activism.

Black women's activism would not be necessary if not for the many forms of oppression facing Black women. It is this dialectical relationship, the very existence and sustainability of a movement and theoretical orientation that only exists because of the oppression it's fighting, that creates a unique position for Black women's activism. In addition, U.S. Black women's movements fight against the contradictions of supposedly basic human rights of all United States citizens: the right for equality, freedom and justice. These rights have historically been divvied up in unjust ways, leaving U.S. Black women sometimes not only questioning "Ar'n't I a woman?"; but also wondering "Ar'n't I a citizen?"

Black women's standpoint. This dialectical relationship amidst the intersectionality of oppression creates the second distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought, a Black woman standpoint. There exists a tension between the experiences and ideas of Black women and Black feminist thought. Although there is no monolithic

experience for Black women, there is a commonality of experiences resulting in a unique standpoint for Black women. Hill Collins (2009) states that

Despite differences of age, sexual orientation, social class, region, and religion U.S. Black women encounter societal practices that restrict us to inferior housing, neighborhoods, schools, jobs, and public treatment and hide this differential consideration behind an array of common beliefs about Black women's intelligence, work habits, and sexuality. (p. 29)

Given the varied perception of these shared experiences, Black feminism is charged with coming up with diverse approaches to these common themes. For example, depending on class, experiences with racism may take various forms. A charge within Black feminism is to allow the space for multiple approaches to grow and be supported.

Black feminist thought and practice. Connecting the practice of Black feminism and Black Feminist Thought becomes the third distinguishing feature. The relationship between action and thought is not at odds, instead one informs the other. According to Hill Collins (2009), Black feminist thought leads to Black activism:

a dialogical relationship suggest that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a change consciousness. For U.S. Black women as a collectivity, the struggle for a self-defined Black feminist occurs through an ongoing dialogue whereby action and though inform one another. (p. 34)

Within this framework, Hill Collins asserts that knowledge is not enough, it is the action tied to that knowledge with the goal of creating change that will better the experiences of Black women.

Dialogical practices and black women intellectuals. Acknowledging the existence of a Black woman's standpoint is useless if it is not then critically analyzed for its usefulness in creating or promoting social change. Black women, being historically denied access to formal education, created different ways of knowing and acts of resistance based on their lived experiences at that moment. This allows for the recognition of at least two types of knowledge—commonplace and specialized. Commonplace knowledge exists in the form of “everyday” knowledge that Black women share with each other, such as “how to style our hair, characteristics of ‘good’ Black men, strategies for dealing with White folks, and skills of how to ‘get over’” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 38). It is my assertion that as a result of this inquiry project, we will find this commonplace knowledge is less accessible for geographically isolated (typically as a result of class mobility) Black women. Specialized knowledge refers to “experts or specialists who participate in and merge from a group . . . whether working-class, or middle-class, educated or not, famous or everyday” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 38).

The role of Black women intellectuals in black feminist thought. The role of Black women intellectuals as central to Black feminist thought is important for the following four reasons: shared experiences, personal investment, self definition and empowerment, and building collaboration.

1. Shared experiences. Black women have unique vantage points based on our *experiences* as Black women. As such, we are able to offer critical insights as members of an oppressed group regarding our oppression. According to Hill Collins, this does not mean that other groups are not able to participate in

Black feminism, however it does mean that “ the primary responsibility for defining one’s own reality lies with the people who live that reality, who actually *have* [emphasis added] those experiences” (p. 39).

2. Personal investment. Black women intellectuals are more likely to be committed to staying with the struggles when others who are less personally invested may be tempted to walk away. Hill Collins discussed the importance of recognizing the relationship between advocacy and personal experiences. She contends that over the long haul, Black women will always remain investing in their liberation.
3. Self-definition for empowerment. Black women intellectuals are responsible for participating in the ongoing quest for self-definition necessary for empowerment. Hill Collins (2009) states

Black feminist thought cannot challenge intersecting oppressions without empowering African American women. Because self-definition is key to individual and group empowerment, ceding the power of self-definition to other groups, no matter how well-meaning or supportive of Black women they may be, in essence replicates existing power hierarchies. (p. 40)

This process of self-definition is another key aspect of this inquiry project, as I seek to rearticulate and re-evaluate my role as a black women intellectual within black feminism.

4. Building collaborations. The last reason why Black women intellectuals are a key component of Black feminist thought is that “we alone can foster the group autonomy that fosters effective coalitions with other groups” (Hill

Collins, 2009, p. 40). Collaboration will be necessary among the varying types of Black women intellectuals to create coalitions with other social justice projects. As described above, the role of Black women intellectuals plays a central feature in the creation and sustainability of Black feminist thought.

Black feminism as dynamic and changing. Another distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is concerns the dynamic nature of social movements. Black feminist thought and activism does not occur in a vacuum, instead it is creating and re-creating itself in a vortex of change. Put succinctly, “as social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 43). In particular, this feature address a component of this inquiry project, namely the impact of the shifting nature of oppression and geographical isolation on Black women intellectuals—

Under current conditions, some Black women thinkers have lost contact with Black feminist practice. Conversely, the changed social conditions under which U.S. Black women now come to womanhood—class-segregated neighborhoods, some integrated, far more not—place Black women of different social classes *in entirely new relationships with one another* [emphasis added]. (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 43)

And it is within these “entirely new relationships” that another danger exists, “the potential isolation of individual thinkers from Black women’s collective experiences—lack of access to other U.S. Black women and to Black women’s communities” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 45). This lack of access to other U.S. Black women and/or Black

communities is creating a void for Black women intellectuals of both types to share strategies for navigating institutions of domination.

Black feminist thought and social justice. The final distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought is its role with other social justice projects. Black feminist thought does not seek to be in competition with other social justice causes, instead, it recognizes that “without a commitment to human solidarity and social justice . . . and political movement—whether Black nationalist, feminist, or anti-elitist—may be doomed to ultimate failure” (Hill Collins, 2009, p. 47). Black feminism does not seek to compete with Womanist theory, Africana Womanism or Feminist theory; instead, it recognizes the role of Black Feminism as ultimately humanist.

It is Hill Collins’ charge to utilize this knowledge as a survival and liberation tool that intrigues me most for this project. Hill Collins suggests that Black women recognize our “outsider within” status the illusion of access within certain circles only still to find ourselves pushed to the outside. This concept is connected to hooks’ view of using the margins as radical spaces of openness, and my idea of the tight spaces that are produced as Black women constantly navigate their “selves.” Learning from our “outsider within” status becomes a second major area of exploration in my project, as it will provide additional tools for navigating hegemonic institutions of domination that I, and the majority of other Black feminist scholars, did not learn at our grandmother’s kitchen table.

Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory is a postmodern framework developed for analyzing inter-subjective discourses. According to McCann and Kim (2003), standpoint theory was developed primarily by social scientists, especially sociologists and political theorists. It extends some of the early insights about consciousness that emerged from Marxist/Socialist feminist theories and the wider conversations about identity politics. It endeavors to develop a feminist epistemology, or theory of knowledge, that delineates a method for constructing effective knowledge from the insights of women's experience. Hill Collins is one noted feminist scholar who has furthered the understanding of Standpoint theory as a framework for understanding the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism in the lives of Black women.

Standpoint theory "emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power" (Harding, 2004, p. 1). Given that the collective Black woman standpoint is critical to Black Feminist Thought, standpoint theory plays a significant role in understanding Black Feminist Thought. Black Feminist Thought "can create a collective identity among African American women about the dimensions of a Black women's standpoint" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 36).

Chapter Summary

Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism and Black Feminist Thought share many overlapping features. Each theory is important as a foundational piece for this inquiry project, but there is no hierarchy of importance per se. Black Feminist Thought

most closely aligns with my research project, yet its very roots are in CRT and CRF. Hill Collins's work narrows and orders distinguishing features in an effort to provide future researchers what she was lacking, a theoretical framework that speaks directly to, and validates, our research interests.

CHAPTER IV

MY JOURNEY'S ROADMAP: THE METHODOLOGY TO MY MADNESS

Methodology

This chapter explores the role of discourse at the macro level in creating social practices and tools that are being utilized by Black women. The chapter covers a broad overview of my research paradigm; a description of Discourse, Discourse Analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology and theoretical framework; a description of the methods selected for this research project; and my positionality within this inquire project.

Discourse and Discourse Analysis

To adequately explore my research question, it is necessary to possess an overall understanding of the term discourse and discourse analysis, as well as a definition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology. For this inquiry project “discourses are social cognitions, socially specific ways of knowing social practices, that can be, and are, used as resources for representing social practices in text” (Wodak & Chilton, 2005, p. 25). Discourses can be found in a myriad of places from popular culture to institutions, and at a micro analytical level focus on the linguistic examination of the spoken and written word. These analyses recognize “the role of discourse in creating the social worlds in which we live, and challenge the use of language to create

and maintain hegemony. They can be used for the assertion of power and knowledge and they can be used for purposes of resistance and critique” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 6).

According to Wood and Kroger (2000), discourse analysis “originated in branches of philosophy, sociology, linguistics, and literary theory” (p. 18) and focuses on analyzing spoken and written (text) discourses. There are multiple interpretations of what actually constitutes a discourse analysis. The beauty of the multi and interdisciplinary nature of this methodology (inclusion of multiple perspectives), also provides a challenge for novice researchers, like myself. In spite of this potential challenge, this methodology seemed most appropriate for my research given that the discourse that “is the focus of analysis in discourse analysis does not refer to language in the abstract, but to language in use. That is, discourse refers to the words that were spoken, to the text that was written” (Wood & Kroger, 2000, p. 55). Here the implication is that words, whether written or spoken, have no meaning alone, it is in how and for what purposes they are used, that words gain their meaning. Discourse analysis forces us to question the use of word choice, placement and selection. Why that word? Who selected it? What types of images does it create? This type of critical analysis of word choice, selection, use and placement eventually led to the development of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which emerged in the 1990s, goes beyond the surface examination of text and spoken word and instead investigates the role of discourses in maintaining hegemonic institutions. It evolved as a way to embrace a

“view of primacy of discourse...necessary for describing and interpreting, analyzing and critiquing social life” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 10). CDA draws on "poststructuralist discourse theory and critical linguistics and focuses on how social relations, identity, knowledge and power are constructed through written and spoken texts in communities" (Luke, 1997, p. 1). In doing so CDA becomes

Characterized by a number of principles: for example, all approaches are problem-oriented, and thus necessarily interdisciplinary and eclectic . . . Moreover, CDA is characterized by the common interests in de-mystifying ideologies and power through systematic and *retroductable* investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual). CDA researchers also attempt to make their own positions and interests explicit while retaining their respective scientific methodologies and while remaining self-reflective of their own research process. (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 3)

CDA was selected as a methodology for this research project because of its “*constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary approach*” which makes CDA “*not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a mutli-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach*” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 2). CDA shares several common factors: discourse, critique, and power and ideology (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). These common elements, against a backdrop of methods ranging from dialectical-relational to socio-historical approaches, provide the common threads of CDA. Wodak and Meyer (2009) state:

it is important to stress that CDA has never been and has never attempted to be or to provide one single or specific theory. Neither is one specific methodology characteristic of research in CDA. Quite the contrary, studies in CDA are

multifarious, derived from quite different theoretical backgrounds, oriented towards different data and methodologies. (p. 5)

This multi-theoretical approach is a perfect fit for the nature of my research project, which, in a vein similar to that of grounded theory, will generate its theory from the collection of data through the thorough examination of selected texts. I have already discussed discourse and critique (critical research) above. The next section focuses on the influence of power and ideology on CDA, and the role of Michel Foucault in the development of this methodology.

Power and Ideology

In general terms, power, as a linguistic term, has a variety of interpretations and meanings. What does it mean to have power? Is power based on perception? How does power influence ideologies? For this research project, I will be operating from a Foucauldian perspective on the definition and role of power in shaping social practices and creating dominant ideologies. Therefore I will use the “Weberian definition [of] power as the chance that an individual in a social relationship can achieve his or her own will even against the *resistance of others* [emphasis added]” (Weber, as cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 9).

A major player in the evolution of CDA was Michel Foucault, who posited that language is never neutral and plays a major role in the construction and regulation of knowledge, social relations and institutions. Foucault, well known for his works *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969), sought to understand how knowledge and power were societally and institutionally created and maintained.

Foucault asserted that discourses, which he viewed as social practices, are the dominant principle in history, as they create and reify practices and institutions that ultimately sustain hegemonic ideologies. Foucault believed that “all history is a document of the past—that traces it leaves in our present through books, account, acts, building, [and] customs” (Horrocks & Jevtic, 2002, p. 87).

Unique to Foucault, and important to this work, is his understanding of the role of discourse as more than just ideological. Foucault believed the discourses can be both “a means of oppression and the means of resistance” (Mills, 2003, p. 55). Discourse becomes more than just language; it is also the “key words and statements that recur in local texts of all kinds. Such statements appear intertextually across texts and comprise familiar patterns of . . . paradigmatic knowledge and practice” (Luke, 1997, p. 7). Foucault cautions, however, that we should not oversimplify the relationship between discourse and language as they are so intricately involved. We create discourse through our actions and interactions with the world, there are very few objects Foucault would place in the non-discursive realm (a table for example); however, even things in the non-discursive realm are interpreted through our experiences and understanding via discourse of how to interact with those structures.

The Regulation of Discourses

In addition to investigating the production of discourse, Foucault was also interested in how discourses are regulated: “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its

chance events, and to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (as cited in Mills, 2003, p. 57). Of interest to Foucault were how discourses were then constrained and controlled externally, and how these constraints and controls lead to the production of discourse. In ‘The Order of Discourse’ he writes about three external exclusions which lead to the production of discourse: taboo, the distinction between the mad and the sane, and the distinction between true and false.

External Exclusions

The first external exclusion, taboo, refers to the regulations surrounding the discussion of certain topics (such as sex, drugs, etc) and how these regulations form a prohibition that influences, and at times limits, how we talk about these topics. This limited discourse influences how people began to feel about topics and creates then societal practices which become institutionalized.

The distinction between the mad and the sane, the second external exclusion, refers to the notion of whose voices are heard. For those deemed to be “mad”, their voices are not included and therefore do not (cannot) directly contribute to discourse. For example, the North Carolina sterilization law passed in 1919, allowed patients deemed mentally incompetent to be sterilized without their consent. Because they were deemed “mad,” their voices on matters pertaining to their bodies did not matter in the discourse surrounding this topic. Only the voices of the “sane” (i.e. physicians, psychiatrists) were heard and respected.

The final external exclusion impacting the production of discourse is the distinction between true and false. For those in positions of power, they are allowed to

speak and it becomes recognized as truth; those without power are deemed unworthy of having any insights worthy of contribution. Even the lived experiences of those without power are deemed false and are not included or rewritten in discourses. Institutions work together regarding the external exclusions to maintain and support those discourses which support their agendas.

Internal Exclusions

In addition to external exclusions, Foucault wrote about four internal exclusions which impact the production of discourse: commentary, the author, disciplinary boundary, and “the rarefaction of the speaking subject” (Mills, 2003, p. 59). The goal of the internal exclusions is “ultimately distinguish between those who are authorized to speak and those who are not—those discourses which are authorized and those which are not” (Mills, 2003, p. 59). The first internal exclusion, commentary, refers to writing about another author’s statements such as in the case of literary critiques. Texts which are commented on often, even if it is in some ways repetitive, receive a different and primary status.

The second internal exclusion, the author, refers to how texts by the same author, become grouped together and unified, even though the works may indeed be quite different. I will be mindful of this second internal exclusion as I investigate the works of Lorde, hooks, and Hill Collins, to ensure that I look at each work separately, and not as one continuous volume per author.

Disciplinary boundary, the third internal exclusion in the production of discourse, refers to the limitation imposed on how we study and investigate texts based on the

discipline in which we are trained. This imposes limitations on how we engage with texts if we are only able to view it from one specific theoretical or methodological viewpoint. And finally, the “rarefaction of the speaking subject” refers to who has the power to speak authoritatively and have their voice heard. According to Foucault “speaking authoritatively is hedged around by rituals and takes place within particular societies of discourse, where discourses circulate according to prescribe rules. For example, at universities, only certain people can give lectures” (as cited in Mills, 2003, p. 61). Universities have unwritten rules on who can speak authoritatively, and through a complex “system of multiple constraints act both internally and externally on the production and reception of discourse and it is these constraints which bring discourse into existence” (Mills, 2003, p. 62).

Although Foucault’s perspective on the production of discourse is a critical foundational piece to this inquiry project; it has been the subject of criticism for his lack of emphasis on the subjects of discourse. Wodak and Meyer (2009) address this critique regarding Foucault, when they state

though often wrongly accused of so doing, [Foucault] does not deny the subject. It aims to analyse [sic] the constitution of the subject in its historical and social context from a diachronic (i.e. longitudinal) and synchronic (i.e. cross-sectional) perspective: who was conceived of as a subject at a particular point and time? How, and how come? . . . Foucauldian discourse theory contests the existence of an autonomous subject, but that does not mean that it is against the subject . . . The individual also faces the problem of having to prevail, to assert himself, to find his place in society. (p. 38)

In particular, as I examine the works of bell hooks, Audre Lorde and Patricia Hill Collins for their role in creating a collective standpoint for Black women, I must keep in mind

that “it is not the sum of everything which can be known within a period but it is a complex set of relationships between the knowledge which are produced within a particular period and the rules by which new knowledge is generated” (Mills, 2003, p. 62).

