

DICK, MARRISSA R., Ph.D. *An African American Woman's Educational Journey: Pragmatic and Pedagogical Practices of Fantasy.* (2012)
Directed by Dr. Kathleen Casey. 157 pp.

My dissertation is an autobiographical narrative about my journey through a non-pedagogical and oppressive school system, to an oppressive marriage, and back to a graduate program that, in my opinion, epitomizes the essence of pedagogy. I explain how fantasy theory has situated itself in my life as a metacognitive tool in order to save my conscious reality as it guided me towards transcendence. I address my introduction to fantasy as a child inside of the classroom. I talk about mis-educative experiences inside of the classroom and provide examples of those experiences. I discuss microaggression and how it was played out during my earlier educational years as well as describe my experience with internal-microaggression during my master's program. I explain how fantasy returned to my life during my marriage and divorce. I also discuss my relationship with the Black church utilizing soul therapy. I talk about my African American contemporary Christian romance novels and how writing them allowed me to be reflective on my past relationships so I could still have faith and hope of love in my future. I conclude my dissertation by providing examples of my teaching pedagogy and my inspirations for those reading my dissertation. In essence this dissertation is a qualitative culmination of past recollections, current reflections, and future endeavors as I continue to learn and transcend through my lifelong journey with education.

AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN'S EDUCATIONAL
JOURNEY: PRAGMATIC AND PEDAGOGICAL
PRACTICES OF FANTASY

by

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

Greensboro
2012

Approved by

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APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Most High God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob I thank you for saving my mind, body, and spirit for such a time as this to write this dissertation. I thank you for keeping me in search of education even though she attempted to hide herself from me through intentional mis-educative practices. I thank you, God, for not allowing these ill experiences to hinder my educational walk.

To my parents Charles and Joyce Dick I thank you for being the most loving, nurturing, and supportive parents God could have ever given to a child. To my brother, Charles, Jr. (Wayne) and my sister, Bartola (Spirit), thank you for comforting me relentlessly when I felt as though life was passing me by during my educational pursuit. To my nephews, Arabian and Joseph, my great nephews, A'Leel, and Elijah, my nieces, Shakiba and Nubia and my great niece, Nevaeh thank you for all of your love and continued support. I pray that I have set an example for you to never give up on your dreams as attaining the doctorate degree has always been mine. I cannot explain the magnitude of love I have for each one of you. I am profoundly grateful that I am but a tapestry in your lives.

To my Pastor, Dr. Kevin A. Williams, thank you for allowing God to utilize your unique preaching style to heal my mind and bring clarity to questions I never asked you. Throughout my master's and doctoral degrees you have been a spiritual rock for me. You taught me how to increase my faith and affirmed for

me that I can indeed do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I love you, Pastor, and I thank you for allowing me to serve you unconditionally in your ministry. To my spiritually-knitted sister, Rev. Lisa D. Taylor, thank you for the prayers you have provided for me and my family during our hour of need. You have been the constant reminder that if we step out of God's way He will always supply the ram in the bush. Thank you for always reminding me of how much God loves me.

I would also like to thank my awe-inspiring advisors, Dr. Kathleen Casey and Dr. H. Svi Shapiro, who guided me toward fantasy theory as well as an autobiographical dissertation. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Poulos for introducing me to accidental autoethnography and Dr. Jewel Cooper for her support. During this research old educational wounds have been healed and my faith in education and educators has been restored. I am better for having you all as my professors during this season of my life. Thank you so much for embodying and sharing the essence of pedagogy; I'm all better now.

PREFACE

Every great advance in science has issued from a new audacity of imagination. (Dewey, 1929, p. 11)

And I was thrown into a whirlwind of writing. The writing just took me. I could not not write. And, for the life of me, I could not think of any way to write sense into this senseless time other than to surrender to the anxiety that had gripped me, and to fall into writing about it. The idea of ethnography being something that directed my attention, seemingly by accident, had begun to take hold. My autoethnographic reflection on that day, and the weeks that followed, really launched the beginning of my career as an “accidental ethnographer. An idea about the practice of accidental ethnography was beginning to take shape. And then I had a dream . . . (Poulos, 2009, p. 59)

What in world is he saying to me? Did my dissertation committee co-chair just tell me that I don't really want to write about divorce? Whose proposal is he talking about? It can't be mine. Is he really sitting here saying that it's obvious to him that my dissertation is all about fantasy? He had to say that because I'm watching the letters F, A, N, T, A, S, Y slowly come out of his mouth riding the waves of his thick English accent. I clearly remember leaning back in my chair because I feared the letters were going to strike me in the face.

“Are you alright, Marrissa?” he asks leaning forward and gently touching my hand.

Hell no, I'm not alright! I wanted to scream. How in the world did you come up with fantasy theory from what I wrote? “Yes, Dr. Shapiro, I'm fine. Uh,

can you please expound on fantasy theory? I don't see the connection. I really do want to write about divorce."

"Why do you want to write about divorce, Marrisona? I know you were married and it ended in divorce, but what does that have to do with your dissertation? Explain to me what your central concern is about divorce." I was silent. "You have multiple theories here. I see black feminist theory, women and violence; I also see education as an oppressor and a liberator. What is it about education that liberated and oppressed you? It appears that you experienced some type of transcendence through education," he says leaning back in his chair with a serene look on his face as though he is contemplating his own question. "Take your time."

"I want women to know that divorce isn't the end of the line. Society makes divorced women feel like something is wrong with them, Dr. Shapiro. We become labeled and stigmatized. I want women to know that there is life after divorce. It's not a death sentence. A lot of productive and creative things can come from divorce. I was liberated during the entire process."

"Liberated? How so?"

"Well, for one I went back to school and completed my undergraduate degree as soon as I signed my divorce papers and I also wrote five African American contemporary Christian romance novels that are published. I would not have been able to do any of that if I were still married. I want women to know that they can use their emotions during the divorce process as a tool of

empowerment. You know, when I went back to school I met five women who returned to school immediately after they divorced. There's something to that. Why did we turn toward academia, Dr. Shapiro?"

"I don't know Marrissa, that's something you can include in your dissertation, but I do not believe divorce is your driving force. I believe your driving force is how you use your imagination to escape oppressive situations. You escaped through fantasizing and it became an art. You know, Marrissa, "Art is a lie that tells the truth" (Shapiro, 2010). Tell me if I'm wrong here, but I sense that you actually have a relationship with the characters in your books." I nodded, yes. "After reading your proposal, it is clear to me that you use fantasy as a way of escape. You know, Marrissa, fantasy runs parallel with hope and desire and it can even aid in fostering certain beliefs. Fantasy in your case seems to be tied to your purpose. It's as if fantasy benefitted you somehow. It's almost as if it affirmed your position in reality. Fantasy is your unrealized passion, Marrissa. Tell me what do you believe your passion is?"

What in world did he just say to me? Passion? What passion is he talking about and what in the world does that have to do with my dissertation? "Uh, divorced women returning to school?" Dr. Shapiro shook his head no as he looked down at his yellow legal pad.

"I've made some notes for you, Marrissa" he said gently tearing the paper from the pad and passing it to me. "Can you make out my writing? Is it clear?"

"Yes, sir," I said taking the yellow sheet of legal paper.

“What I want you do is to read my suggestions and then do some research on fantasy of course, daydreaming, psychotraumatology, and dissociative functions. I believe you have tapped into an area of study that you are not aware of and it is interesting indeed.”

Psychotraumatology? Dissociative functions? Is he telling me I’m crazy? I asked myself. “But Dr. Shapiro, what does this have to do with divorce?”

“Absolutely, nothing. Marrissa, you say you want to write about divorce yet you mentioned divorce three or four times in 30 pages and you did not cite any sources or present any quantitative data. What you wrote passionately about is how you mentally escape traumatic situations. For example you wrote passionately about your elementary school years and how oppressive it was. You wrote passionately about your marital experiences and how this mystical man stepped out of your mind and saved you. You wrote passionately about your experiences as a graduate student and how it helped give definition to your life. Now I’m not here to tell you what you have to write about because this dissertation is yours - - you own it. I’m just here to help you navigate through it, but from what I have read thus far you have the makings for a creative qualitative autobiographical dissertation. Why don’t we make arrangements to meet this same time next week? Bring any new research material with you and any questions you have.” I remember exhaling heavily as I gathered my papers and put them inside of my brown leather book bag. “Don’t worry Marrissa, this is all a part of the process,” he said rising to his feet.

“If you say so, Dr. Shapiro.”

As I walked down the hallway toward the exit door I was trying to understand what just happened. It had taken me almost three weeks to write my dissertation proposal and it took my co-chair all of 30 seconds to dismantle it. And excuse me, but did he say that I was confused and had far too many theories? How did I miss all of that? I felt certain that my proposal was well written. I made sure that each paragraph flowed together like a tapestry of fine literature. There were no grammatical or punctuation errors within the document. I thought I made certain to cite my supportive and scholarly authors. Fantasy Theory? Is there such a theory or am I making it up as I go along? How do I begin researching that? I asked myself as I exited the Curry Building and began walking toward the parking deck. Fantasy Theory? I repeated to myself as I opened my book bag and withdrew Dr. Shapiro’s yellow sheet of paper. I was attempting to decipher his hand writing until I heard voices screaming and car horns honking.

When I looked up from my paper to my surprise I saw onlookers staring at me with expressions of horror on their faces. I looked to my left and realized that a dark blue Mercedes Benz was just inches away from me. I closed my eyes tightly. When I opened my eyes again it seemed as if everything was moving in slow motion. I watched as the driver of the car jumped out of his vehicle screaming with flailing fists. Though I could see his lips moving I could not hear a word he was saying. As he walked toward me I could see the expression of

anger on his face and the veins protruding from his neck, but I also saw fear in his eyes. I knew he was shaken. When I blinked it seemed as though he had descended upon me.

“Oh, God, what’s happening?”

“What’s happening?! What’s happening is that I almost hit you! What are you crazy walking into the street like that?! You just walked right in front of me!” he screamed! “You don’t *read* in the middle of the street, lady!” I covered my face because his saliva was assaulting me.