In feminist work following Foucault, CDA has been used to "write and hear historically marginalized speakers and voices. This includes significant work in educational autobiographies of women and members of indigenous and cultural and ethnic minority groups . . . this work is seen to serve educative and emancipatory political projects” (Luke, 1997, p. 6). I would like to continue in this vein to utilize CDA to examine the voices of Lorde, Hill Collins and hooks. Lorde, Hill Collins, and hooks have all recognized the power of language and began the process of reclaiming their individual power through discursive counter-hegemonic discourses. These discourses are creating a collective consciousness, or standpoint, for Black women who are looking to also reclaim their power in the face of their marginalization.

Method and Madness: Talking to Myself

The process of critically reflecting on my personal and professional experiences and memories took me through a roller coaster of varying emotions. I found myself crying, laughing, and even screaming. I was ultimately facing years of buried questioning, anger, and resentment. While journeying through my life and talking to myself, I began the process of deconstructing all I had ever been taught in school. I found myself finally questioning the “institution” of education and all the curricula I had been fed over the years. Prior to this inquiry project, I spent forty-three years as a

“model” student. I did not question my teachers or the information they presented. I guess I always trusted their pedagogy and practices. Having been told by my community and family, “to get a good education, so you can have all the things you want by getting a great job” I thought obedience was part of the process.

Entering higher education, I continued to play the game until I entered graduate school at least so I thought. I began conquering this demon throughout my Masters program, when my advisor would assign papers and not give us page limits. I remember this so vividly because it shattered my viewpoint on education. His rational: “If I tell you how long to make the paper, that’s how long you’ll write. Your paper needs to be long enough to convey your point, period.” I could no longer count words to make the magic word limit, and, if necessary, add any fluff. I adjusted to the “new way” of writing papers, completed my program and graduated.

Well the systemic institutional practice of just doing enough to meet the standard and not really engaging in scholarly discourse and research reared its ugly head again. After 48 credits of course work, comprehensive questions and a dissertation proposal; I thought I had conquered my own need for mastering a system that stifled my voice and crippled my very own thoughts. I began to acquiesce into something that was very ingrained in my psyche—the need to play it safe and not disrupt and question a system of education that was oppressive and rooted in hegemony. I knew why this was happening it was because of my own fear of failure and not living up to some unattainable self-imposed image of myself as a doctoral student. Even within a doctoral program that

encourages free expression and growth, I found myself at odds with myself, and my advisor.

What was I Thinking!?!

Initially I thought I would do interviews to investigate how Black mothers deal with raising their children in white neighborhoods. Part of this interest was driven by my own personal experiences. But I was never quite sure of what I would do that would be considered scholarly—by others. Finally, at a meeting with my dissertation chair we discussed investigating Black scholars utilizing critical discourse analysis to disrupt the institution of education. I liked the idea. It really spoke to my personal and professional experiences, as well as perspectives in which I entertained as a faculty member at a HBCU (Historically Black College and University). However, my chair did not tell me exactly what I needed to do, he encouraged me to read and think about various ways to actually question/disrupt the institution of education. Looking back, I realize now he wanted me to really think about myself, my work, my thoughts, and what it was that I wanted to truly investigate. I wasn't sold on the self-discovery. I didn't have time for that I was too busy trying to get a Ph.D.

I began journaling my thoughts, of frustration and fear, loneliness and pain in preparation for this monumental task. Although, I enjoyed most of my coursework, I often wondered numerous times, why, why do I need a "Ph.D."? What does it even mean? I reflected on the inner workings of our department and the discussions students held regarding rigor and strategy. Some of us were interested in the process. Yes, the process was and is important, but at some point we wanted to know how to play the game

to win. Because all of us wanted to have a Ph.D. we decided to create rules that we thought would get us closer to getting a Ph.D. instead of spending time engaging in scholarly discourse. We came up with the following flow plan to achieve our goal: How do you cross the stage? Rule number 1: Put together a “good” committee. Rule number 2: Please your chair. Rule number 3: Just do it. Do what, though? My chair was too busy trying to get me to read more articles and engage in self-discovery instead of telling me exactly what to do. I was frustrated, mad, and angry. There were days, I know he felt like I was harassing him. And I felt like he was hazing me.

He Thought I Lost My Mind—I Did Too!

After calling him one day while he was trying to get to a meeting, I questioned him on his review of some recently submitted work. He asked me to calm down, then he said, “Ms. Ricks, you are now going to make me yell and I don’t want to go there.” He put me on hold. I was heated! I wanted to slash his tires. He came back on the phone and said he was going to be late for his meeting; however, he decided to pull over into a shopping center’s parking lot to have this conversation. Needless to say, he missed his meeting and spent almost two hours on the phone with me. He then said, “now you need to go back and read those articles I sent you via email and call me after you finish so we can discuss them. If we need to meet in person let me know.”

I must admit I did not want to hear what he had just told me to do. Reading more articles was not on my flow chart for getting my Ph.D. I needed him to tell me exactly what to do. After going through this scenario on more than one occasion, actually I am too embarrassed to give the number of times we shared this scene. It was definitely like

the movie *Ground Hog Day* with Bill Murray. Dr. Gause had re-lived that scene with me more times than I can imagine. Finally, I decided I needed to become what he likes to call “a willing worker.” I learned from Dr. Gause that a student who is a willing worker comes to trust the relationship that exists between the student and advisor totally. Once that happens the student is able to receive advisement and engage in writing with ease. With this in mind, I began reflecting on my writing. I started visiting the journals and diaries that I had been keeping since I was twelve years old. I wanted Dr. Gause to know that I was a willing worker and decided that I would just do it. Through these visits, I realized, I spent a year trapped in my own fear. That’s how I know this process worked for me, and was the process I was meant to utilize.

The abstract nature of Critical Discourse Analysis provided multiple ways I could approach my research questions given the nature of my inquiry project. Producing the methods and data analysis was the ultimate test for me; however, CDA provided me the intellectual freedom and intellectual license to pursue what would be helpful to me while I engaged this project. However, elements of wanting to be told how and what to do continued to rise within my psyche and therefore, I kept blocking myself. I knew I wanted to write about survival; the intricacies of “making it” and being successful; particularly given the multiple roles and responsibilities that I negotiated on a daily basis. While dealing with my multiple positionalities and identities, I often wanted to pick up a book, better yet; a map to help me get through this thing called life. In fact, the times that I thought I was living, I was only existing and persevering.

While overcoming the obstacles and challenges of my existence, I knew deep down the lessons that I was learning needed to be handed down. Handed down to other women who shared the common bond of womanhood. Ultimately, I needed to leave a roadmap for my own daughters. The irony in this process kept striking me on my head constantly. I was being told to trust my intuition, my gut; but often would not do this for the fear of not being scholarly. I finally did trust my gut, which is often the way I have figured out a lot of things.

Even this inquiry project, rooted in Black Feminist Epistemology and completed in a doctoral program that espouses a liberatory process; made me feel that it still is not enough to *say* or *feel* or *know* or *be*. You have to prove, validate, acknowledge. It's only valid if someone else has made it so. I was reminded of the Lorde (2007) quote: "The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free" (p. 38). Somehow my yearning to be "free" was clashing with the process that I needed to engage in order to arrive at that freedom.

My Real Journey Begins

I chose books I had read before and authors that "spoke" to me. By that I mean, when I read the works of Lorde, hooks, and Hill Collins previously, something deep inside me finally came back to life. I felt the yearnings of the souls of my ancestors re-kindling the spirit of my soul. I realized if I were to gain freedom through this process, I would have to find it in bits and pieces. Much like the slaves traveled North to their emancipation. It was not in grand fashion, but in the collected bits and pieces of their

inner strength. Mostly, I would have to find it inside. The first reading of the text was done for classroom research, or in preparation for scholarly conferences. I re-read all the texts this time stopping and reflecting on words, phrases, sentences, and thoughts that gave me pause. I underlined them all—the words that served as kindling to the fire within my being. If I was so inclined I made additional notations in the margins of the texts. I read a chapter at a time, and when the chapter was complete I pulled out my red journal. My keeper of the flames. It is a personal journal that I bought a year ago in anticipation of this process at the heed of one of my professors, who said “write down everything—use it for your dissertation.”

I began my journey towards freedom with my red journal and my favorite fine point black pen. I went back through the chapters of all the selected works from “my three women” and hand wrote the quotes that spoke like thunder and the one that whispered ever so lightly to me. I knew this process would be crucial for several reasons in order to examine the intertextuality of the selected texts, I had to know them backwards and forwards; scribing also gave me an opportunity to notice the finer details of each author’s writing. This process also provided the opportunity to notice what words they emphasized, when they chose to capitalize words (white, black, etc); and finally, scribing allowed their words to flow between my mind and my heart. A connection was made as I wrote their very quotes. The words naturally flowed from my fingers to the tip of my favorite fine point black pen. It was then that I realized that I began to own a piece of it—my inquiry project and the lived experiences of their texts.

In between the quotes I wrote my thoughts, experiences and feelings that awakened by the very act of writing.

The process was a long and arduous one. Sometimes it took three hours to document two pages, sometimes after an hour, I had only one line. Throughout this process, I realized that even when it was just a line, a thought, or a question. I was engaged in research. A valid line of inquiry that would yield what I desperately wanted, my Ph.D. I repeated this process until I reached saturation in reading, and had completed at the minimum the two texts. Next, I went through the journal and typed the quotes into a word document, again stopping to pause and reflect on the uniqueness of each statement or how it fit within the author's overarching theme. Did their themes "speak" to each other? How would I interpret those themes? Throughout this process it was like I had my grandmother's wisdom once again at my disposal only this time she was able to give me hints on how to survive the often parasitic environment of academia.

The typed quotes were printed and read again, this time not only for clarity but also to situate the themes within the larger scope of the project. As I read the quotes, I decided where and how I thought they fit within this inquiry project, sometimes in multiple places, and I made note of that above the quotes in bold letters. Themes were then grouped from both authors for similarity, contrast, and intertextuality. This became my data set. From the themes, my notes and my reflections in between the quotes, I conducted my analysis.

Methods

To explore my research questions, I conducted a secondary and textual analysis of the following works: *Sister Outsider* (2007), by Audre Lorde and *Teaching to Transgress* (1994) by bell hooks. Because it serves as the foundation to Black Feminist Scholarship, I utilized *Black Feminist Thought* (1990, 2009) by Patricia Hill-Collins as the central Black Feminist Epistemological framework for this inquiry project. Although there are many sources of written discourse data (correspondence, publications, and unpublished), I focused primarily on publications (books) that assisted me in understanding the authors' personal and professional journeys.

Utilizing an inter-discursive analysis, which sees texts in terms of the different discourses, genres and styles that draw upon and articulate together, the books were analyzed for how they have interacted with each other to create social practice and have influenced the standpoint of Black women, and how their works will influence the future standpoint of Black women. In addition, I considered the intertextuality of the texts, which refers to how texts draw upon, incorporate, (re)contextualize and dialogue with other texts. This allows us to continue to recognize texts as social events, a way people can act and interact with each other and the world. This position brings into mind issues of agency and identity politics which may need to be explored.

According to Wood and Kroger (2000), patterns “involve essentially the recognition of relationships between features of discourse: within or across participants, within or across sections, within or across occasions, and so on” (p. 117). I examined the

writings of Lorde and hooks looking for patterns in their intertextuality that may address the following questions:

- Is there an identifiable trigger for each woman when her writing becomes noticeably counter-hegemonic?
- What role do words and language play for each author?
- What was the impact of the author's personal, professional and political development on their interpersonal relationships?
- Was the author "successful" in navigating hegemonic institutions of domination?
- Were strategies for survival passed on, and how?
- How do the texts "talk" to each other? How do they "talk" to me?
- What social movements/actions have these texts created?

The above questions acted as a guide; however, I was aware that additional patterns might emerge.

In addition, part of my analysis will explore "What is valid knowledge at a certain place and certain time? How does this knowledge arise and how is it passed on? What functions does it have for constituting subjects? What consequences does it have for the overall shaping and development of society?" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 34). This perspective fit nicely with my desire to investigate how Black women have created different ways of knowing and being in the world, how that knowledge has been validated, and how Black women have attempted to pass this information on.

This critical discourse analysis may lead to the future development of a template. This template will serve as a guide for Black feminist scholars who are striving to survive and transform hegemonic institutions of domination. This template may allow emerging Black feminist scholars to see a collective pattern of psychosocial development, and provide basic information on how they may begin the process of self-preservation and survival. This pattern of growth and empowerment will, of course, be unique to each woman; however having a skeletal understanding of what the process may be in navigating the academy is crucial. It will allow for an earlier period of “normalizing” for emerging Black feminist scholars who will understand that pieces of their personal struggle have long been understood by a collective group.

Positionality

One of the challenges related to this inquiry project was recognizing my positionality during the collection and interpretation of the data set. Reflexivity demands that we “turn back on our self the lens through which we are interpreting the world” (Goodall, 2000, p. 137). This type of scrutiny can be a frightening experience at its best. Researching the “Other” for me is a safer experience, but to constantly examine my ontology and epistemology required a hidden strength I discovered during this process.

I recognized the importance of being aware of my positionality while doing this research in part because “positionality . . . forces us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases just as we are denouncing the power structures that surround our subjects” (Madison, 2005, p. 7). Prior to enrolling in this Ph.D. program, I am sure that I would have denied being part of a system that replicates oppression. In my mind I was

not privileged, I was underprivileged. It was an “either/or” not a “both/and.” I realize that in order to be an effective researcher I had to recognize the ways in which I am privileged and how this has impacted my ontological perspective. How could I, a trained counselor, go through all these years not *seeing* something that became so obvious once the blinders were removed? That is the tricky thing about perspective, and why reflexivity is so important. We only allow ourselves to see things we *want* to see or to know things we can bear to handle. The other perspectives simply do not exist. We *cannot* see them.

The research I conducted was very personal to me. Examining feelings of belonging, coping, and survival strategies for women of color who have been labeled as the “other,” is really what I have been doing my whole life. I attempted at first, through one of my comprehensive questions to approach this need of belonging from a psychological perspective. I engaged one the questions from this perspective because of my counselor education training and background. But, as Lorde (2007) wrote in a letter, “I doubt that your (psych) training can have prepared you to explore the tangle of need, fear, distrust, despair and hope which operates between us, and certainly not to the depth necessary” (p. 162). But this inquiry project has pushed me to examine this term in a broader arena as well. It has forced me to stop, step back, and reflect.

My Youth

My feelings of alienation and being “different” started as a young child. I experienced both of these perplexing constructs both in the home and in the community. Why? I did not look like anyone in my family. My mother had me at eighteen, and

although my “dad’s” family lived three row homes away (none of which I knew until I was around eleven); I didn’t realize that I looked like them. In the household in which I grew up in, I stood out for several reasons, first because of my complexion. I am what many members of the Black community call “high yella” or “red-boned.” I was “light bright and damn near white.” This caused me a lot of grief. The second big sin was having “good” hair, meaning the texture was not “nappy” or “kinky” and it was long. My cousins and aunts used to ask to play in my hair, and my grandmother reminded me often that it was my “crown and glory.” I also stood out because of my height. I was very tall, so I really stood out. In fact, I stood out everywhere or at least it seems. I started as a young child trying to make myself invisible, and I would literally think that if I thought I wasn’t there, others could not see me. I discovered later in my training that most children between the ages of four and six like to practice invisibility. This feeling of invisibility is a central theme throughout this inquiry project not only in the lives of the authors I examined, but also in the lives of most women, particularly women of Color.

As a child, I was simultaneously praised and shunned for my light skin, big eyes, and “good hair.” Often I was told that I was a beautiful child, but it always made me feel uncomfortable. This surface attention based on the Eurocentric concept of beauty denied the other pieces of who I was. People were constantly surprised that I was smart or humorous or competent, period.

I finally stopped growing just shy of six feet tall, and officially became an anomaly in my family. I never got to see my paternal cousins, whom I did resemble, and it was not until 2008 at a reunion for “that” side of the family, I was able take a picture

with them and it hit me—I look just like them. Damn. Not growing up with any of them, I still felt different. Everyone else calls my “dad’s” mom “mom mom.” That phrase doesn’t roll off my tongue. How could it? No interaction from “that” side of the family until I was 18. The event was so “staged.” I received a set of luggage to go off to The Pennsylvania State University to pursue an education. The event didn’t form a family connection for me; however, I have been told this is not uncommon in many Black families. What is so interesting over the years they have become more accepting. I love they have embraced my children and me now, but I still don’t feel comfortable enough to stay overnight at one of their homes. I still feel as if “that” side of the family are strangers. I am simultaneously teased and adored by my mother’s side, learning the beauty and curse of being different. But I know I *am* different and it *does* matter.

My Schooling Experience

From this home life I added a school history that involved attending ten schools in twelve years. Yes, that takes repeating. I attended ten schools in twelve years. I had a salad bowl educational experience, which included Montessori, private, public, and magnet. The feeling of being different continued, magnified, grew, and festered often based on the multiple educational communities in which I participated. I received very visceral responses from people. Most were impressed and thrilled with my light skin; or they look at me as if I am responsible for my own shading. Either way, it was very uncomfortable. In fourth grade I attended a Montessori school in Philadelphia, and in fifth and sixth grades I attended private schools. This was the beginning of feeling that same sense of “othering” from outside the community. My token status allowed me in to

certain places and gave me a glimpse of cultural capital, but only if I behaved. That meant answering questions about hair, sweet potato pie, etc., or fitting in. Being quiet or silent was the key. It also meant I had to dress the part. Oxford shirts, khaki pants, penny loafers or boat shoes—the “preppy look” was always the outfit of choice.

During high school, I attended the prestigious Philadelphia High School for Girls (GHS), I began to feel the beginning of my fight with Black women. The group that looked like me, so I thought, reminded that I didn’t look like them. They also continued to remind me that I did not talk like them, act like them, or have anything in common with them. In the eyes of some I saw deep fear and loathing. I realized, I had something they wanted; however, I had no idea what it was nor did I care. All along they didn’t realize they had what I wanted—acceptance. In order to survive and negotiate the oppression, I flew under the radar. Hiding from them and hiding from myself. GHS was challenging; however, I still managed to graduate Summa Cum Laude. This was no easy task. During this time of my life, I found myself living all over the city with no room of my own. I had no space, no mother really. I lost her at age fourteen. That’s when she met my sibling’s father, and started to drift away. I lived with them until I was about sixteen, but the physical abuse I witnessed was too much. Walking “home” and seeing police cars, I knew what was happening. I would turn and instead walk the three or four blocks to my grandmother’s house. I finally just moved in with her. When my mother had my sister when I was sixteen, and then twins when I was seventeen; it was assumed that I could take care of myself. I was strong and capable and independent and I would figure it out. I got a job to pay for my extras and planned for college. But the messages

kept coming. A social studies teacher tells me I probably will get into Penn State, just not University Park, that's competitive, and his daughter didn't get in. How could he expect that I would? I apply for schools without direction, and choose to only apply to Penn State and University of Pittsburgh, even though my guidance counselor had suggested I go to community college and stay at "home" so I can help my mom out with the babies. And she was serious. No internal locus of control told her that was in anyway inappropriate. Without direction and with mostly myself parenting me; I was often 5 -10 minutes late to school. This cost me an opportunity to play basketball at GHS. I was told by the gym teacher (who was also our class advisor) which I couldn't even try out because of my tardies. Couldn't even try it. She also reminded me right before graduation that she was surprised I graduated summa cum laude, and to please have my family keep themselves "in check"—you know, not over celebrating. These are things in reflection that have stayed with me, deep inside me, festering, creating something—anger or hatred—I'm not sure, but it has to come out. It has to end. What was it about me that frightened her? She had nothing to worry about. Only my mother came to graduation, there was no family dinner, etc. Just another day and a few congratulations.

I did make it to Penn State, University Park campus, in the Fall of 1985. I left for college on my eighteenth birthday. In retrospect I can see what a baby I was, just a kid being sent off to war. . . . but that's not how it was presented. I went alone to school. Well, not completely. I rode to college with my best friend and her parents. They picked me up from my grandmother's house and off I went. I started a new chapter of my life

that continued to remind me that difference mattered, but it did not have to be in a negative way. That we could use and embrace difference. As Lorde (2007) stated “In our work and in our living, we must recognize that difference is a reason for celebration and growth, rather than a reason for destruction” (p. 35). Penn State. Approximately 1,200 students out of 30,000 on the “main” (University Park) campus were Black. I managed to be one of them. Once again thrust into an area where I had to learn the rules, the coping strategies, how to survive. Not just mentally, which was already tough—I had no idea what credits were, how they worked, how to add or drop classes, nothing. I was in the middle of Pennsylvania, a State which at the time had more hate groups than North Carolina. And it was me, and my best friend from high school. We roomed together, and she saved me that year. She was my sister-friend. I wouldn’t have made it without her. And even with the person I was most close to there were secrets. She had a daughter when she was 14, and passed her off as her sister. So her first year at Penn State was rough because she missed her, she longed for her. I could see in her eyes that something was wrong, but it wasn’t until we had lived together in a tiny room for six months that she trusted me enough to tell me her secret. Her fear kept her from living for that first year. And she didn’t return for our sophomore year.

I continued to struggle through Penn State becoming heavily involved in the Black Caucus and getting a work-study position at the Paul Robeson Cultural Center (PRCC). These two things allowed me to reduce my defenses, reload and recharge for the daily fight—why is your perm different? What is pink lotion? Why do you wash your hair once a week? One of my roommates even asked me, challenged me, on the

validity of the extra muscle theory in Black athletes (runners in particular) because all the Black runners beat her when she was in high school. They would've beaten me too.

Could it be that they were just better runners?

My involvement during that sophomore year got me arrested. I found a community and we decided that we were not going to allow the University to continue to ignore our needs. We protested, we marched, we organized, we sat-in. It was the sit in at the telecommunications building that led to our arrest. The building was strategically selected with help from a Black faculty member as a good location because of the ground level windows (to get food in and people out if necessary) and lots of restrooms. In addition, it was the “hub” of Penn State. That takeover resulted in the National Guard being called in. We were arrested (charges later were dropped) and talks resumed. The result of our action brought about change—a position was created at the upper administration level devoted to “underrepresented” groups. We selected the first hire. It never occurred to me that I could be kicked out of school; I was either passionate or stupid, or passionately stupid. But it was another pivotal opportunity for me to recognize that whether or not they want to see or hear me—I will be seen and will be heard.

The summer of my junior year I got pregnant, and also got kicked out of school for lack of satisfactory academic progress (too much protesting?). There I was, no place to go in Philly . . . no place to go in State College. One of the Black female staff members at the PRCC took me in until I could get a part-time job (waitressing at the Country Club and as a cashier at the downtown store owned by a country club member). A Black woman saved me; she knew what I needed even when I couldn't articulate it.

I never went “home” (to Philly) during that pregnancy, I stayed in State College, ignored the stares and ignorant questions and whispers, and thought to myself “how many of you have been in this situation but have chosen abortion?” Why is *my* path the wrong one? Why shouldn’t I be here? Why can’t this work? It can. It will. More than one person just blatantly asked me how I was going to manage this? I didn’t know how, but I knew I had to. The community rallied around me, and my daughter was born in Centre County. I named her Imani, Kiswahili meaning faith. There was only me and my future husband at her delivery. No mom, no dad, no aunts. Just us, Medicaid, WIC, and my “mother wit.” I drove her to Philly when she was three weeks old so everyone could meet her. I was twenty-one and now I was grown. But I needed a mother more than ever to stave off this alienation.

I was re-admitted to Penn State and determined to finish school with this baby, but I had no plans and no money and no transportation. Once again community rallied, and a Black basketball coach’s wife, introduced me to a Black football coach’s wife who wanted to watch a little baby as her youngest was now five. Perfect!! She charged me only what I could afford, and watched Imani while I was in class *only*. It wasn’t the ideal situation, but it worked. Her husband is now the coach of the Indianapolis Colts.

I lived with my sister friends and the three of us rallied around this baby. I stepped back from sit-ins and instead shifted my activism towards systemic change. My grumblings over Penn State’s childcare situation led to my appointment on the Commission for Women and the Child Care Advisory Board at Penn State. I was a single Black mother in a college town receiving stares when I bought our food with food

stamps, used our WIC vouchers, and paid for her medicine with her Medicaid. People knew she was a basketball player's daughter and some of the boosters would see us and look. The stares bore holes in me, that I filled with angry resolve. I graduated from undergraduate school (*my mom did come up for that*) and applied, with the encouragement of a Black faculty member I knew, to graduate school. Based on my undergraduate struggles, I didn't think I could do it. I was accepted, aced the GRE, and completed the program with ease. I asked for and was granted a paid internship for the Spring semester until Grad school started. This was unheard of at Penn State, a paid internship on campus. But the VP for student services was a Black man, and as the Patti Labelle song goes sometimes "beauty buys what a child gets for free." He helped me out.

My first appointment came as Director of Multicultural Affairs at a small private University in small Pennsylvania town. *Oppression and Isolation Personified*. I married (at Penn State with the reception at the Paul Robeson Cultural Center) during the blizzard of 1993, 33 and ½ inches of snow. It was the first time my dad and my husband's dad had been to Penn State. *The first time*. I had another daughter and named her Nia (Kiswahili meaning purpose). Part of her purpose is to always be a companion for her sister. After my husband completed his MBA program at PSU, we moved to Arizona where I started a Ph.D. program in Counseling Psychology. Two children, a husband working at JC Penney and a graduate student equals hard times once again. We rented a town house with no furniture but a bed and plastic table for the kids to eat, and felt immediately that we didn't fit. No one else in that complex had a MBA or was a doctoral student. But once again I learned that in my isolation comes creation. I learned how to

survive again. This time I even went to the food bank several times to feed us. And I remember the hate I had for the only other Black woman in the program, older than me, who wasn't struggling. *I hated her and she didn't know why. I didn't know why.* I stared my class issues straight on, it didn't matter what credentials we had, we were poor. . . . we had a common denominator with our neighbors. But we didn't talk like them, so they thought we were "beyond" them. Once again in the middle to poor to hang out with the rich, and to rich to be poor. *Or so they wanted us to believe.*

We left Arizona and moved to Colorado to begin to follow my husband's career and begin our path towards upward (or uppity) mobility. I had another child, this time a son. We named him Nathan, meaning a gift from God. While in Colorado, I worked with the several non-profit organizations founded to "create change" and "help those in poverty"; but no one working at those organizations was in need. I was the token representative they needed to make themselves feel alright. Organizations for change in a town that only pretended to embrace diversity. The median cost of a starter home was around \$250,000. The illusion of diversity was more like it. To battle what children of color being raised in Boulder might experience, I worked with a non-profit that gathered us together two times a month, took field trips, put on plays and performances, and event took a trip to South Africa. The organization supported many children during my five years with them, sadly however, three children still lost their paths and committed suicide. One wrote a traveling journey that touches the heartbeat of this inquiry project with his isolation and alienation.

Our move to North Carolina allowed me to enter a program that gave me the freedom to research my experiences and see that I have come full circle. This program has liberated me and this research has helped me reclaim the voice I tried to silence so I could desperately fit into suburbia. Pampered Chef. Tastefully Simple. Soirees. Tennis. Golf. Piano recitals. Swim team. Horseback riding. I wanted it all, I wanted my kids to be ‘normal.’ I know now there is no normal . . . just the “mythical norm” we get sucked into believing is real.

And I come today saying to those who hear and those who pretend to be deaf, that I am who I am as I am meant to be. Love me or don’t. Hear me or don’t. Invite me to your parties, but only if I can be me. And that is not yet, nor will never be, fully defined. Let me exist with you and you with me and we will learn how to navigate this world.

I woke up one day and I was a tenure track assistant professor at a HBCU. I never wanted to teach but the profession found me. It is what I was meant to do. I am now fighting again to find my voice to hear it to scream it to yell it on a campus where I am told that until we solve this race problem we are all in this together. RACE. You are Black first you know, or didn’t you? There are no feminine receptacles in the women restrooms. I ask why. No answer, but we’ll place a work order. Who designs a whole restroom for women and overlooks a key part of their womanhood? And no one but me thinks it’s odd. And when I ask other women, they agree, yes we noticed that. We want that. But they dare not ask. Silent. Be silent. Be obedient.

This same type of obedience was implied as I attended a recent summer institute for doctoral students. I was so excited about the opportunity to engage in “scholarly

discourse.” But I found that there too, I was expected to recognize the pecking order of privilege. RACE. Then whatever else you want to throw in. Oh wait, but not lesbians and gays. They don’t exist. I spoke up when I was asked to privilege various pieces of me over other pieces, and was almost eaten alive by my “brothers.” Afterwards, every young woman in attendance (most of the attendees were under thirty years old) approached me and said “I was thinking the same thing”; but no one said anything. I doubted myself in that dorm room that night for a long time, fighting myself, using my energy against myself, because I KNEW I was correct. Why did it bother me so? Why was I so afraid to become an anathema? And I did. For the rest of that institute several “brothers” wouldn’t speak to me. I looked around the room with my “brothers” and “sisters” and I am still alone. A pivotal point for me in writing this dissertation, as I found my voice that weekend and realized that it comes, sometimes with isolation and alienation. I forgot. But you cannot forget. It is not a luxury of the Black woman.

And my journey continues, I fight at this HBCU. I fight for me, and I fight for you. I am trying to educate, liberate these students. On a campus full of fear, hatred, and oppression I try to push against the margin and use it. Own it. Claim it. I cringe as I witness an education of oppression and victimization that allows the headlines of the local newspaper to scream “Big Changes at a local HBCU”; but those changes are about how hard the cheerleaders shake their asses. And the more the better. The higher the heels the better. And no one challenges that our students dress as if they are ready for battle and their gear is make up, high heels, and oppression.

Chapter Summary

I have lived in a large urban cities and rural areas, populated with both progressive and conservative people as part of my journey. My lens continued to change with my marriage, and the birth of each child. Most recently my lens has been shifted by my socio-economic status, and my geographical isolation, as I do not live near any family or close friends. The isolation is exacerbated by the neighborhood in which we live, which is 4% Black with a median income for a household of \$77, 510. My hobbies, such as tennis and swimming, and educational pursuits continue to put me in places in which I am often the only Black. This type of isolation continues to fuel my passion for wanting to investigate how other Black women have navigated their tight spaces amidst increasing shifting geographical and economic conditions. How have they found their voice and dealt with their alienation and isolation. How will I? So again, ultimately this piece is about me, Shawn *Arango* Ricks. I no longer fear how this will be received, who I will offend, and how many times I must use the word “hegemonic” to prove my intelligence. To whom? I know many words, but the only useful ones will be those that can cross barriers and build bridges back to those I started to leave behind.

CHAPTER V

LORDE, HOOKS, AND THEIR BLACK FEMINIST RHETORIC(S)

It is sometimes both the curse and the blessing of the poet to perceive
without yet being able to order those perceptions
and that is another name for chaos.

But it is out of chaos that new worlds are born.

I look forward to our meeting eye to eye.

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

The distinguishing features and core themes of Black Feminist Thought provide for this inquiry project the foundation necessary to explore the role of bell hooks and Audre Lorde for today's Black women as they navigate their "tight spaces." Lorde and hooks have been identified because they most closely align with the experiences and feelings of the researcher as they have written extensively about their "tight spaces." Although they represent a miniscule proportion of African American women who navigate the hostile terrains of hegemonic institutions on a daily basis, the interconnectedness of their oppressions once again demonstrates the "collective consciousness" of Black women. Each scholar has documented her unique perspective on dealing with the marginality and domination throughout multiple areas of their lives.

Audre Lorde: The Master's Tools

Audre Lorde was selected, in part, for her work on the "many layers of selfhood" as well as the emancipatory nature of her writing. In 1979, Audre Lorde, a Black

Feminist Educator/Scholar, lesbian/queer, poet, challenged the “lilly white halls” of academia by demanding that her white feminist colleagues deconstruct and take stock in the type of work they engaged. In a 15-minute address to a largely white, entitled and privileged feminist audience at the Second Sex Conference in New York, Lorde launched a ballistic literary missile of enigmatic proportions: she challenged academic feminists to destroy the oppressive structures of the academy and create anew. The address, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House,” was a quantum leap for feminist activism. More than thirty years later, many academic feminists are still at a crossroads regarding, “this old house.” Her work also explores issues of belonging and reconciliation of self throughout her numerous books and poems, touching on many important components of who I am, and who I have yet to become. She has made me realize the importance of my own self empowerment and preservation as I navigate my “tight spaces.” The following passage illustrates this point well:

Acting like an insider and feeling like the outsider, preserving our own self-rejection as Black women at the same time as we’re getting over—we think. And political work will not save our souls, no matter how correct and necessary that work is. Yet it is true that without political work we cannot hope to survive long enough to effect any change. And self-empowerment is the most deeply political work there is, and the most difficult. (Lorde, 2007, p. 170)

Lorde’s work for this project is important because it integrates all the loose ends of hooks and Hill Collins and fuses them to my yet unformed thoughts. She discusses issues surrounding mothering, anger, marginalization, and relationships, in a way that compels me to learn more. Her insights on living, loving and learning, provide more

information for me on ways to survive in parasitic environments. Her insights provide information I did not hear or learn as a child, and have not been exposed to yet as an adult. Certainly this can provide for me a new way of being, inclusive of all my complex parts and aware of the complex skills necessary to navigate institutions of domination without sacrificing any part of myself.