“Oh, God, I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to.” I looked back at the car. I could feel the heat from the car engine permeating the fabric of my sundress and I felt as though my legs were going to give way at any second.

“What in the hell is wrong with you?! *Move!*” he bellowed. “Get out of the street!”

I rushed across the street and walked briskly to my car. With each step I took I could feel my heart beating faster against my chest. When I reached my car I nervously searched through my book bag for my car keys. My hands were trembling profusely. “Calm down,” I instructed myself. I unlocked the car door, stepped inside, immediately turned the car on, and placed the air conditioning on high. When I closed my eyes and leaned my head back against the head rest I could feel warm tears flowing down my cheeks in a steady stream. Where are you, Baby? I need you, I thought to myself. I adjusted the air vents toward my face and chest. I wondered when the sweat rolling down the middle of my back

was going to dissipate. “Relax, girl. Breathe, Marrison, breathe,” I instructed myself as I inhaled deeply then exhaled slowly,

Devina felt her body finally surrendering to sleep, but there was nothing familiar or welcoming about it. The security and warmth she normally felt was no longer there. The beckoning voice that normally whispered in her ears guiding her toward her fantasy was not present anymore. Something was missing from her dreams, but she didn't know what it was. All she felt was emptiness surrounding her as her mind searched through the gray garden for the missing link. (Dick, 2003, p. 93)

I repeated the breathing exercise several times before I felt my body starting to calm. My moment of tranquility was interrupted by a light tap on the driver's side window. I opened my eyes slowly and turned my head toward the window . . .

She's more beautiful than I remembered. When did she grow locks? He thought to himself. “Excuse me, madam, madam? Are you alright?” My eyes roamed over his face. I had never seen skin so rich and smooth before. His skin looked brand new and reminded me of a Hershey Kiss. His lips were full and moist and were accentuated by a fine black glistening mustache with a connecting goatee. His eyes, oh my gosh his light brown eyes were so full of compassion and love. I know this man, I thought to myself. “Madam.” I pressed the automatic button and the window rolled down. “Are you alright? Do I need to contact someone for you?”

I licked my lips and swallowed. “No, no, thank you. I'm good. I'm good. I was a little shaken, but I'm better now, thank you.”

“You dropped this paper when you were crossing the street. It looks pretty important,” he said offering Dr. Shapiro’s notes to me. I looked at the paper then looked inside of my book bag. “Oh my goodness!” I said turning toward the man and taking the paper. “I don’t know what I would have done if I had lost this. Thank you, sir. Thank you, so much.”

“I’m glad I could help. You know you should be more careful when you’re crossing the street.”

“I know, I know. I don’t normally do things like that. My mind was someplace else.”

“That was obvious. You were reading that paper when you stepped into the street.” I sighed. “I noticed that you’re working on your dissertation. I can understand why you would be preoccupied. “

“It’s more like my dissertation is working on me. It’s not going so well.”

“Aw, I’m sure it’s not as bad as you think.”

“Humph,” I grunted as I looked at the paper. The gentleman chuckled.

“By the way, I’m Tyberius,” he said extending his hand through the window.

Tyberius, Tyberius, I repeated to myself. Why does that name sound familiar? “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Tyberius. My name is Marrissa,” I said taking his warm hand and shaking it. I wonder why his touch feels so familiar, I asked myself. “Well, I don’t want to hold you up any longer. Again, thank you so much for your kindness, sir” I said smiling at him.

“You’re more than welcome, Marrissa. You sure you’re good,” he asked. I nodded with a smile. “Ok, you take care,” he said patting the hood of my silver SUV then turned and walked away. As I put on my seat belt I watched him walking out of the parking deck. I was captivated by his long smooth and rhythmic stride. “I know that walk. Why does that man seem familiar to me?” I said putting my car into drive.

I felt my stomach grumble. I looked at my watch and saw it was almost seven p.m. “My goodness, I haven’t eaten all day. I better get something to eat before I go home.” I pulled out of my parking space cautiously. “I think I’ll get something from the Vietnamese restaurant,” I said turning my car in the direction of Spring Garden Street.

As I drove my mind reflected back on my conversation with Dr. Shapiro. How was I going to rework my paper to include fantasy? I wondered where I should begin my research. I wondered if fantasy had anything to do with daydreaming. Were they considered one in the same? I wondered about consciousness. Was fantasy a conscious or an unconscious act? How do people begin fantasizing? Why do people fantasize? I wonder what makes that happen? I asked myself. I entered the parking lot, turned my car off and gathered my book bag. As I walked toward the entrance of the restaurant I could tell it was crowded. I hoped it wouldn’t be long before I would receive a table. When I opened the door I saw people were standing in line to be seated so I

walked toward the take out counter to place an order to go. Just as I was about to place my order I heard a familiar voice...

“Marrissa?” I turned around. “Isn’t this a coincidence?”

“Tyberius? Hi.”

“Are you dining in?”

“Normally I would be, but there aren’t any tables available,” I said looking over my shoulder at the customers eating and conversing.

“I have a table. I would be more than happy to share it with you and your guest.”

“Guest?” I said wrinkling my nose. “I’m alone.”