Reading Lorde and hooks was a powerful experience for me in unique and different ways. I don't purport to be an expert on all aspects of the lives of either woman, just an expert on the pieces of both of them that I needed to embrace. The process of reading their work was interesting, as I felt earlier in my research that I would ultimately identify more with hooks, and the opposite happened. Where Lorde screamed at me through her text with an urgency and intensity in which a mother screams at a child who is in danger; hooks whispered to me with a grandmotherly comfort, reminding me to hold on. Hold on.

I found in the work of Lorde the information I needed to begin healing and connecting all the fragmented pieces of my selves. In the initial conceptualization of this inquiry project, I spoke of, and researched the concept of multiple identities. Lorde, using different terminology, touches on this in her work and validates what I could not name, but *knew* was there. I use her work as the framework for healing, in the broadest definition possible. That is the beauty of discourse; we interact with it and create social spaces based on these interactions. And every interaction with a text can be different, for every time we read it we are a different person.

hooks provided me the information I needed to continue in my current role as a professor and program coordinator of a large undergraduate program at a HBCU. The work has been overwhelming. For the first time in my teaching career (which started at Penn State almost twenty years ago), I feel done—“bone weary,” as she calls it. Reading her work, believing it would liberate me from my personal demons, she continued instead to whisper to me about the role and need of education as a liberatory practice. And while doing that she taught me one of the golden rules of working with qualitative data, you must be open to change.

And finally, as I write this last piece, it feels as if my thoughts are rolling down a large bubble gum shoot, each one faster than the other, all wanting to come out, to be heard, to be free. Against this clamor, I remind myself and remind you that although I may take a longer route organizationally—I will arrive at the same destination. My message is no less valid than the one created in “perfect” prose.

In Lorde’s work I found an overarching theme of survival, physical and psychological, is threaded throughout each piece of work I read, and all the subthemes. She demands from herself, that in order to strive for survival, she must define what survival means to her. She states that “survival is the ability to encompass difference, to encompass change without destruction” (Lorde, 2007, p. 75). I explore her definition of this term, and what it means to her by interrogating the subthemes of self-definition, self-love, sisterhood, adaptability, voice, power, and language. As Lorde (2007) notes, “we are powerful because we have survived, and that is what it is all about—*survival and growth*” (p. 139, emphasis added).

Lorde's battle with cancer had an immense impact on her view of survival—she was in a fight for her life, yet she was able to recognize during her bouts with cancer—that ultimately we are all in a fight for our lives. She writes: “Racism. Cancer. In both cases, to win the aggressor must conquer but the resisters need only survive. How do I define that survival and on whose terms?” (Lorde, 2007, p. 132). Lorde recognizes early on that she will have to decide for herself what survival will look like, incorporating a sub-theme to be explored later in more detail—the importance of self-definition.

To fully explicate and tease out Lorde's themes, I have written a fictional dialogue, as if I were sitting across the kitchen table from her. This dialogue is a combination of my interpretation of how Audre Lorde would answer my questions, and direct quotes. The information is gathered primarily from *Sister Outsider* (2007) and *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* (2009). To remain true to the organic nature of this dialogue, there are no citations throughout. An annotated data set can be found in the Appendix.

Breaking Bread with Audre

SR: Thank you for so much for giving so much information via your work. Historical coping tools used by Black women continue to shift, and I am searching for ways to continue to survive both inside and outside of the academy. What can you share with me about survival?

Lorde: “The first and most vital lesson [is] that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings.”

SR: What do you mean by that?

Lorde: It is important to recognize that survival, the term, can be viewed as a tool. If you think you're surviving, you are just getting by. Yes, you may be alive, but in what form? Do you not want to thrive? Will you be brain-dead, your

ideas co-opted and used against yourself and our people? Ultimately, you need to decide what survival means to you. For me it “is the ability to encompass difference, to encompass change without destruction.”

SR: That’s right, I guess I never really thought about it, but your work really awakened something inside of me that I think was destroyed—was dead. Survival is complex, and I believe there were parts of myself that I had allowed to die. I was so busy trying to make sure I knew all the rules of the game; I drifted away from some core pieces of me.

Lorde: It is important that you do know the game, “for in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection.” Given what you’ve told me about your upbringing, time in private schools, hostile college environment, and (congratulations) tenure-track position, you’ve had to learn how to be a little bit like them. Not just to protect you, but also your children. Also your children.

SR: That’s right, you know I had my first child as a single parent in college, and I think I was afraid for her. I’ve always been afraid for all of them, and stuck with my choices. Raise them in the suburbs, or in the “hood.” I hate that I have to make a call on that. Hate it.

Lorde: Being a Black mother is hard, and it’s your responsibility to teach your children how to survive. “And survival is the greatest gift of love. Sometimes, for Black mothers it is the only gift possible, and tenderness gets lost”

SR: Yes, I know. The kids think I’m harsh sometimes, and they often ask me why I am so angry. You know, I tell them, I don’t know any other way to be!

Lorde: As parents, we teach our children continuously, through our words, our actions, and our non-actions. “My mother taught me to survive from a very early age by her own example. Her silence also taught me isolation fury, mistrust, self-rejection, and sadness. My survival lay in learning how to use weapons she gave me, also, to fight against those things within myself, unnamed.” A lot my writing has become healing as a result, and as I note in my essay, “Poetry is not a luxury.” When you are hurt, you need to find a way to heal. Perhaps we are also mourning the loss of our childhood and the loss of mothering; which is a luxury that Black parents just can’t give sometimes, and that we may no longer be able to receive.

SR: I think you may be onto something there. Mourning the loss of a mother is big for me. I haven’t lived near my family since for over 25 years, I had to use

your advice and “learn to mother” myself. But, even in doing so, I still felt angry . . .

Lorde: And that’s fine, feel anger, feel anything . . . you have to allow yourself time for the mourning, the anger, your losses. As Black women we must remember that “the piece we paid for learning survival was our childhood. We were never allowed to be children. It is the right of children to be able to play at living for a little while, but for a Black child, every act can have deadly serious consequences, and for a Black girl child, even more so.” You’ve not been allowed to be a child, and you don’t have a mother anymore. So acknowledge, embrace, own your feelings . . . and don’t separate them from your mind . . .” Now when males or patriarchal thinkers (whether male or female) reject that combination, then we’re truncated. Rationality is not unnecessary. It serves to get from this place to that place. But if you don’t honor those places, then the road is meaningless. Too often, that’s what happens with the worship of rationality and that circular, academic, analytic thinking. But ultimately, I don’t see feel/think as a dichotomy. I see them as a choice of ways and combinations.”

SR: Be careful of the “mind/body” dichotomy hooks refers to?

Lorde: Yes, it’s better to be angry than to not feel anything at all. You see, feeling is key to your liberation. “The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free.” Your freedom, all of our freedom, is wrapped up in feeling . . . connecting and conquering the dark places within our souls we’ve been to afraid to touch. Anger being one of them.

SR: There’s such a negative stereotype on anger, and so many labels on Black women as angry. From a counseling perspective, I love teaching about anger, mostly because it is often referred to as a secondary emotion. The students immediately disagree, and then we get to the process of learning . . . showing them how to connect the dots! Taking examples of when they were “angry” and having them examine them to find out the underlying emotion—pain, frustration, hurt, jealousy. There’s always an underlying emotion.

Lorde: Anger does get a bad rap, but it shouldn’t. Anger is fine; it’s hate that is dangerous. And to me there is a difference. To me “anger [is] a passion of displeasure that may be excessive or misplaced but not necessarily harmful. Hatred [is] an emotional habit or attitude of mind in which aversion is coupled with ill will. Anger, used, does not destroy. Hate does.”

SR: I think I needed to hear that. I notice you use the word “passion” when describing anger.

Lorde: Yes, it is a “passion of displeasure” —you feel it deeply, passionately. But it still doesn’t destroy you, if you use it.

SR: I think I’ve left a lot of anger floating around in me, unused. Going, with my secondary emotion theory, I would have to say that the bulk of my anger is based on hurt—both personal and systemic.

Lorde: “It is easier to be angry than to hurt. Anger is what I do best. It is easier to be furious than to be yearning.” And, over time and through my reading of *The I Ching*, I realized that even those things I was angry about—little girls dying, black boys failing, black women hating each other—that I had little control over, I needed to recognize and withdraw. And anger is not unique to you! “Women of Color in America have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. And I say symphony rather than cacophony because we have had to learn to orchestrate these furies so that they do not tear us apart. We have had to learn to move through them and use them for strength and force and insight within our daily lives. Those of us who did not learn this difficult lesson did not survive. And part of my anger is always in libation for my fallen sisters.”

SR: So I need to find out how to use my anger, all my emotions really, for strength within my daily life?

Lorde: Yes, and one of the first steps will be to love yourself. Attack the “passion of displeasure” with the passion of love. Self-love will mean facing all your feelings, owning them, using them. Defining yourself. Embracing your sisters. Finding your voice. Claiming your power. Understanding the oppression you’ve internalized and swallowed and spit it back up. And reconcile the contradictions that are within you, that are within all of us. Self-love is critical to our survival.

SR: Yes, those are all pieces I feel I need help in, and areas in which I feel our ancestors recognized we needed to work on. When you look at the early work of slave women, writers of the Harlem Renaissance, calls for action, etc., there was this urgency for change for action—even though not perfect, that is missing now. Now there’s a complacency it seems.

Lorde: It is urgent that we love ourselves. “We have to love ourselves and we (Black people) have to love every piece of our brothers and sisters.”

SR: That’s critical, you’re right. I have to love me. And I have to love my brothers and sisters.

Lorde: “every piece.”

SR: Every piece?

Lorde: Yes, one of the downfalls of the Black community has been homophobia. We can’t pick and chose which parts of people we’ll love.

SR: I agree. When I was in college, I was . . . ummm . . . different. I had a different perspective on a lot of things. I wore two buttons on my bookbag all through college. One from Brother Malcolm X stating “by any means necessary,” and a button of your quote “Silence is the voice of complicity.” I always felt that if someone will talk about one group with me in the room, they’ll talk about Blacks, women, Latinos, etc. . . . whatever group is their target du jour. I had an interesting experience this summer regarding a choice to be silent or to speak up. I participated in the National Council for Black Studies Summer Institute for PhD students. I was thrilled to be selected, and excited about what I knew would be an intellectually stimulating and enriching think-tank.

Lorde: That sounds like a great opportunity.

SR: For the most part it was, but as we discuss the need for solidarity and self-love, I will share two disappointing pieces.

Lorde: Okay.

SR: The first incident happened when a challenged a “brother” on gay-bashing as he discussed the Harlem Renaissance. This “gentleman” was another institute participant, and, well, over the top. He wanted to be the alpha dog, if you know what I mean. But I was one of the older participants, with a lot of lived experience to share. When I challenged him, he barked back that there were no gays during the Harlem Renaissance, and it didn’t matter either way. Then one of the male facilitators says “We’re Black first” . . . and the men rally around this. Including Maulana Karenga (who created Kwanzaa), who was there to facilitate a session later that afternoon.

Lorde: So, in an environment you thought would be supportive of every piece of who you are, you felt attacked.

SR: Yes, it’s like you can never let your guard down. Never. Anyway, I resisted. I challenged. I said to the group, that I could not privilege one piece of myself over another piece. And, even if I could, I wouldn’t. The room was silent. There were no women facilitators there to support me (there were only two on the agenda; one had to leave after she presented and one wasn’t there yet). The other young women in the room were silent. But afterwards, one by one they sought

me out to say that they agreed. And the young man, he didn't speak or look at me for the rest of the conference.

Lorde: That's exactly what I mean. "There is always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself—whether it's Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc—because that's the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else. But once you do that, then you've lost, because then you become acquired or bought by that particular essence of yourself and you've denied yourself all of the energy that it takes to keep all those others in jail. Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat."

SR: That's how I felt exactly, I felt dismissed. And angry! (smile). But I persevered. I wanted to leave, I wanted to run and hide. I questioned myself, you know, no one else is speaking. The next day, a female facilitator led a discussion on Black women's literature, in particular the piece *The Color Purple*. As her allotted time was about to expire, Karenga again spoke up, took over really. He shared his sense of disappointment with Alice Walker for not showing more positive Black males in her novel. His five minute diatribe on this took us right to the lunch hour. Our afternoon session would be led by a man. Again. Something deep within me stirred, and I think I felt the beginnings of the connection you speak of (self-love+voice+feeling=power). Somehow, I felt powerful enough to approach him, someone I once idolized, and challenge him on that statement. But more than that, I raised the irony that the last voice we heard from during the small section we (Black women) had was a BLACK MALE . . . talking about how bad a Black woman has treated them.

Lorde: Yes, you see once you love yourself enough, find your voice, acknowledge the "black mother" within you . . . you have begun to re-claim your power!

SR: Yea, it was surreal. It was great. Over lunch I noticed the male elders who run NCBS discussing the implications of homophobia, so that was cool. You know, to plant a seed and start discussion. And, as a result of my other observation, we spent an additional hour after lunch allowing my sister to finish up her presentation. It was phenomenal. I felt energized, renewed. And not how I thought I would be.

Lorde: We need those experiences. We need to stand up for and defend our "multiplicities of self." "As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pluck out some one aspect of myself and present this as a meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate

all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of an externally-imposed definition.”

SR: Yes, your concept of “multiplicities of selves” really resonates with me. I tried to approach this in an earlier paper I wrote, but I used the term “identity” and approached it from a counseling perspective. But you have captured what I was trying to say. That when people force me to chose, interact with only the piece of me they desire . . . then I begin to feel trapped by those “externally-imposed definitions” and that’s how I developed the phrase “psychological tight spaces” and later shortened it to “tight spaces.”

Lorde: “With respect to myself specifically, I feel that not to be open about any of the different ‘people’ within my identity, particularly the “mes” who are challenged by a status quo, is to invite myself and other women, by my example to live a lie. In other words, I would be giving in to a myth of sameness which I think can destroy us.” So, it’s kind of interesting that you wore that button all throughout college “Silence is the voice of complicity.” If I am silent about who I am, or don’t speak up in defense of others (even if it’s other pieces of me!) . . . I am complicit.

SR: Yes, I finally got that. I still have the button. It’s on a singing frog in my office. It reminds me daily not to leave my voice at the door when I come to work! Now that I work at a HBCU in the south I am constantly reminded that Black heterosexual male privilege rules. There is a belief in the hierarchy of oppression on this campus, and many HBCUs.

Lorde: It is important that we work at abolishing “horizontal hostility.” Although “the tactic of encouraging horizontal hostility to becloud more pressing issues of oppression is by no means new, nor limited to relations between women. The same tactic is used to encourage separation between Black women and Black men. In discussions around the hiring and firing of Black faculty at universities, the charge is frequently heard that Black women are more easily hired than are Black men. For this reason, Black women’s promotion and tenure are not considered important since they are only taking jobs away from Black men.”

SR: Yes, I see that working at a HBCU comes with a unique set of problems, the crabs in a barrel syndrome, if you will. There is very little room for difference at a HBCU. You Black. Just be Black.

Lorde: Yes, it’s true, that there are lots of similarities shared among people who share a cultural background, however “in order to work together we (Black people) do not have to become a mix of indistinguishable particles resembling a vat of homogenized chocolate milk.”

SR: I think that's the expectation, and I walk around that campus feeling like an outsider as well. Needing, wanting more from the others on campus. Students, faculty and staff. The campus is without feeling, and in such an environment the pursuit of liberation can be difficult. I am on a campus where, for the most part, feminism is still a dirty word and women are invisible. The other Black women on campus have not formed a community that I am aware of, and as eagerly as I search for survival tools for life; I am also aware that if I am going to maintain longevity in the academy I will also need to develop survival skills, some may be the same, some may be different.

Lorde: In academia, and in life, "the failure . . . to recognize differences as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower."

SR: And the "define and empower" must be for all! Black men and women, straight and gay, white women, all.

Lorde: Ultimately, yes. "Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged."

SR: Personal power through difference and connection. No matter what we need each other ultimately. I guess I was hopeful that working at a HBCU would be different. That I wouldn't be invisible and that sisterhood would come. I would build and find networks. We have a lot of Black women in key positions on campus, but they still work twice as hard as the men to prove . . . I don't know what. And even with those supposedly visible women, I had to put in a work order to request feminine hygiene receptacles in the women's bathroom near my office. Another opportunity to use my voice! And, again, no one appreciated that they weren't there. It's terribly awkward, borderline humiliating, as a woman not to have access to dispose of feminine hygiene products. All the women I spoke to agreed that it was odd. And now I smile daily when I see that I made a small change. But you reminded me that revolution is not a one-time event. I have to keep fighting, keep speaking. But I can't seem to find that sense of female solidarity on campus that I am yearning for.

Lorde: Yes, oh my yes. I am familiar with the atmosphere of HBCUs from my time at Tougaloo. Definitely an interesting dynamic and example of how deeply entrenched the oppressor can become in ones soul. And for liberation, for your survival to get back to your original question, Black women will need to "move against not only those forces which dehumanizes from the outside, but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into

ourselves.” And remember, survival is about growth and change. “As Paulo Friere shows so well in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors’ tactics, the oppressors’ relationships.”

SR: Growth and change. I feel a lot of resistance around this concept. There is fear of change and growth because it’s new, it’s uncomfortable.

Lorde: Yes, it is uncomfortable, because “change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival.” But reaching across difference is so crucial; we need that community, that sisterhood. I often think about how my life would’ve been different if I had the opportunity to make connections with other women. I am saddened to think about how Angelian Grimke, a black lesbian poet during the Harlem Renaissance, died alone. Isolated. I was across town struggling in isolation at Hunter College. We both thought we were alone, but we could’ve supported each other, helped each other, and guided each other through. “I think of what it could have meant in terms of sisterhood and survival for each one of us to have known of the other’s existence for me to have her words and her wisdom, and for her to have known I needed them! It is so crucial for each one of us to know she is not alone.”

SR: That’s what strikes me most about your writing and the writing of bell hooks. It reminds me that I am not alone. In counseling terms we call that normalizing. People often get locked into thinking that their circumstances are totally unique to them, and no one can understand. But that’s not true! Your words and your wisdom are here, through your literature, anytime I need them. That’s a powerful piece of the power of language that can’t be denied.

Lorde: You are right, language is powerful, and it can bring a whole community together or tear one apart! But for me “poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity for our existence.” It is “through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt.”

SR: So, for you language holds one of the keys to my survival?

Lorde: Yes, for our survival. “Each one of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us. In the

transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation.”

SR: “the transformation of silence into language and action.” This phrase reminds me of the Frierian concept of praxis hooks discusses when she talks about her work in the classroom. And, you believe strongly in the usefulness of destroying our silences and finding our voice as a liberatory tool.

Lorde: Yes. Over time “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”

SR: That is one of your more well-known quotes, but it doesn’t diminish its effect, if you really read it. And you use very powerful, deliberate language when you speak and write.

Lorde: I have to. If we are to move through this process we have to recognize that silence and fear are not going to liberate us. They did not liberate our ancestors. They spoke and wrote and ran—with the risk of physical death. For me, for us, we risk a spiritual death if we don’t speak. I am aware that “there are so many ways in which I’m vulnerable and cannot help but be vulnerable, I’m not going to be more vulnerable by putting weapons of silence in my enemies’ hands.”

SR: If I view language as a tool for liberation and survival, then I guess it makes sense that silence could be a weapon. I never really connected those dots consciously, although I think subconsciously I must have, otherwise why would I keep a college button for twenty-five years?

Lorde: Yes, and if you buy into the silence, the obedience, the docility than you become easier to manipulate. You begin to accept the “many facets of our oppression as women.” And for us, for women of Color, we have to recognize that to white women we are the “other, the outsider whose experience is too alien to comprehend.”

SR: Yes, “the other.” I think this describes some of my feelings when I moved into the suburbs, joined tennis teams, went to pre-school playdates . . . with moms that didn’t look like me. No one ever says it. Ever. But I can feel it. I am welcome, as long as I behave. I guess sometimes I feel like the token Black family in our community!

Lorde: Be mindful that the “tokenism that is sometimes extended to us is not an invitation to own power.”

SR: I thought I could belong, if I “played nice.” But daily, I was swallowing things subconsciously; caught up in my world. Tricked by the plate of “equity” placed before me.

Lorde: And that’s not just you. “It is easier for white women to believe the dangerous fantasy that if you are good enough, pretty enough, sweet enough, quiet enough, teach the children to behave, hate the right people, and marry the right man, then you will be allowed to co-exist with patriarchy in relative peace.”

SR: Yes, fifteen years I’ve wasted hoping to be allowed to “co-exist” in “relative peace.”

Lorde: No experience is ever wasted. Without that realization, without having experienced it, you could not be a witness for it. “Unless one lives and loves in the trenches it is difficult to remember that the war against dehumanization is ceaseless.”

SR: Yes, I thought that I could just focus on “making it.” You know, having “the dream.” But I was so foolish! I don’t want the dream, I want my dream. It just didn’t feel right, it was starting to feel forced. Once I got everything the dream said I needed: a husband, a house, cars, cat, dog, three kids. I still felt this emptiness, this yearning to do more. Fulfill my dream.

Lorde: You were indeed feeling trapped. “Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a mythical norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows ‘that is not me’ . . . It is within this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around differences, some of which we ourselves may be practicing.” It sounds like you realized you were not being true to you, and by doing so and not recognize the ways in which you were privileged you became part of the oppression of others.

SR: And it’s a rude awakening. Although I don’t think I was one hundred percent asleep, for me it was more like a coma. So, I guess it’s been like a re-awakening, a re-birth.

Lorde: Yes, that’s fine. That’s good. You, like all of us, have had to adapt. Now, you must take this experience and use it. Use all your experiences. This is “one of the most basic Black survival skills . . . the ability to change, to metabolize experience, good or ill, into something that is useful, lasting, effective.” Now that you have had the experience, what will you DO with it. You speak of your dream. How will you define that? How will you define you?

SR: How will I define me?

Lorde: Yes, you are in a battle for survival, but before you build your army, your community of support; you have to know your position on the battlefield. You won't know this until you know you. And if you know you, define you, and then you won't be swallowed up by other's definitions of who you should be. It's something that I had to discover, and then live by . . . that "if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."

SR: That's powerful.

Lorde: And, it's true! "If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment." So, you see it's not really an option. "As Black women we have the right and responsibility to define ourselves and to seek our allies in common cause." Once you define yourself, accept yourself, love yourself, you can begin to reach across, back and through to others to build your community of support, knowing that "nothing [you] accept about [your]self can be used against [you] to diminish [you]."

SR: So self-love, self-definition is another vital component of survival?

Lorde: Yes, and using it then to help you face your fears to build alliances. You will have to learn to be "open and self-protective" at the same time?

SR: How can that be? How can I guard myself while welcoming you in to help me build the community I need?

Lorde: It will take determination and practice, but I imagine you've done this to a certain extent in your life already. "Black women who survive have a head start on learning how to be open and self-protective at the same time. One secret is to ask as many people as possible for help, depending on all of them and none of them at the same time. Some will help, others cannot. For the time being."

SR: I stopped.

Lorde: You stopped?

SR: Yes, I stopped asking for help, depending on people.

Lorde: You were hurt, afraid?

SR: Yes, both. I built a community when I raised my daughter during her early years at Penn State, and it was great. It really was.

Lorde: So you see that “without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our difference, nor the pathetic pretense that those differences do not exist.”

SR: Yes, I believe in the individual power that can be harnessed through community.

Lorde: What happened? Why did you stop?

SR: Well, for one, we moved away from everyone. This was before social networking. We stayed in touch, but it’s not the same. What really happened was I saw how fear magnified can destroy what takes years to build. My best friend came to visit with her husband and three year old son. We put the boys (my son was 8 at the time) to bed, and went to the store for some private time. Her husband checked on the boys, and they were out of bed, naked in the bathroom. The immediate response from both of them (out of homophobic fear) was that something was terribly wrong. Their son told them my son told him to take his clothes off and get in bed with him. I believe it, but I know my son. He is a nurturer. It was hot. He problem solved and tried to comfort a younger person. Then took him to the bathroom to use it. Anyway, the pain of them leaving the next morning abruptly shook me to my core. Finally all my worlds were colliding. We were both Black women, we were all Black . . . but the fear of difference . . . the homophobia . . . nullified that. Instantly.

Lorde: That’s a powerful, and it seems painful story. Are you still in touch?

SR: We tried to talk, but I cannot do anything that doesn’t feel right. I can’t do it if it’s not from my soul. Through this process, my dissertation, your words, I had the strength to find my voice and write to her with my true feelings. I feel sad, but it has to be this way.

Lorde: I can hear the sadness in your voice, but I also hear fear. You do not have the luxury of being afraid to build another community or to reach out. You must do it. This is another piece that will help you reclaim your power, your survival.

SR: Yes, there is fear there. I am afraid. I must remind myself of one of my favorite quotes by you, “When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”

Lorde: Do you dare to be powerful, it’s inside you, it’s inside all of us.

SR: [silence]

Lorde: Do you dare to be powerful?

SR: Yes. I resolve, I dare to be powerful. And I know “to search for power within myself means I must be willing to move through being afraid to whatever lies beyond.”

Lorde: “Where does our power lie and how do we school ourselves to use it in the service of what we believe?” It lies within, but you must be in touch with it. You “must be in touch with our own ancient roads in which lies deep power for each woman” and “as we come more in touch with our ancient, non-European consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge, and therefore lasting action comes.”

SR: Thanks so much for taking this journey with me. It has truly been transformative.

Lorde: You are welcome my sister, you are welcome. Remember as you continue on your personal and political journey that “there are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves—along with the renewed courage to try them out.”

After the Meal

This dialogue was an unplanned cathartic experience indicative of an inquiry project. Not only was I unsure of what I would discover at the start of my journey, I did not know exactly how the analysis would look. I started this analysis with an idea in mind to use each theme as a subheading, and explain Lorde’s definition for each of them. Five minutes into the analysis, the dialogue began in my head, and I decided to allow it to flow. This was the right angle to take to explore Lorde, because it was effortless. Lorde’s overarching theme of survival (physical and psychological) is accomplished through the acquisition and use of power. Reclaiming our power involves the following:

voice (language, feelings); adaptability; and self-love (self-definition, multiplicities of self, sisterhood).

Power. The theme of power involves finding our voice, embracing adaptability, and self-love. Our ultimate power lies inside each of us, and always has. It lies dormant, waiting for us to recognize, own, unleash and embrace it. What we know intuitively is often counterattacked through dominant discourses that fear that we will find ourselves within ourselves. This view of intuitive knowledge has been termed many things: the Black poet within, mother-wit, and *la facultad* (Anzaldúa, 1987). Regardless of how we name it, its basic premise remains the same. If we are able to acknowledge, unlock, and use our feelings to connect to our inner power we will find our liberation.

There are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations, extrapolations, and recognitions *from within ourselves*—along with the renewed courage to try them out. (Lorde, 2007, p. 38, emphasis added)

Voice. Voice involves the ability to acknowledge your feelings, and address and conquer the fear that keeps us standing still. It also involves destroying the silences the slowly choke us. Lorde (2007) believes that to “suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance” (p. 58), which then places additional power in the hands of our enemies. If we begin to suppress truths, and allow ourselves to be externally defined we begin to accept and become complicit in our oppression as women. Instead of silence, Lorde (2007) challenges us by asking

What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps . . . because I am

myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours. (pp. 41-42)

Silence, according to Lorde, is deadly. You may not physically die from it, but you surely will never *live* in it.

Feelings are a large theme in the work of Audre Lorde. As a Black, feminist, lesbian poet, she disconnected and re-connected with her selves and her community multiple times. All of which demanded she acknowledge her feelings. If we acknowledge our feelings then we can use them to increase our power. We have a finite amount of energy, and if we are consciously or subconsciously using it to suppress truths, we will never discover our full potential. Lorde (2007) states:

There is a distinction I am beginning to make in my living between pain and suffering. Pain is an event, and experience that must be named, recognized and then used in some way in order for the experience to change, to be transformed into something else, strength or knowledge or action.

Suffering, on the other hand, is the nightmare reliving of unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain. *When I live through pain without recognizing it, self-consciously, I rob myself of the power that can come from using the pain, the power to fuel some movement beyond it.* I condemn myself to reliving that pain over and over whenever something close triggers it. And that is suffering, a seemingly inescapable cycle. (pp. 171-172, emphasis added)

Adaptability. Whether discussing feelings, or a personal challenge, Lorde (2007) believes that “one of the most basic Black survival skills is the ability to change, to metabolize experience, good or ill, into something that is useful, lasting, effective” (p. 135). This gift will, and has, allowed Blacks and other marginalized groups resistance domination, and create pockets of liberation.

Self-love. Discovering and using voice demands an engagement in self-love and self-definition. Several of Lorde's well-known poems reflect the theme of self-definition. Once we have discovered and learned to love ourselves, we will be in a better position to recognize the importance of sisterhood and the damage inflicted when we participate in what Lorde termed "horizontal hostility." Regarding self-love and acceptance Lorde (2007) states

Nothing I accept about myself can be used against me to diminish me. I am who I am, doing what I came to do, acting upon you like a drug or chisel to remind you of your me-ness, as I discover you in myself. (p. 147)

Discovering the power we hold within will only occur when we embrace the multiplicities of ourselves. When we deny, and alter these pieces, energy that could be used towards our creative missions is dissipated. We need to utilize our energy towards our personal liberation, recognizing any pieces of oppression we have swallowed and fighting to destroy that within us.

With respect to myself specifically, I feel that not to be open about any of the different 'people' within my identity, particularly the "mes" who are challenged by a status quo, is to invite myself and other women, by my example to live a lie. In other words, I would be giving in to a myth of sameness which I think can destroy us. (Lorde, 2007, p. 118)

It is clear from the quote above that Lorde recognizes the multiplicities of self as an integral part of liberation.

Embracing ourselves will also allow us to conquer the fears that prevent us from embracing our sisters and brothers. In particular, Lorde writes extensively about the

importance of sisterhood as a liberatory tool. Lack of sisterhood drains energy that could be used for our liberation. In addition, sisterhood forms a collective groups, a shared well-spring (Evans, 2007), that allows Black women to finally commune and lift each other to freedom. Lorde is not just concerned with a sisterhood between Black women, although she addresses this quite extensively throughout her poems. This is in response to the harsh outsider position she was often thrust into by her “sisters” because of her lesbianism, interracial marriage, unpermed hair, etc. Lorde also writes about and recognized the interdependence of *all* women to reach freedom. She states “interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative” (Lorde, 2007, p. 111).

Lorde’s themes of survival through power, voice, adaptability, and self-love seamlessly intertwine to connect and overlap with each other providing a clear picture, for me, of my road to reclaiming my personal power. The next section explores the works of bell hooks as a vehicle for my professional liberation.

bell hooks: Transgressing as a Liberatory Practice

The epigraph by bell hooks (1994b) at the beginning of Chapter I of this dissertation espouses the role of the African American educator throughout history. These educators, many of them Black Females, realized the foundation of their “call” was built on liberatory practices. Many of them had to *transgress* in the name of progress. Yet at the same time, there has been an unyielding hunger and thirst for the “promise” of the future for those who have been, and continue to be, oppressed by institutional

practices. bell hooks identifies this as the “yearning” coupled with a “cold awareness” of the presence of past oppressions. Readings and Schaber (1993) assert:

For us, the postmodernism marks a gap in the thinking of time that is constitutive of the modernist concept of time as succession or progress. This is something we feel strongly about. It commits us here to resisting a number of existing images of the postmodern. We do not resist in the name of truth or purity, but in order to refuse that the postmodern be given a truth, circulated as current and legitimate coinage. (p. 6)

This “spatial rift” or “split in time” can be connected to the “double consciousness” that was articulated by W.E.B. DuBois. The notion that African Americans, even as they have sought to build from within a full sense of authenticity, have had to exist in a nation where the fundamental symbolic structures continually place them in the position of the “Other.” As Ferguson (2000) presents:

For African Americans, “race” as an identity and as a nexus of identification has never been theorized or experienced as a simple, unitary, decontextualized subject position. At the beginning of the twentieth century—long before the poststructuralist discovery of the socially invented, multiply positioned, nature of “self”—W.E.B. DuBois was describing the African American experience of self as unstable and dualistic. Blacks identified both as Americans, as “citizens,” and as a racially subordinated minority that was excluded politically and socially. This “double consciousness,” as he described it, has served as the matrix for identification as “black” culturally and politically, grounding a culture of resistance and struggle against denial of the full rights of “citizens” because of “race.” (p. 205)

Gloria Jean

bell hooks (nee Gloria Jean Watkins) was born in 1952 in Hopkinsville, Kentucky to a custodian father and homemaker mother. hooks’ ontological viewpoint is based in part on a childhood fraught with patriarchy, domestic violence, and subordination. She

attended segregated schools in rural Kentucky, and struggled with belonging as a young child. With five sisters and one brother, hooks came from a house full of noise, but where ultimately she had no voice. This lack of a voice at home was part of the impetus for hooks dealing with her issues of subjectivity and voice throughout her career.

Beginning at age nineteen, when she first published *Ain't I a woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), she began a critical postmodern examination of race, class, and gender in the continued oppression of all peoples. As such, hooks is one of the premiere Black feminist writers to demand that people view these systems of oppression as interlocking.

Growing up, as I did, under the golden rule of “children should be seen and not heard,” hooks wrote often of the importance of being “heard.” Her writing is a form of psychological healing that affirms her existence, while informing others of the conditions of black women in America. Her struggles with class and belonging speak to me, and have motivated me to place her among the women to be analyzed for this project.

hooks brings several pieces to this research project. I acknowledge her concept of choosing the margin as a space of radical openness. Utilizing the politics of location, hooks describes her view of transforming the margins in which Black women have been pushed into spaces which will “nourish one’s capacity to resist . . . to imagine alternative, new worlds” (hooks, 2004, p. 157). These spaces are important to Black women who may live and work at the center, and are yet pushed to the margins daily. If we view the margins as only places of despair, we have the potential to embrace nihilism. For the purpose of this inquiry project however, I focus more on how she utilizes the classroom, the academy, as one avenue to freedom.