Great, he thought to himself. “Well, I didn’t want to assume. Regardless, you’re still welcome to share my table if you would like to dine in.”

“Thank you, Tyberius. I would appreciate that.” I followed Tyberius to his table.

He remained standing until I was seated. “Thank you,” I said with a smile.

“Good evening, Dr. Sphinx,” Ping, the waitress said with a warm smile as she walked toward our table. Doctor Sphinx? I wonder if this is the man Ping was telling me about who helped her son? I asked myself. “Hi Marrissa, I thought you said you didn’t know Dr. Sphinx.”

“I don’t. I just met him on campus about a half hour ago.”

“Oh. This is the professor I was telling you that could probably help you with your dissertation. He’s so smart.”

Tyberius blushed. "You're too kind, Ms. Ping."

"Don't be so modest, Dr. Sphinx you're a true educator. Anyone that can motivate my son to read a book is truly gifted. Marrassa, its pathi Wednesday! You want your usual?"

"Yes, ma'am and..."

"And you want one fresh shrimp spring rolls, hot jasmine tea with extra lemon on the side." I smiled and shook my head, yes. "Dr. Sphinx you want your usual beef street noodle, hum?"

"You know what, Ms. Ping. I think I'll have what the lady is having."

"You want your own pot of tea?"

"Oh, no, please. He can share mine. I never drink the whole pot anyway. I mean unless you want your own pot."

"Thank you, Marrassa. One pot of jasmine tea will be fine."

Ping repeated their orders and told them that she would return momentarily with their appetizers and drinks.

"It's the least I can do especially since you're sharing your table. My goodness its crowded in here tonight. Do you come here often, Dr. Sphinx?"

"Tyberius."

I know that name, I said to myself. "Excuse, me?"

"Call me, Tyberius, please. And in answer to your question I normally eat here two or three days out of the a week."

"I do too. I wonder why I've never seen you here before."

“Here you go,” Ping said placing their appetizers and freshly hot brewed jasmine tea on the table. “And your side of extra lemons, Marrison. Your orders will be out shortly.”

“Thank you, Ping. Boy this looks so good,” I said placing my napkin on my lap. Just as I was about to bow my head and pray I looked at Tyberius. I realized by his posture that he was about to do the same. “Would you do the honors?” I asked stretching my hands toward him.

“I’d be honored,” he said taking my hands. Her hands are still soft, he thought to himself. “Heavenly Father we come together tonight to thank you for the bountiful food we are about to receive. We ask Father God that you bless the hands that prepared it and we ask that you remove all impurities. Lord God, we also ask that you dispatch your angels to feed the homeless and those who don’t have enough food to eat. Fill them with your heavenly manna Lord that they may be nourished. I thank you, God for this fellowship on this evening and I humbly request that you guide your daughter, Marrison, as she seeks to write her dissertation. Lord allow her to use just the tip of one of your fingers so she can create a literary work that will bring a positive awareness to qualitative research. Father God, bestow upon her clarity, wisdom, and understanding. It’s in your son’s, Jesus, precious name that we pray, amen.”

“Amen. Thank you for that prayer, Dr. Sphinx. I mean Tyberius.” I said trying to maintain my composure. I truly enjoy a praying man. “So I’m assuming

that you teach at G?" I said applying the peanut butter paste on my spring roll then biting into it. Oh, this is so good, I thought to myself.

"Yes I do", he said enjoying his own spring roll. I'm a part of the new interdisciplinary program."

"Oh, I heard about that. When is it supposed to start?"

"This fall."

"Ooh. So what is your doctorate in?"

"Rhetoric, but my specialization is creative writing."

"Really? So why aren't you teaching in the English Department?"

"I was, but administration asked me to work with the new program because my creative writing has a twist."

"A twist? What kind of twist?"

"Fantasy Theory." I stopped chewing and looked into his eyes to see if he was serious.

"You're kidding me, right?"

"No, ma'am I'm not." He chuckled.

"You're going to teach a course in Fantasy Theory," I asked with disbelief.

"Yes."

"You're not going to believe this, Tyberius, but my dissertation co-chair told me this evening that I should concentrate on Fantasy Theory instead of divorce."

"I noticed that was written on the top of the paper you dropped."

“I need you.” Tyberius felt his stomach tighten and he looked at me intensely. “I mean, I need your help. I don’t know where to begin. I don’t know anything about Fantasy Theory. I never knew it even existed until today.” I opened my book bag and withdrew my dissertation proposal. “Tyberius, would you read this for me, please, and give me your honest opinion. You don’t have to do it now, but can you read it sometime in the near future?” I asked offering it to him.

“I would be honored to read it, Marrissa,” he said wiping his hands on his white linen napkin then taking my paper.

Though I had not expected it, but I will admit that I was grateful, I watched him begin to read my paper. I know this man, I said to myself searching his face for something concrete. I looked at his hands holding my paper and wondered how come his touch felt like a familiar caress...

. . . Have we met before? I mean other than today?

Yes, we have.

Where?

In your dreams.

Excuse me? In my wh, what? Devina stammered. (Dick, 2003, p. 80).

I closed my eyes tightly and shook my head slightly because I could have sworn I just heard a conversation going on in my head.

“Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?”

“That conversation.”

“Uh, no,” he said putting my paper down and seriously focusing on me. Maybe she’s remembering he hoped to himself.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I must be stressed. I need something stronger than this tea,” I said looking inside of my tea cup. Tyberius chuckled.

“Just sit back and take a breather.”

“Ok, here are your orders,” Ping said placing their plates in front of them. “Be careful the plates are hot. Ok, I’ll be back to check on you in a little while. Enjoy your dinner.”

“Are you feeling better?”

“Yeah, I guess. I’m telling you, Tyberius, I heard a conversation.”

“Maybe you did, but let’s talk about your paper for a moment.”

“Oh, lord, it’s a mess isn’t it?” I said with disgust pushing my plate to the side. I had completely lost my appetite.

“Now, now, don’t be so hard on yourself. I have to admit that I would have made the same suggestions that Dr. Shapiro made. He’s being very insightful here.”

“Insightful?! He’s basically telling me that I’m crazy and that I’m living in a fantasy world. How did he get that out of what I wrote?! You just read it. Do you think I’m living in a fantasy world too?” Tyberius looked at me. “You actually agree with him?! How can you possibly? Where are you getting that from?” I asked taking the paper from his hand and attempting to re-read it. Tyberius took the paper back from me and laid it on his seat. “What are you doing?”

“Let’s just talk about your relationship with school for a minute.”

“My relationship with school? What are you going to do psychoanalyze me now?” I asked with a slight attitude.

“Not at all. I just want you to talk to me about your experience in Catholic school. I get the sense that your educational tenure from the first grade through your master’s degree has been somewhat oppressive. I also sense that at one point your environment wasn’t pedagogically homogenous and that had a profound effect on you, too.” I shook my head yes affirming for him that he was on the right track. “Ok, so I can sense all of this in your paper, but you don’t go into detail about any of it. Why were your peers laughing at you, Marrison? Share that narrative with me, please.” I looked into his eyes and knew that he was genuinely interested.

“Well, they laughed at me because my last name is Dick.” I waited to hear a snicker then inspected his face for a sign or a grin or a smirk but heard and found nothing. Tyberius nodded. “Look, I don’t see the point in this.”

“Continue, please,” he said pushing my plate back in front of me. I looked at my food then back at him. His soft light brown eyes were warm and sincere.

“Well, to tell the truth, Tyberius, my educational experience has been much to be desired,” I said picking up my chopsticks and stirring my food.

“And why was that?”

“Because I was tortured mentally and emotionally by my peers and I was physically abused by my teachers. I hated going to school. I knew as soon as I

crossed that threshold I was going to be beaten and laughed at before the day was out. Every day one of those nuns found a reason to beat me. I didn't do anything to deserve that treatment. I was a good student."

"So, what do you believe was the impetus for their behavior?"

"My last name," I sighed. "Every morning I would sit in my home room terrified because I knew my homeroom teacher was going to call the roll and I knew everyone was going to laugh. Sometimes my teachers would laugh with them. I would look at my teachers in disbelief because I just couldn't believe that they were laughing with my peers at me. But this one nun in particular would get so frustrated because she couldn't calm the class down and because she couldn't calm them down she would take it out on me. I mean I never understood why she would even bother to call my name out. She could see me sitting in my assigned seat, but she would call my name out anyway." Tyberius poured me a cup of tea. "Thank you," I said taking a few sips. "You know Tyberius, I remember vividly the day I asked God to just let me die. How can a seven year old want to die just because they're in school, huh? I mean school is supposed to be a safe place, but there was no safety for me."

"What else did your teachers do to you besides laugh at you and chastise you, Marrison?"

"Chastise? Oh, no, sir. They didn't chastise me; they beat me. They beat me with wooden rulers and they beat me with wooden paddles." Tyberius grunted. "Do you know they actually changed my last name?"

“What do you mean they changed your last name?”

“Just what I said. They changed my last name from Dick to Richard without telling me. I can only assume it was to stop everyone from laughing at me. It wasn’t until months later did one of them tell me in anger that they really changed my name because they detested saying Dick so much. Can you imagine hearing that as a child from your teacher? But you know if they had told me what they were doing then I would have been glad to answer to Richard.”

“So you wouldn’t have had a problem with them changing your identity?”

“As a child, hell no. At the time I would have agreed if it would have put an end to my oppression. I mean it’s not like I knew anything about Erik Erikson as being one of the earliest psychologists to be explicitly interested in identity, Tyberius. I wasn’t exposed to the Eriksonian framework until I started as a doctoral student. I didn’t know anything about a distinction among the psychological sense of continuity, known as the ego identity and that it was sometimes identified as “the self”; nor did I know as a child about the personal idiosyncrasies that separate one person from the next, and I didn’t know anything regarding personal identity; and the collection of social roles that a person might play, known as social or cultural identity. All I knew was that I was literally dying inside and I wanted it to stop. So if being renamed to Richard while I was in school for six or seven hours a day would increase my self-image and my self-esteem and help me be a part of the privileged cohort, then as a child I would have agreed to anything,” I said exhaling deeply.