Her main theme of liberation via educations is supported by: language (privilege, class), freedom (self-love, belonging, fear, healing), teaching as a political act, and obedience (mind/body split). I selected hooks at the beginning of this inquiry project because I was looking for her to help me use “the margins as spaces of resistance.” However, in reading her selected works, I came to see that she would help me most as a useful tool to discover, and re-discover, my passion for teaching. At the end of my formal educational journey, when most are excited to get into the academy, I am beginning to burnout. I saw it happening slowly, at first it was less detail in my preparation for class. Next, I noticed that I became increasingly irritated with the students, for, well, being students. I know I was in danger, however, when I dreaded the drive to campus. I am not an expert on teaching and learning, but I do know this—if I don’t have passion, and can’t help ignite it in anyone else. This is why hooks’ feelings of being “trapped” by the prospect of tenure, instead of excited, moved me so deeply. That’s where and when we connected for this project. Her words would help me remember what education is about, a perfect complement to Lorde, who helped me re-discover what *I* am about.

There were several areas of connection between bell hooks and myself. We both felt displaced during our early school years; for hooks this was due to bussing, for me it was scholarships to attend private schools in the suburbs of Philadelphia. These feelings of displacement and isolation were exacerbated by our college experiences, in which we continued to be pressured to act as “native informants.” I share with hooks and early sense of activism on campus as a way to push back, resist. She writes about the impact

on her worldview of meeting Paulo Freire while she was an undergraduate student. Her passion for his ideas, laid the theoretical framework for her remaining works. I had a similar pivotal moment as an undergraduate when I read *The Cress Theory of Color Confrontation and Racism* by Dr. Frances Cress Welsing (1970). Not only was I intrigued by her work, and the theoretical framework supporting it, but I continued to grow as I coordinated and hosted her visit to Penn State. Something about her presence, her spirit, gave me continued hope and renewed energy. Welsing embodied the following Thich Nhat Hanh statement:

When you [the teacher] come and stay one hour with us, you bring that milieu . . . It is as though you bring a candle into the room. The candle is there, there is a kind of light-zone you bring in. When a sage is there and you sit near [her], you feel light, you feel peace. (as cited in hooks, 1994b, p. 56)

I was drawn to Welsing as an image of the powerful Black woman I could become. I had choices, which did not involve begging to be let in to the patriarchal system of domination as a token. I had light, I felt peace.

hooks and I also share a need, as a result of this sense of displacement, to belong—to find a place that would feel like “home.” She writes extensively about her search in her book *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (2008), and reading that work helped me understand that seeking out what one thinks is lost is normal, healthy even. She states:

Imagine then if you will, my childhood pain, I did not feel truly connected to these strange people, to these familial folks who could not only fail to grasp my worldview but who just simply did not want to hear it. As a child, I didn’t know where I had come from. And when I was not desperately seeking to belong to this

family community that never seemed to accept or want my, I was desperately trying to discover the place of my belonging. I was desperately trying to find my way home. (hooks, 1994b, p. 60)

hooks' search for home also triggers another connection between us, not feeling included in the group we "belong" to (family) or with the "others," creating tight spaces in which we must learn to navigate and manage our feelings and emotions in order to survive.

hooks was an anomaly within her own home, with her very *family*. Throughout her work *Belonging*, she realizes that she cannot leave her past in the past, she must return to it and embrace it. She returns to Kentucky, "home," and continues her journey of healing and liberation. The realization happens for hooks, as it has for me, that she has always held the keys to her liberation inside of her.

Obedience

This desire to belong (with the "others") often goes along with obedience in the classroom. The theme of obedience really resonated with me. I instantly connected with her feelings of being an outsider as a result of being bused across rural Kentucky during desegregation. It was a result of being bused that she first begins to monitor herself, and recognize that the goal of desegregation, stated as increasing diversity, really was about the illusion of difference. Our presence in those vanilla classrooms may have added a spot of color, but the atmosphere did not welcome our way of thinking or our cultural values. Instead "we were . . . showing how well we could become clones of our peers. As we constantly confronted biases, an undercurrent of stress diminished our learning experience" (hooks, 1994b, p. 5). hooks reminds us that the environment is as important as the content in order for the learning process to fully occur. The expectation of

“obedience” is counter-intuitive to a natural environment of learning and growth, and sets unrealistic expectations for students about education. As a result, educators truly interested in education as a practice of freedom, will spend countless hours undoing the programming of many students, in order to unlock their true ability to learn—and, as a result, to be free.

The impact of demanding obedience in the classroom has real implications for all dimensions of our lives. If we believe, as hooks asserts, that teaching is a political act, than we are telling students that obedience and conformity, not education, is the way to freedom. hooks (1994b) states,

if we examine critically the traditional role of the university in the pursuit of truth and the sharing of knowledge and information, it is painfully clear that biases that uphold and maintain white supremacy, imperialism, sexism and racism have distorted education so that is no longer about the practice of freedom. (p. 29)

Teach us about “them.” An additional burden is placed on students who are asked to be the “native informant” for their group. This seemingly tempting position of insider is nothing more than the tokenism described earlier by Lorde as a way to lure someone in with the illusion that they will be either allowed to access some power, or at the very least left alone. Being asked as a student to inform for or on one’s group, creates cognitive dissonance and is in direct contradiction to the liberation that occurs (according to Lorde) through sisterhood. Somewhere deep inside, the message that you will be allowed access in to the group is coupled with a hidden message that there is not room for everyone. Not only are we asked to act as “native informant”; but we begin to feel an

unhealthy competition with those who can help provide our freedom—our brothers and sisters. *We are afraid.*

Mind/body split. To encourage obedience in the classroom, classrooms and universities have become places that reward students and teachers who live in the head, but are not connected with their heart. This notion of universities as places for those smart in “book knowledge,” reminds me of a saying from my grandmother “you’re so smart, you’re stupid.” Never critically examining this statement, we thought she was just talking gibberish, underestimating her mother wit . . . her Black mother inside. With more and acknowledged wisdom, I see this statement as profound. Those who disconnect their minds from their bodies lose a large part of themselves, and their ability to be free, by being void of feeling. Yet, to not conform in these new spaces could be an indication of membership in lower socioeconomic class and hurt ones chances to advance. hooks (1994b) states

As silence and obedience to authority were most rewarded, students learned that this was the appropriate demeanor in the classroom. Loudness, anger, emotional outbursts, and even something as seemingly innocent as unrestrained laughter were deemed unacceptable, vulgar disruptions of classroom social order. These traits were also associated with being a member of the lower classes. If one was not from a privileged class group, adopting a demeanor similar to that of the group could help one to advance. (p. 178)

Obedience is easier to enforce if you couple it with internal *fear* that those who are disobedient, already living on the edges of the social circle, will be labeled as “interlopers.”

Where will I stand? It was through reading hooks' book, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000) that I, as an "interloper," first began to understand and expand my definition of class. Previously I had associated this term only as it correlated to income. The more money you made, the higher economic class you were in. Although this is accurate, I fell short of understanding "that class was more than just a question of money, that is shaped values, attitudes, social relations, and the biases that informed the way knowledge would be given and received" (hooks, 2000, p. 178).

Struggling with issues surrounding class, and its resulting cultural capital (Delpit, 1988), often place an additional burden on students who learn to balance their class locations. Students "must believe they can inhabit comfortably two different worlds, but they must make each space one of comfort. They must creatively invent ways to cross borders" (hooks, 1994, p. 183). Crossing borders was also explored by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) as she described her concept of a "mestiza consciousness" as "spaces where the inhabitants, 'the prohibited and forbidden,' live in a state of discomfort as they negotiate between the conflicting forces in such margins" (p. 49). People then become "border dwellers," hailing from a "borderland . . . a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3). "Border dwellers" can be defined as "a person who straddles or lives across two or more borders (literal, theoretical, social, cultural, geographical, political, etc.)" (Villaverde, 2008, p. 11).

Write it out—the power of and in language. Ultimately crossing borders and creating spaces of comfort will demand an introspective healing process that addresses that *fear* that can accompany the discovery of the "true self." As both students and

teachers we have to move away from internalized oppression which reinforces our participation in the patriarchal construction of education, and instead face our fears, address our feelings, and being the process of healing. According to hooks (1994b), “to heal the splitting of the mind and body, we marginalized and oppressed people’s attempt to recover ourselves and our experiences in language. We seek to make a place for intimacy” (p. 175). Liberation through language as a healing property is an overlapping theme with Lorde. Finding ourselves, owning our power, will start with language and demand that we “make our words a counter-hegemonic speech liberating ourselves” (hooks, 1994b, p. 175).

Language and disruption. hooks’ view of language and the power it holds is twofold. First, she recognizes, as did Lorde, that language (in terms of reading and writing) holds healing properties, and creates political statements. The spelling of hooks’ name is a political statement. That seemingly small change, not capitalizing her first and last names, speaks volumes and creates discourses that impact the political, educational, and social landscapes, thereby creating spaces for change. hooks’ refusal to capitalize her pen name is in an effort to ensure that people focus on the “substance of books, not who I am.” This decision has created a discourse in classrooms, hallways, and blogs on the internet. Is hooks breaking the rules? Why? One blogger was infuriated that hooks would not conform (read be obedient) in this respect. She states: “If bell hooks thinks it’s unimportant who writes a book, then why is she so determined that black authors are quoted in discourse on postmodernism?” (DaLynziiChic, 2006, para. 5). It is the author’s humble opinion that the blogger has missed hooks’ point. Too often people will read

pieces by a particular author with a different, non-critical eye. This takes away from the content of the book, and instead becomes a type of empty idol worship. hooks also makes a quiet stand by not placing “Ph.D.” behind her name. Once again, some people are hesitant to critique a “doctor.” Lorde shared this understanding of the power of language with hooks, not only in the vital necessity of poetry, but also in subtle ways. Throughout *Sister Outsider*, I noticed small acts of resistance through language demonstrated by Lorde: in the phrase “women of Color” the “c” was always capitalized; “Black” women was always capitalized; america was not capitalized. *Discourse creates social change*. hooks (1994b) was right on target when she stated “like desire, language disrupts, refuses to be contained within boundaries” (p. 167).

I ain't be got no weapon. The 1987 movie *Hollywood Shuffle* adopted a comedic approach to examining the role of Blacks in media. Through vignettes the actors mocked Blacksploitation films, creating a discourse (outside academia) regarding the role of Blacks in Hollywood. One common thread through all the vignettes was the use of Ebonics (also called Black English or Black Vernacular). Utilizing Ebonics allowed Blacks to rally around a language that been created out of need, and was being used to heal.

Linguists have traced Ebonics back to slavery, when the need to communicate to the master and to each other, demanded that slaves (from different tribes) quickly learn and use “broken English.” Common language patterns were created (*out of isolation comes creation*) which were carried over for years, morphing into various dialects (Gullah), and reminding Blacks of our common starting place. Remnants of these

dialectical differences can still be found today, and have been studied and debated in academia (Dillard, 1973; Smitherman, 1977).

hooks also recognizes that language, Black vernacular, holds an unique space and fills a need for Black people in terms of liberation. The language created out of need to heal, to be free, holds a power that is negated when we are forced to adopt the language of our oppressor. Adrienne Rich notes in *The Burning of Paper instead of Children*, “This is the oppressor’s languages yet I need it to talk to you” (as cited in hooks, 1994b, p. 167). The contradiction inherent when a group is forced to learn the ways of another group to survive supports hooks assertion of the importance of using Black vernacular to claim our spaces. Black vernacular, now most often shared through rap music, has now been co-opted and/or discredited, leaving one standard by which all are measured. Ultimately, to co-exist in both worlds, we are forced to learn the language of our oppressor. Even this personal exercise in liberation had to be constructed in the language of the oppressor. I am curious, then, of just how liberating this project will be given Lorde’s assertion: “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”

The messages hooks tries to impart with her emphasis on language underscore her view of teaching as a political act. She states “writing, I believed then, was all about private longing and personal glory, but teaching was about service, giving back to one’s community. For Black folks, teaching—educating—was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle” (hooks, 1994b, p. 2). This subtitle to *Teaching to Transgress* recognizes that freedom, liberation as an important goal that can be reached in the classroom, both as the teacher and as the student. A message I needed to hear at this

stage of my professional journey, she states: “to have work that promotes one’s liberation is such a powerful gift that it does not matter so much if the gift is flawed” (hooks, 1994b, p. 50). Her view on the use of education as a tool for liberation is based on the premise teaching is not just about the sharing of information with our students. It is also about sharing in their growth. This important message is often overlooked by the academy, as teaching is based on “rigor” and the competition that ensues among faculty is more about who is teaching the “harder” courses. At the HBCU I work at, most professors brag about the fail rate of a course—looking for that bell curve to justify their course, and ultimately, justify them. hooks (1994b) states:

To educate as a practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn that learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)

Inherent in the above quote is the contradiction of believing that classrooms without teachers who care for the students are even classrooms at all. They are just rooms.

Creating my Own Paradise

Her critique of teaching and teachers spreads from elementary schools to the academy. No one is exempt from creating an environment in which learning can occur. And this learning will most not involve rote memorization. Her words remind me to stay in the battle for the long haul, to stay in the trenches. It is exhausting swimming against the tide, with no support from peers or administration. It makes the academy a hostile environment, and I find myself wondering how I will survive this hegemonic institution

of domination. The timeliness of this inquiry project provides me with hope. hooks (1994b) helped me to recognize that

The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom. (p. 207)

hooks' belief in the importance of education as a liberatory reminded me of my original passion as an educator. She asserts that "no education is politically neutral," it is indeed a political act. Much of hooks' visions of what education should like is based on the influence of Paulo Friere. Friere's critical analysis of education and the "banking" system lit a fire in hooks, igniting within her the passion that allowed her to continue to question and move on.

I felt connected to hooks as I read this, particularly in my role as a professor at a HBCU. I cannot recall in my years in the academy a meeting that was held to discuss "the pursuit of truth and the sharing of information and knowledge." General faculty and department meetings instead become opportunities for discussions on assessment, outcomes, and dispositions. Again, I feel slightly out of place, for although I agree with the need for measurable learning outcomes, the part of me deep inside wants to scream "how can I *really* measure learning?" Even this exercise, the academic exercise of the dissertation, demonstrates the ability to synthesis information in an organized, logical fashion. There is no guarantee that I have truly *learned* through this process.

Give the people what they need. As hooks heals herself through theorizing, writing, and teaching, she comes to understand that “any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public” (p. 64). hooks (1994b) has been criticized for not producing work that is “scholarly” enough for the academy. She counters these attacks stating

work by women of color and marginalized groups of white women (for example, lesbians, sex radicals) especially if written in a manner that renders it accessible to a broad reading public, is often de-legitimized in academic settings, even if the work enables and promotes feminist practice. (pp. 63-64)

This conundrum places Black women in academia in an interesting position. In order to receive tenure—and continue their political act of teaching—they must utilize “the oppressor’s language,” or find alternative venues of information sharing. I now fully understand why hooks panicked at the idea of receiving tenure. It is a life sentence.

Keeping information locked in the academy, through “top tier” journals, research symposiums, and conferences, may not be directly helpful to the masses and can be likened to an academic apartheid. A balance has to be struck between work that informs the academy, and work that informs the soul. Sometimes there is overlap, often times not. This debate will continue and is especially pertinent to this inquiry projects as it relates to how discourse creates social change. bell hooks, despite the criticisms of scholarship, has created discourse that is useful in a variety of settings. Not only will you find her text used for classroom instruction, but you will also find it read in small groups at the coffee shop. This is was discourse *must* be about.

My After Thought

hooks' experiences provided her with opportunities for praxis, a chance to reflect on her work and connect it to action. The theme of liberatory praxis which should be inherent in education is supported by her understanding of the importance of language, self-love, the political act that is teaching, and obedience. hooks overlaps Lorde in many keys ways, but for my reading it was more complimentary, as they addressed different areas. For me to also practice what I am preaching, I must combine them into a useful template to propel me, and others in my situation, forward.

Embracing Sisterhood: A Meeting of the Minds

This experience has been overwhelming for me. It is like I have met, studied and apprenticed with my sisters—Audre and bell. The spiritual connection we formed cannot be fully explicated on paper, nor should it be. I own it, it's mine, and selfishly there are pieces that I need for just me. With an overarching theme of survival for both Lorde and hooks, I have created subcategories of personal survival (Lorde) and professional survival (hooks) to anchor my reading. For Lorde survival came through a grand theme of power, which would be unleashed by discovering our voice (language, feelings), utilizing our adaptability, and recognizing self-love (self-definition, multiplicities of self, and sisterhood). For hooks it came through a grand theme of liberation via education is supported by: language (privilege, class), freedom (self-love, belonging, fear, healing), teaching as a political act, and obedience (mind/body split). Although their goal is the same, their approaches differ slightly.