Humph, she's passionate, he thought to himself. I noticed that some of the customers in ear shot range were staring at me. I realized then that my tone must have risen.

"I'm sorry; I went on a bit of a tangent, huh?"

"I find your passion quite stimulating, Marrison. Eat your food before it gets cold."

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Certainly," he said wiping his mouth with his napkin.

"Where are you from? Your accent is wonderful." Tyberius smiled. Wow, he's got beautiful white teeth, I thought to myself.

"Barbados."

"Really?!" I said with a hushed excitement.

"Have you been there?" he asked taking a drink of the jasmine tea.

"In my mind I've been everywhere," I said laughing.

"Aah, that reminds me of an article I read in the Shambhala Sun. Are you familiar with that Buddhist journal?"

"No I'm not. Enlighten me, please."

"Are you familiar with bell hooks?"

"Of course, I have read almost all of her books. My favorite is Teaching to Transgress (1999)."

"Now that's a good book. It's an excellent example of pedagogy for the classroom. Anyway in the journal, John Jerry Barlow is having a one on one

interview with bell hooks. They're talking about things they both enjoy doing such as traveling. Well, bell hooks says that she enjoys traveling in her mind. As a matter of fact she says,

I'm such a girl for the living room. I really like to stay in my nest and not move. I travel in my mind, and that that's a rigorous state of journeying for me. My body isn't that interested in moving from place to place. (hooks, 1995, "Fear & Faith," para. 13)

So just know that you are not alone when it comes to traveling in your mind."

"That's comforting. So, how long have you been here, in North Carolina?"

"Almost ten years. I came over as an international student for undergrad.

Then I went on to receive the master's degree."

"Did you earn them both here, at G?"

"Yes," he said nodding his head.

"Did you earn your doctorate here, too?"

"No, I went to Chapel Hill for that one. So, tell me more about the nuns changing your last name," he said taking the conversation off of him and back onto me.

"Well for instance I remember one time my home room teacher repeatedly calling the name, Miss Richard during morning roll call. While sitting at my desk with my hands folded, I remember thinking, "Who is this Miss Richard? Where is the new girl?" The next thing I remember is seeing my teacher hastily marching down the aisle toward me. She snatched me up by the back of my blue and gray

checkered uniform, forced me down the aisle, tossed me inside of the wooden coat closet, and forcefully slammed the wooden sliding door shut.

I remember sitting in that coat closet, in my own urine, in shock, and afraid to move. I was terrified because I thought I was going to die from suffocation. I could literally hear my heart beating without the aid of a stethoscope. I was trembling as though I was bordering on having an epileptic attack. I remember closing my eyes and laying my head back wishing that I could be transported home to safety, but when I opened my eyes in the darkness, I was still in that coat closet.

I began reciting the Lord's Prayer and something strange happened to me in that moment. A warm presence enveloped me and communicated to my soul that I was safe and most of all loved. The shaking slowly abated and I was released from the grip of fear. This time when I laid my head back and closed my eyes, I was transported to a faraway land that was filled with fast and loopy roller coasters, cotton candy bushes, chocolate rivers, and trees that grew caramel candy apples."

Tyberius shook his head with disbelief. "That must have been traumatizing for you especially at such a young age. You know, Sigmund Freud talks about fantasy having the capability to fix one's reality. He actually says, "Every single fantasy or dreaming is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality" (as cited in Jay, 2005, para. 6). "That's why you were able to transport your mind to that fantasy world. You were able to do it because what

was happening to you at that moment was too much for you. At that moment you were not able to cope with your reality so your mind took you to another place,” Tyberius stated almost as though he were explaining the scenario to himself. “How long were you in that closet, Marrison?”

“I don’t remember. All I know is that when she finally slid that wooden door back and looked at me her eyes widened, her face grew flushed, and she actually stepped away from me. Apparently, she was expecting to see a teary-eyed, snotty-nosed and emotionally wrecked little girl. Instead, what emerged from that closet was a rejuvenated spirit looking back at her. I remember the class was extremely quiet as I walked back to my bolted down, wooden and wrought iron desk, sat down, and crossed my hands on top of it. Nervously, my teacher walked to her desk and ordered “Miss Richard” to open her textbook. Boldly, I stated, “My name is “not” Miss Richard. My “name” is Miss Dick.” I swear it didn’t even sound like my voice because the tone was deep and authoritative.” I picked up my cup of tea and drank. “You know what, Tyberius.”

“What?”

“For the first time in my educational experience, there was no laughter as I stated my last name. From that moment, at the age of seven I became numb to people laughing at my last name. But that quote from Freud what was it, “Every single fantasy or dreaming is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality?” Is that what you said? Tyberius nodded, yes. “That quotation rings true

for me. I guess you're right, Tyberius. I had to escape from what was happening to me at that moment."

"From that closet experience, I began searching for my fantasy world as soon as I crossed the school's threshold."

"I guess you would seek refuge when you have daily educational experiences such as you have described. You know, according to Jay (2005, para. 9) "A fantasy floats between past and the future." He explains that "Every fantasy is linked up with some current consciousness in the present. From the present it moseys back to the memory of an early experience belonging to childhood." It is clear to me that your fantasy world was your protection."