Lorde earlier discussed how her life might have changed if she knew of Angelina Grimke while she was struggling at Hunter College; I guess I have to wonder what it might have been like for Lorde and hooks to interface: to tease out their ideas with each other, and support each other through the journey. Lorde continues to do that for many people with her work. And that is the beauty of understanding what it means for you to survive and be free. Her work, her personal work, had a huge political impact and has allowed many women the opportunity to unlock their own doors towards freedom. I can only speculate if this is what she had in mind as she wrote, but my feelings from reading her work is that her primary goal was to free herself. Much like the well-known airplane advice—put your own oxygen mask on before attempting to help others.

Language

Lorde and hooks shared a commonality around the importance of language for liberation. hooks viewed language as an opportunity to disrupt the academy with simple political statements, such as non-capitalization of her name. She also recognized the organic nature of language that is created to heal. Her view of the importance of Black vernacular, or Ebonics, is a refreshing reminder to carefully examine all pieces of our cultural history before denouncing them as rooted in nothingness, and therefore worthless. Lorde's approach to language was more directly tied to the therapeutic properties of poetry, journaling, and writing in general. It is through these actions, and specifically through poetry for her, that we will find—connect—to our Black poet, mother-wit, la facultad, that will allow us to reclaim our voice.

Fear

An undercurrent theme for both, fear is recognized as needing to be faced and conquered to move closer to freedom. Audre Lorde tackles fear in multiple ways across several of her poems and speeches. For her, fear (being afraid) will stifle us and not allow us to connect to our feelings (Black poet inside!). This lack of connection will diminish our ability to work towards destroying the silences that render us voiceless.

hooks sees fear as connected to our need to practice self-love, become more confident in who we are and shed these pathological need to be “obedient” students. This will unlock a freedom within us that will connect body and mind *again*—like opening a valve—allowing us to freely flow back and forth within ourselves.

Self-love

But the greatest of these is love—(I Corinthians 13)

You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire Universe, deserve your love and affection—Buddha

I have decided to start this section on self-love with two quotes that I live with daily. The first quote I have heard many times as a child in church. The second quote I discovered while in Portland, Oregon, and it struck right to my core. I dug around in my purse for paper and scribbled it down. I shared it as my quote on Facebook, not for the others, but for ME, to remind ME to love ME. So I was struck by this theme from both women, and perhaps I was looking for it, but nonetheless, there it was. What I needed, when I needed it.

For hooks self-love comes with a sense of belonging, a discovery of the illusion of what we call “home,” and a healing that allows us to be brave enough (no fear) to face ourselves and others. Lastly it demands that we learn to love and be loved. Lorde approached self-love from the perspective of embracing who we are (our many “me’s”), and defining each part of us so that it will not be defined for us, and used against us. With this new ability to love ourselves comes the ability to reach out and build connections with our sisters so that we can support each other through this perilous journey.

Chapter Summary

This analysis has allowed me the opportunity not only to discover more about the impact of the discourse of Lorde and hooks, but also about myself and the discourse I am creating with this document. Lorde’s themes of personal survival via power, continue to resonate with my soul. Her sub-themes of voice, adaptability, and self-love provide several of the necessary tools I need in my toolbox of survival. The dialogue, an organic intellectual experience, allowed me to flush out several main themes and ideas through praxis. As I was writing the dialogue, I was practicing self-love, abolishing silence to reclaim my voice, and learning how to use my experiences to impact my future (adaptability).

Reading and recording hooks was accomplished in a different format, one more in line for the usefulness of her work to my project. As much as I personally owned Lorde’s work, I could not address hooks in the same way. Professional survival is key to me, but my personal survival trumps all. With a slightly more clinical approach, I read hooks for

the remaining keys that would help balance me out. Her theme of education as a tool for liberation kept me charged up not only to continue in my role as a professor in the academy, but to complete and *embrace* this inquiry project. She saved me by illuminating this process. I am thankful. I recognized how I could make simple language changes, and make a political act. My teaching is a political act. I challenged my obedience through her writing, and could finally recognize how the pathological pieces of conformity were eating me alive. Her insistence on holistic education resonated with me, and encouraged me to continue to attempt to connect with my students—mind and body—even though it may be physically and mentally exhausting. Finally, I recognized the need to examine her concepts of belonging and “home.” These important pieces must be addressed and pushed through utilizing self-love and healing, the last few tools in my toolbox.

CHAPTER VI

MY JOURNEY'S END: A TOOLKIT FOR BLACK FEMINIST SCHOLARS/EDUCATORS

While on the path of completing this dissertation, my goal was quite ambitious, at its best, and somewhat naïve. I realized upon my introit into this project, several dissertations could be written on Audre Lorde and bell hooks; from multiple perspectives. Several dissertations can and yet still be written on these phenomenal Black Feminist Educators/Scholars, as well as on the oppression of Black women in America. Viewing myself, not only as a researcher, but also as a faculty member at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU); and a student at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) that was historically the first Women's College in North Carolina. A university filled with history, but was established to educate the daughters of wealthy white landowners and "men of position," in the State.

Black Women Faculty and Historically Black Colleges and Universities: I am a Woman!

Black women historically have struggled for parity with White women and men in the American academy. They continue to be at the bottom of employment, rank, and tenure ladders at PWI's; and this pattern of gender inequity and discrimination is confounded by race at HBCUs. Scholars in the women's studies community have given some attention in recent years to the education of and climate for Black women at HBCUs. Guy-Sheftall's (1995) anthology of Black women's writing, *Words of Fire*,

includes a few chapters describing the obstacles faced by Black women in the academy. Alexander's (1995) contribution to that work, though not specifically focused on the HBCU experience, details her mother's, her sister's, and her own struggles to obtain an education and utilize their professional training and skills. Hers is a discussion of financial hardship and lack of recognition due to gender and racial discrimination. She details, for example, the forces influencing her mother's decision to stay home and raise her three children instead of advancing her career in music. She also describes her sister's experiences of constant humiliation and harassment at the hands of male administrators while working at a small southern HBCU. That experience proved so difficult that her sister left the institution, vowing never to work at another Black school. Alexander later faced similar types of discrimination herself in her first job in academia, but at a PWI. Wallace's (1995) contributed chapter in *Words of Fire* reflects upon the climate for Black women students at a particular HBCU campus in the 1960s. Recalling on her own undergraduate experiences there, Wallace notes that she left after her first semester because she found her female peers to be more focused on finding suitable mates than on advancing the collective status of Black people.

She, on the other hand, was struggling to understand and reconcile what it meant to be a feminist. Her ideological conflicts in the HBCU setting led to an overwhelming sense of isolation. In her contribution to this debate, reprinted in *Words of Fire*, Beale (1995) described the phenomenon of double jeopardy, or dual exposure to racism and sexism, experienced by Black women at PWIs more than 30 years ago. Moses (1989) had earlier pursued this line of reasoning by examining the absence of Black women in

the research literature on women in the academy. Her research explored the impact of the double obstacles of racism and sexism on Black women students and scholars. King (1988) also addressed the limitations of such dual-jeopardy models, pulling together a special issue of the feminist journal *Signs*, which argued that Black women face triple jeopardy instead—that is, the conflux of race, class, and gender discrimination and oppression—resulting from their unique socio-historical circumstances.

Black Women: Leadership Development in the Academy

Appleby, Colon, and Hamilton (2001), in their discussion of the oppression of women of color, noted that a significant part of the process of victimizing females involves stereotyping them as unable to compete and as “more intuitive than rational, and less capable of scientific achievement” (p. 83). Moreover, Radford-Hill (2000) noted that this stereotyping of “female” behavior is inadequate, incomplete, and ineffective and often leads to the expectation that such behaviors, whenever and wherever they are demonstrated by women in leadership roles, should be subjected to and tamed by emulating “male” models of leadership.

Presenting itself as an area in need of future research, Black women at HBCUs suffer greatly from conflated expectations and little or no resources. This fight for leadership on HBCUs in general, and on the HBCU at which I am employed, is in direct contradiction to several of the survival skills noted by Hill Collins, Lorde, and hooks. In an effort to advance, with little or no leadership, those with perceived power often outwit, outtalk, and outlast, their subordinates. But the cost of “fighting the good fight” comes with serious consequences. Engaging in academic battle often comes with mental and

physical side effects. Many Black women at HBCUs suffer from hypertension, diabetes, depression, and a myriad of other ailments. These ailments, also common among Black women in general, should be seen at slightly reduced rates among Black women faculty once correlated with educational attainment. This is not the case, however. The same women who are coordinating the “healthy heart walks” and “depression screenings” are in dire need of these interventions to save *them*.

Confounding the lack of leadership on campuses is the accompanying horizontal hostility (Lorde, 2007) it creates. Personal and professional survival of Black women in academia, and in particular HBCUs, needs to be examined utilizing a different lens. Women of Color and other marginalized groups are being shoved into models created for the rescue and support of white, heterosexual, able-bodied men. The unique atmosphere surrounding Black women at HBCUs demands further research and exploration. The survival strategies suggested for Black women at PWIs (discussed earlier in Chapter II), are not always applicable given the unique environment of the HBCU.

For Black faculty at HBCUs, the campus is like a battlefield, but I am not sure who the enemy is. Within this oppositional framework of guarded binary thinking, I am wasting energy that can be used for campus change, personal growth and liberation. Over the four years I have taught at an HBCU, I have not witnessed one incident of activism that united the campus. Instead, I have seen and felt faculty who are disgruntled with a heaving teaching load (5/4), expectations of community, University and Departmental service, and scholarly production. I, too, often feel overwhelmed. We, I,

desperately need more tools in our toolboxes to survive personally and professionally as a Black woman in academia.

**“Survival is Not an Academic Skill”:
Creating a Toolbox for Personal and Professional Survival**

Given the history of Black women attempting to juggle multiple roles on and the complexities surrounding leadership roles at HBCUs; this project, in part, attempts to provide insights on maintaining (or reclaiming) oneself while navigating the waters of an HBCU. The quote at the beginning of this section is a wake-up call to all women of Color, and other marginalized groups, trying to survive academia. Too often we believe we can out think any situation, having bought into the premise of the mind/body split (hooks, 1994b); we find ourselves analyzing our situations, searching for solutions for our survival with our heads, and not our hearts. Without a clear roadmap of our own, Black women in academia (and particularly those at HBCUs) have continued doing what we have done for generations—be resilient. Some of the currently used tools are problematic in that they continue to portray Black women as “superwomen,” assertive/aggressive, and indestructible. Black women themselves have bought into this myth, and have suffered from physical and mental anguish as a result. Black women continue to wander the hallways, tentatively reaching out to their female counter-parts, afraid to ask for support and taking on additional tasks to prove their worth. The overlooked population of Black women at HBCUs, has left a huge void in both research and practice, and is worthy of further study. This inquiry project, largely designed to assist me in filling my toolbox, has potential usefulness for those in similar circumstances.

Breaking My Silence

Hill Collins (1998) supports the universal nature of the theme of “voice” found while reading the works of Lorde and hooks, calling it “breaking silence”. Using this term, she discusses the importance of using literature as a counter-hegemonic tool, which will begin a healing process both individually—and as a collective. Citing the work of Alice Walker, The Combahee River Collective, Toni Morrison and Ntozake Shange, Hill Collins illustrates the power of literature for Black women in reclaiming their subjectivity via a variety of writing methods. According to Hill Collins (1998), when Black women break their silence individually (through autobiographies or inquiry projects such as this); they/we are adding to, and shifting the, collective voice of Black women.

In particular Hill Collins (1998) discusses the importance of writing about “concrete experiences” stating that “when Black women valorize their own concrete experiences, they claim the authority of experience” (p. 48). This authority disrupts other discourses which seek to subjugate marginalized groups by denying and/or overlooking the validity of lived experiences. This inquiry project was written utilizing my “authority of experience” in an attempt to disrupt other discourses and help me reclaim my voice. In doing so, this project recognizes the different worlds or “spheres” (Hill Collins, 1998) in which Black women must learn to navigate.

Tools for Personal and Professional Survival

This inquiry project has proven to be an exercise in self-healing and liberation. The product of which has created more tools for my toolbox. These tools may be useful to others also traversing treacherous terrains and I share them with this caveat: no one

method can be used for all, however Black women have created a standpoint that should allow for some commonalities for these tools. These tools are necessary in both the public and private spheres (Hill Collins, 1998), and I acknowledge that although there may be a difference in spheres (public versus private); these tools connect seamlessly across multiple areas of our lives. If these tools are to be useful for survival, whether it is personal or professional, there must be an understanding that we cannot disconnect the various arenas of our lives. The fluidity of our existence, and our self-preservation, lies in not compartmentalizing areas; but learning to embrace the connectivity and overlaps that lie within and between. The following tools may be helpful:

- Trust yourself—the Black poet/mother-wit/ la facultad. Listen to it. Trust it.
- Love yourself—as Buddha says “you above all others deserve your love and affection.”

Self love is paramount to our survival, and our ability to thrive. This love needs to be holistic and encompass the many pieces of you. It may involve journaling, exercise, traveling, and daily affirmations. Fall in love with you.

- Recognize and own your power—this will happen in with time as you trust and love yourself.
- Develop a community—in both our personal and professional worlds, we all need support. Create a community that will assist you in moving towards your goals, and dealing with the tight spaces along the way.

- Establish a “sistah-hood”—both on and off campus. Share your marginalization and resistance strategies. Utilize the healing properties that come from such communal bonds.
- Mother yourself—as a Black female faculty member (especially at a HBCU) you will be expected to nurture many students along the way. In your personal life, as a mother and/or “other” mother, you will again be called upon for support. Mother yourself first.
- Establish allies/create a “sisterhood”—community must include *all* our brothers and sisters, as well as women and men from other racial/ethnic/cultural groups. Selective oppression is poisonous.
- Discover your voice—the one deep down inside you, waiting to be heard. Let it out. Suppressing your voice will diminish your power, removing tools from your toolbox and placing them in the hands of your oppressors.
- Reconnect with your feelings—this will allow you to feel again. Pleasure, pain, joy, and anger. Be in touch with your feelings will allow you to fully experience life with every particle of your being.
- Start a group on campus—Connect with others who share your passion for teaching and learning. Find creative ways to resist.
- Discover (or re-discover) the power of language—Read the experiences of others and/or write your own. It is frustrating not having the language to articulate how you have been marginalized. Reading the scholarship related to your experiences will help you give voice to what’s happening to you.

- Document your experiences—blog, journals or simple notes to yourself will allow you to track your experiences, monitor your growth. Most of all it will provide beginning tools for the generations following behind you.
- Engage in healthy living.—You must experience wholeness. Wholeness is being in harmony with mind, body, and spirit. Tennis anyone?

Future Research

Black women in academia continue to face additional challenges. These challenges have been well researched regarding the implications of life in the academy for Black women at PWIs; however, the literature is sparse regarding this phenomenon at HBCUs. This inquiry project began to de-tangle some of the nuances of life for Black feminist scholars at HBCUs. One noted coping method can be the use of literature to provide mentors for Black feminist scholars at HBCUs who are struggling with the horizontal hostility (Lorde, 2007) present at most HBCUs.

Additional research is needed on the psychological impact of negotiating the unique atmosphere and challenges HBCUs present—to progress the souls, hearts, and minds of her students while creating anti-oppressive environments for women of color; particularly Black women. Research should also be conducted on the congruency of the historical significance of HBCUs and their mission within the context of the twenty-first century. Do we really need HBCUs in today’s context and for what purpose?

Summary

This inquiry project set out to “make sense” of how Black Feminist Scholars negotiate power, navigate oppression, and resist domination while dismantling the

institutional structures of the academy in order to engage in liberatory practices. Within a theoretical framework of Black Feminist Thought, I engaged in a Critical Discourse Analysis of selected works of Audre Lorde and bell hooks, to create a framework (toolbox) for the personal and professional survival of Black women in academia.

Beginning with a historical overview of oppression of Black women, this project interrogated the various forms of oppressions; as well as the resistance strategies utilized. From slavery until present day my research has noted that many of the same resistance strategies that were utilized by enslaved Black women; they are continually being utilized (both inside and outside) of the academy—by Black women literally and metaphorically free—however for some many find themselves in today’s time—enslaved. They include: ‘sistah-hood,’ support groups, community, faith, literature, calls for action, mentoring, resiliency and education. This inquiry projected explored utilized a coping method of literature to interrogate a failing coping method, education. Black women continue to pursue education as a “way up and out”; but as faculty, have discovered numerous roadblocks on their path to liberation.

A critical discourse analysis of the selected works of Audre Lorde and bell hooks have yielded additional coping methods for Black women to survive, personally and professionally in academia. From Lorde’s and hooks’ texts the following themes emerged: reclaiming/discovering power and voice, adaptability, self-love, recognizing/embracing feelings, language, and obedience. The themes have been presented earlier as a framework, or toolbox, for the personal and professional survival of Black women in academia.

As there is no monolithic experience, there is also no one key that will unlock every door. However the more keys in our possession the greater our chances of opening the door to our liberation. My hope is that this document will provide one key for future use.

EPILOGUE

You cannot, you cannot use someone else's fire. You can only use your own. And in order to do that, you must first be willing to *believe* that you have it.
(Audre Lorde, emphasis added)

Rushing to make my office hours, I grab a yogurt and apple for my long day, and head out the door. I never question the time I made for myself earlier to play tennis, and how much that outlet was needed. I am five minutes late for my office hours, and there is, indeed, a student waiting for me. It's a young man I first had in my freshman seminar class. Now a second semester sophomore, he stops by regularly every semester just to chat. And that's what we did for almost an hour, we chatted.

This inquiry project reminded me of the importance of spending time with my students, chatting with them, and just being there. The difference is I now recognize the importance of self-care, and how it impacts my longevity, specifically in a career that I really do love. So the end justifies the means, and I feel once again whole. Bit by bit this process broke me down; however, it has re-built me stronger.

The struggles I had with this process mostly came from my attempting to create a liberatory piece in an oppressive manner—and not recognizing it as such. I had to completely let go—free fall if you will—realizing the faith that I possessed within my abilities and myself would be the bedrock that sustained me throughout this process. Ultimately, there was no one there but me during the late nights and long weekends. No

one could do this for me. I had to face my fears and face myself. And I did, and it feels great!

As I continue my tenure in academia, I am more hopeful and encouraged than I have been in years. I have placed additional tools in my toolbox! I even volunteered to be part of the committee for Women's History Month at my University. I am creating a community. One day at a time. One colleague at a time. One student at a time.

My search for personal survival tools has left me feeling quite at ease as well. I am embracing my multiplicities of self (Lorde, 2007), practicing the self-love and mothering that I *know* will liberate me. I have found my way again, full circle. In the prologue I describe myself as moving in a linear fashion from “round the way girl *to* grassroots activist *to* carpooling mom *to* my present position: tenure-track faculty member.” I am *still* all of those things, on any given day. I am no longer shedding pieces of myself, I am instead adding to the collage that is Shawn *Arango* Ricks. And I love it.

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APPENDIX A
ANNOTATED DATA SET

SURVIVAL

“We are powerful because we have survived, and that is what it is all about—*survival and growth*” p. 139, *Sister Outsider*

“For in order to survive, those of us for whom oppression is as American as apple pie have always had to be watchers, to become familiar with the language and manners of the oppressor, even sometimes adopting them for some illusion of protection” p. 114, *Sister Outsider*.

Women of Color in america have grown up within a symphony of anger, at being silenced, at being unchosen, at knowing that when we survive, it is in spite of a world that takes for granted our lack of humanness, and which hates our very existence outside of its service. And I say symphony rather than cacophony because we have had to learn to orchestrate these furies so that they do not tear us apart. We have had to learn to move through thema and use them for strength and force and insight within our daily lives. Those of us who did not learn this difficult lesson did not survive. And part of my anger is always in libation for my fallen sisters” p. 129, *Sister Outsider*.

“survival is the ability to encompass difference, to encompass change without destruction” p. 75, *Sister Outsider*

“I know teaching is a survival technique” p. 88, *Sister Outsider*

“It is for me and I think it is in general; the only way real learning happens. Because I myself was learning something I needed to continue living. And I was examining it and teaching it at the same time I was learning it” p. 88, *Sister Outsider*

“the learning process is something you can incite, literally incite, like a riot. And then, just possibly, hopefully, it does home, or on” p. 98, *Sister Outsider*

“This first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings” p. 42, *Sister Outsider*

“And I think of what it could have meant in terms of sisterhood and survival for each one of us to have known of the other’s existence: for me to have had her words and her wisdom, and for her to have known I needed them! It is so crucial for each one of us to know she is not alone” p. 101, *I am Your Sister*.

“Where does our power lie and how do we school ourselves to use it in the service of what we believe?” p. 101, *I am Your Sister*.

“Racism. Cancer. In both cases, to win the aggressor must conquer but the resisters need only survive. How do I define that survival and on whose terms” p. 132, *I am Your Sister*

“For Black women, learning to consciously extend ourselves to each other and to call upon each other’s strengths is a life-saving strategy. In the best of circumstances surrounding ourselves, it requires an enormous amount of mutual, consistent support for us to be emotionally able to look straight into the face of the powers aligned against us and still do our work with joy” p. 135, *I am Your Sister*

“Black women who survive have a head start on learning how to be open and self-protective at the same time. One secret is to ask as many people as possible for help, depending on all of them and none of them at the same time. Some will help, others cannot. For the time being.” P. 142-143, *I am Your Sister*

“You know why the hard questions must be asked. It is not altruism, it is self-preservation—survival” p. 215, *I am Your Sister*

“Poetry as illumination—for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt” p. 36, *Sister Outsider*

SELF DEFINITION

“If I didn’t define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people’s fantasies for me and eaten alive” p. 137, *Sister Outsider*

“As Black women we have the **right and responsibility** to define ourselves and to seek our allies in common cause” with Black men against racism p. 52, *Sister Outsider*

“If we do not define ourselves for ourselves, we will be defined by others—for their use and to our detriment” p. 45, *Sister Outsider*

“Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each one of us within our hearts knows ‘that is not me’...It is within this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society. Those of us who stand outside that power often identify one way in which we are different and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around differences, some of which we ourselves may be practicing” p. 116, *Sister Outsider*

BUILDING/UTILIZING COMMUNITY

“Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that those differences do not exist” p. 112, *Sister Outsider*

SELF LOVE

“We have to love ourselves and we (Black people) have to love every piece of our being and every piece of our brothers and sisters” p. 89, *I am Your Sister*

“Nothing I accept about myself can be used against me to diminish me. I am who I am, doing what I came to do, acting upon you like a drug or a chisel to remind you of your me-ness, as I discover you in myself” p. 147, *Sister Outsider*

SISTERHOOD

“The future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference” p. 123, *Sister Outsider*

“Perhaps this is why it is often easier for Black women to interact with white women, even though those interactions are often a dead end emotionally” p. 163, *Sister Outsider*

“The failure of academic feminists to recognize differences as a crucial strength is a failure to reach beyond the first patriarchal lesson. In our world, divide and conquer must become define and empower” p. 112, *Sister Outsider*

“Now we hear that it is the task of women of Color to educate white women—in the face of tremendous resistance—as to our existence, our differences, our relative roles in our joint survival. This is a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought” p. 113, *Sister Outsider*

Simone de Beauvoir —“It is in the knowledge of the genuine conditions of our lives that we must draw our strength to live and our reasons for acting” p. 113 in *Sister Outsider*

“Interdependency between women is the way to a freedom which allows I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative” p. 111, *Sister Outsider*

“Within the interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged” p. 111, *Sister Outsider*

ABOLISHING HORIZONTAL HOSTILITY

“The tactic of encouraging horizontal hostility to becloud more pressing issues of oppression is by no means new, nor limited to relations between women. The same tactic is used to encourage separation between Black women and Black men. In discussions around the hiring and firing of Black faculty at universities, the charge is frequently heard that Black women are more easily hired than are Black men. For this reason, Black women’s promotion and tenure are not considered important since they are only taking jobs away from Black men” p. 48, *Sister Outsider*

“In order to work together we (Black people) do not have to become a mix of indistinguishable particles resembling a vat of homogenized chocolate milk” p. 136, *Sister Outsider*

“Increasingly, despite opposition, Black women are coming together to explore and to alter those manifestations of our society which oppress us in different ways from those that oppress Black men” p. 46, *Sister Outsider*

“Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young,

lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival.” p. 123, *Sister Outsider*

“And I think of what it could have meant in terms of sisterhood and survival for each one of us to have known of the other’s existence: for me to have had her words and her wisdom, and for her to have known I needed them! It is so crucial for each one of us to know she is not alone” p. 101, *Sister Outsider*

ADAPTABILITY

“One of the most basic Black survival skills is the ability to change, to metabolize experience, good or ill, into something that is useful, lasting, effective.” p. 135, *Sister Outsider*

DESTROYING SILENCE OR FINDING/ACKNOWLEDGING VOICE

“There are so many ways in which I’m vulnerable and cannot help but be vulnerable, I’m not going to be more vulnerable by putting weapons of silence in my enemies’ hands” p. 99, *Sister Outsider*

“To suppress any truth is to give it strength beyond endurance” The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression as women” p. 58, *Sister Outsider*

“I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood” p. 40, *Sister Outsider*

“What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? Perhaps...because I am myself—a Black woman warrior poet doing my work—come to ask you, are you doing yours” p. 41-42, *Sister Outsider*

“There are no new ideas still waiting in the wings to save us as women, as human. There are only old and forgotten ones, new combinations extrapolations and recognitions from within ourselves—along with the renewed courage to try them out” p. 38, *Sister Outsider*

Poetry (for Lorde) “Poetry as illumination—for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are—until the poem—nameless and formless, about to be birthed, but already felt” p. 36, *Sister Outsider*

“Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity for our existence” p. 37, *Sister Outsider*.

“Poetry is not a luxury. For the quality of light by which we scrutinize our lives has direct bearing upon the product which we live, and upon those changes which we hope to bring about through those lives. This is poetry as illumination, for it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless, about to be birthed but already felt” p. 185, *I am Your Sister*.

LANGUAGE

“Each of us is here now because in one way or another we share a commitment to language and to the power of language, and to the reclaiming of that language which has been made to work against us. IN the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each of us to establish or examine her function in that transformation and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation” p. 43, *Sister Outsider*.

POWER

“The tokenism that is sometimes extended to us is not an invitation to own power” p. 118, *Sister Outsider*.

“To search for power within myself means I must be willing to move through being afraid to whatever lies beyond” p. 146, *Sister Outsider*

“For women, the need and desire to nurture each other is not pathological, but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered” p. 111, *Sister Outsider*

“As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge” p. 33, *Sister Outsider*

“Where does our power lie and how do we school ourselves to use it in the service of what we believe?” p. 101, *Sister Outsider*

“Must be in touch with our own ancient roads in which lies deep power for each woman”
p. 42, *Sister Outsider*

“But as we come more in touch with our ancient, non-european consciousness of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learn more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden sources of our power from where true knowledge, and, therefore lasting action comes” p. 37, *Sister Outsider*

FEELINGS

“The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us—the poet—whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free” p. 38, *Sister Outsider*

“We’ve been taught to respect our fears but we *must* learn to respect ourselves and our needs” p. 161, *I am Your Sister*

“And that anger, as we know from our ____ eyes of childhood, is armed with a powerful cruelty learned in the bleakness of too early a battle for survival. ‘You can’t take it, huh!’. The Dozens. A Black game of supposed friendly rivalry and name-calling; in reality, a crucial exercise in learning how to absorb verbal abuse without faltering” p. 171, *Sister Outsider*

“A piece of the piece we paid for learning survival was our childhood. We were never allowed to be children. It is the right of children to be able to play at living for a little while, but for a Black child, every act can have deadly serious consequences, and for a Black girl child, even more so” p. 171, *Sister Outsider*

“There is a distinction I am beginning to make in my living between pain and suffering. Pain is an event, and experience that must be named, recognized and then used in some way in order for the experience to change, to be transformed into something else, strength or knowledge or action.

Suffering, on the other hand, is the nightmare reliving of unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain. When I live through pain without recognizing it, self-consciously, I rob myself of the power that can come from using the pain, the power to fuel some movement beyond it. I condemn myself to reliving that pain over and over whenever something close triggers it. And that is suffering, a seemingly inescapable cycle.” pp. 171-172, *Sister Outsider*

Black women have asked Lorde “Why do I feel myself to be such an anathema, so isolated” p. 172, *Sister Outsider*

“We can learn to mother ourselves” p. 174, *Sister Outsider*

“Mourning the loss of our childhoods and the loss of ‘mothering’ which is a luxury black mothers can’t always give their children if they really want them to survive” p. 175, *Sister Outsider*

“My mother taught me to survive from a very early age by her own example. Her silence also taught me isolation fury, mistrust, self-rejection, and sadness. My survival lay in learning how to use weapons she gave me, also, to fight against those things within myself, unnamed” p. 150, *Sister Outsider*

“And survival is the greatest gift of love. Sometimes, for Black mothers it is the only gift possible, and tenderness gets lost” p. 150, *Sister Outsider*

“Anger—a passion of displeasure that may be excessive or misplaced but not necessarily harmful. Hatred—an emotional habit or attitude of mind in which aversion is coupled with ill will. Anger, used, does not destroy. Hate does” p. 152, *Sister Outsider*

“It is easier to be angry than to hurt. Anger is what I do best. It is easier to be furious than to be yearning. Easier to crucify myself in you than to take on the threatening universe of whiteness by admitting that we are worth wanting each other” p. 153, *Sister Outsider*

“When we cannot influence a situation it is an act of wisdom to withdraw” The I Ching

“The world is divided into two kinds of people—she said—”those who have mothers and those who don’t. And I don’t have a mother anymore”

“What I heard her saying was that no other Black woman would ever see who she was, ever trust or be trusted by her again. I heard in her a cry of loneliness the source of romance between Black women and our mommas” p. 158, *Sister Outsider*

EMBRACING OUR “MULTIPLICITIES OF SELVES”

Karla Hammond, *American Poetry Review*, March/April 1980: 18-21 “An Interview with Audre Lorde”

“Strongly woman-identified women love between women is open and possible, beyond physical in every way. There are lesbians . . . who were not feminist and would not call themselves feminists. But the true feminists deals out of a lesbian consciousness whether or not she ever sleeps with women”

“While Black sisters don’t like to hear this, I would have to say that all Black women are lesbians because we were raised in the remnants of a basically matriarchal society no matter how oppressed we may have been by patriarchy.”

“There is always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself—whether it’s *Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc*—because that’s the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else. But once you do that, then you’ve lost (?) because then you become acquired or bought by that particular essence of yourself and you’ve denied yourself all of the energy that it takes to keep all those others in jail. Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat”
 Karla Hammond “Audre Lorde: Interview” *Denver Quarterly* 16.1 (1981) 10-27

“But the question is a matter of the survival and the teaching”

“That’s what our work comes to, no matter where we key into it, it’s the same work, just different pieces of ourselves doing it” same citation as above...

“When you are a member of an out-group you challenge others with whom you share this outsider position to examine some aspect of their lives that distorts differences between you , then there can be a great deal of pain. In other words, when people of a group share an oppression, there are certain strengths that they build together. But there are also certain vulnerabilities. For instance, talking about racism to the women’s movement results in ‘huh, don’t bother us with that. Look, we’re all sisters, please don’t rock the boat.’ Talking to the Black community about sexism results in pretty much the same thing. You get a ‘wait, wait . . . wait a minute: we’re all black together. Don’t rock the boat.’ In our work and in our living, we must recognize that difference is a reason for celebration and growth, rather than a reason for destruction.”

“There is always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself—whether it’s *Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher, etc*—because that’s the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else. But once you do that, then you’ve lost (?) because then you become acquired or bought by that particular essence of yourself and you’ve denied yourself all of the energy that it takes to keep all those others in jail. Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat.”

“With respect to myself specifically, I feel that not to be open about any of the different ‘people’ within my identity, particularly the “mes” who are challenged by a status quo, is to invite myself and other women, by my example to live a lie. In other words, I would be giving in to a myth of sameness which I think can destroy us.”

“As a Black lesbian feminist comfortable with the many different ingredients of my identity, and a woman committed to racial and sexual freedom from oppression, I find I am constantly being encouraged to pick out some one aspect of myself and represent this as a meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self. But this is a destructive and fragmenting way to live. My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from patriarchal sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of an externally-imposed definition” pp. 120-121, *Sister Outsider*

INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

“We cherish our guilty secret, buried under exquisite clothing and expensive bleaching creams (yes, still!) and hair straighteners masquerading as permanent waves. The killer instinct toward any one of us who deviates from the prescribed cover is precise and deadly” p. 62, *I am Your Sister*

“Acting like an insider and feeling like the outsider, preserving our self rejection as Black women at the same time as we’re getting over—we think. And political work will not save our souls, no matter how correct and necessary that work is. Yet it is true that without political work we cannot hope to survive long enough to effect any change. And self-empowerment is the most deeply political work there is, and the most difficult” p. 170, *Sister Outsider*

“There were two Black women in the class, and I tried to talk to them about us, as Black women, having to get together. The Black organizations on the campuses were revving

up for the spring actions and the women said, 'you are insane, our men need us'. It was a total rejection. 'No we can't come together as women. We're Black'" p. 96, *Sister Outsider*

"For we must move against not only those forces which dehumanizes from the outside, but also against those oppressive values which we have been forced to take into ourselves" p. 135, *Sister Outsider*

"As Paulo Friere shows so well in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations which we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us, and which knows only the oppressors' tactics, the oppressors' relationships" p. 123, *Sister Outsider*

HOLISTIC TEACHING AND LEARNING

"Now when males or patriarchal thinkers (whether male or female) reject that combination, then we're truncated. Rationality is not unnecessary. It serves to get from this place to that place. But if you don't honor those places, then the road is meaningless. Too often, that's what happens with the worship of rationality and that circular, academic, analytic thinking. But ultimately, I don't see feel/think as a dichotomy. I see them as a choice of ways and combinations" pp. 100-101, *Sister Outsider*