"Yes, I guess it was. Do you know that I actually learned to perfect the art of mentally transcending to that fantasy world while being physically engaged in the classroom? I mean I could literally be engaged in a conversation with my teacher and be gone mentally. Wow, I never really thought about it before. I guess, Dr. Shapiro knew that when he read my paper, huh?" Tyberius nodded, yes.

"Marrissa, are you familiar with Maxine Greene?"

"Yes, my professors discuss her teaching philosophy in class. I remember one quotation in particular she says, "I am not yet what I am" or something like that."

"Yes, exactly, that's her" Tyberius says, grateful they are on the same page. "I prefer to think of her as the consummate Spiderwoman because she

weaves threads from philosophy, literature, psychology, and education like a fine tapestry so we can take an aesthetically critical look at life and learning and discover its meaning. I believe she would be horrified with the experience you just shared with me, given that Maxine Greene (1978) spends numerous hours reflecting about the natural flowering of intellect, the culture of education and discussing the ramifications of teaching. One of my favorite statements from her is when she describes what the efficiency of the classroom should look like. She says,

The classroom is the child's home for many hours each day. It is also his place of work. Therefore, the classroom should reflect happiness, the protection, the loving guidance of the how, as well as, the efficiency of the workshop. (p. 5)

You obviously didn't experience anything that Greene believes is necessary to have a quality education. Come to think of it, Marrison, I dare say that some evolutionary psychologists would hypothesize that you employed fantasy as a survival tool in your daily educational environment. Yes, ma'am, I would assert that you embody the universal characteristics of metacognition at its most rawest form."

"Metacognition? I thought that was knowing about knowing?"

"It is, but it can also be thought of as a mental survival tool. This mental survival tool is so profound that it implements itself into one's immediate reality in order that the human consciousness remains whole, in particular, after a

traumatic experience. What you experienced that day in class was traumatic for you. You were able to transcend because your metacognitive tool kicked in to save your reality or your consciousness if you will."

"That's deep, Tyberius." He chuckled. "No, it really is," I said, laughing with him. "Who knew anything about metacognition? Well, I'm glad I had it because now that I understand what it is I realize that it kicked in a lot." They both laughed heartily. "Tyberius," I called his name softly.

"Yes, Marrissa?"

"Do fantasies follow you? I mean, do they grow as the individual grows?"

"Yes, they do. Your fantasies were filled with cotton candy, chocolate rivers and caramel candy apples because you were a child. Those were the things that gave you comfort and pleasure. I'm sure they changed significantly when you became a woman." Tyberius's eyes roamed casually over my face and torso causing me to blush. Like I said before, fantasies link up. Did that happen to you? Did your fantasies link up, Marrissa?" I hunched my shoulders.

"I'm not sure, Tyberius, I guess."

"So you talk a little about your marriage in your paper. Why was it so oppressive for you?"

"It was oppressive because my ex-husband was a crazy self-centered obsessive oppressive insecure violent son of a bitch." Tyberius was silent as he watched me finish eating the remainder of my food. "So just what do you want to know, Doc? Do you want to know if I fantasized in my marriage?"

“Actually, yes I do, but only if you feel comfortable enough to share that part of your life with me.”

“Humph. Share a part of my life with you? That’s funny. I feel as though I’ve known you all of my life. I’ve been sitting here all this time trying to figure out how I know you and just where I know you from.” Tyberius remained silent.

“You’re absolutely correct, Tyberius; my fantasies did change when I became a woman. They especially changed when I took the plunge into marriage. As a matter of fact they were elevated to new heights. These fantasies were not innocent; instead, they were extremely erotic in nature,” I said looking at him.

“You see it right now don’t you? You’re there in your world now aren’t you?” I nodded yes. “I’ve heard others who fantasize describe it as though they were outside of themselves watching a production being filmed. I can see that happening for you. By this time, your mind’s creativity had expanded to such a point that you can literally go anyplace you desire and actually be there. And on top of that you have somehow perfected a way to be in “your world” while you’re here fully conscious. So you have truly perfected the process of going in and out of “your world” at will.”

I nodded, yes. “I told you I had perfected that in elementary school.”

“Excuse me, yes you did. Did your fantasizing ever stop or has it been continuous?”

“No, it did; it stopped. As a matter of fact it stopped happening when my family moved from New York to North Carolina and I attended a much different

Catholic school. The nuns and most of the lay teachers there were more pedagogically sound. Actually, I hadn't fantasized again until I got married. It just came back like that," I said snapping my fingers.

"How long were you married?"

"Twelve years, but I don't really want to talk about that" I said looking out of the window at the cars passing by.

"That's quite alright. You don't have to. Marrison?" He called my name lightly hoping to bring my attention back to him.

"Thank you, Tyberius. All of that is in my past. Tell me, why do you seem so familiar to me? Have we met before? I declare I know you. Your touch. There's something about your eyes and the sound of your voice calms me on the inside. I feel like I know you."

Tyberius cleared his throat. He could feel the rhythm of his heart beat quicken. Their conversation was interrupted when Ping came to their table to check on them.

"Sorry it took me so long to get back to you. Would you like some dessert?" she asked looking at their empty plates.

"No, thank you, Ping, I'm stuffed," I said patting my stomach.

"Dr. Sphinx?"

"No, thank you, Ms. Ping, I'm good."

“How about some more tea?” Ping asked opening the tea kettle. We both shook our heads no. “Ok, I’ll be back with your checks,” she said taking away our plates.

“So, Marrison, now do you see why Dr. Shapiro suggested you research Fantasy Theory?”

“Yes, actually I do and he was right. He’s so insightful and so are you for that matter. I’ve learned so much tonight.”

“And what have you learned, Marrison?”

“I’ve learned for starters that fantasy theory does exist. You’ve provided some great scholars for me to research. I have to admit even though you gave me some good quotations about Freud; I’m a little leery about him. I know he has some serious Oedipus issues going on.” They both laughed. “Auh, I learned about metacognition and how it positioned itself in my reality in order to save it. You’ve given me terminology to help me interpret my experiences, Tyberius, and I thank you for that.”

“It wasn’t me, Marrison, it was God. He’s so good, girl, that he gave you a built-in mechanism to save your mind.” Tyberius caressed my cheek.

I know this man’s touch, I said to myself.

“Woman, it was through fantasizing that you have been able to endure oppression in multiple and competing ways. Fantasizing helped you acquire strength to get through a less than stellar educational environment. Fantasizing actually enveloped you and allowed you the opportunity to seek refuge in your

agency of ontological space. Truth be told, Marrissa I have not read of any case studies like you have described and I find it quite amazing that you have been able to make it to this level of education with the oppressive forces that you have endured in your life. Quite amazing indeed.”

“I know you, don’t I, Tyberius? I mean even before we met today.”

Tyberius was silent.

Why don’t you remember me? he asked himself. “I see Dr. Shapiro gave you some suggested readings,” he said pointing to the yellow legal sheet avoiding her question.

Why isn’t he answering me? “Yes,” I said looking at it.

“If you don’t mind I would like to add a few readings to this list.”

“Ok, I don’t mind.” Why won’t he answer me?

“I would like for you to research Bruno Bettelheim’s book *The Uses of Enchantment* (2010). Bettelheim believes that children learn to interpret their world through fairy tales. As a child you interpreted your world through fantasy. It would be interesting to see the correlation between the two.”

“That sounds interesting, Tyberius,” Marrissa said, writing. “Whom else do you suggest I read?”

“I’m thinking, Marrissa, about your faith. Now stick with me here,” he said shifting his body in the booth and looking intently into her eyes. “Are you with me?”

Lord have mercy please help me, I know this man, Marrison said to herself. "Yes, I'm with you."

"Despite the fact that you were abused in Catholic school and in your marriage, your faith remained strong in God."

"Yes, it did. Without Him, I wouldn't have made it through any of it, Tyberius." Tyberius leaned across the table and wiped the tears unbeknownst to Marrison that had trickled down her face.

"See, this right here is what I'm talking about" he said rubbing her tears between his fingers. "You've been hurt, Marrison. How have you dealt with the pain, the grief?" I shrugged my shoulders. "The book I want you to read is entitled, Black Grief and Soul Therapy (1999). This book will help you fill the gaping holes in your soul, woman. Dr. Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter is the black Jung and the American Fanon all rolled into one. He talks about the Dionysian way that Black people grieve and worship. He also discusses the unique relationship that Blacks have with the church when it comes to healing. I believe you would get a lot out of reading this literature personally and you could also include it in your dissertation."

"Wow, that's interesting, Tyberius. I want to be whole in my body, mind, and soul. It's interesting to me that I'm able to accomplish this transcendence through education."

“Truthfully, Marrissa, that’s what education is supposed to do. It’s designed to be a life changing tool. I truly believe you can be whole, again. Tell me, Marrissa. Do you think you’ll ever marry again?”

This time it was my turn to be silent. I had not thought about remarriage since my divorce. The husband and children that I had delicately crafted in my mind were all that I needed. In my reality I was actually married. When I looked down at my marriage finger I actually saw a beautiful platinum four carat diamond wedding ring with a wide matching band. When I returned home each night my children ran to greet me and I could always feel my husband’s patience pulling at my spirit waiting for his turn to embrace me. Give that up? I didn’t think I ever could. What would happen to my husband and my sons? Where would they go? Who would take care of them? The thought of my not returning to them caused my body to flush with heat. How could I ever kiss my world good-bye?

“Mmm, probably not, Tyberius. This may be hard for you to understand, but my reality and fantasy world co-exist in perfect harmony. I wouldn’t need to remarry because my worlds are in alignment.”

Tyberius leaned forward so he could hear clearly. “Excuse me?”

“You heard what I said and don’t be looking at me like I’m crazy, Tyberius because I’m not. I have my reality here and my husband and children back in my fantasy world. Get remarried for what? I’m perfectly satisfied and besides, I am not going to be unfaithful to my husband; I love him and the way he makes me

feel when he's making love to me, no man in this world can touch him and on top of that I be damned if some other woman is going to be raising my sons."

Tyberius was speechless. He knew by the tone of my voice and the seriousness on my face that I meant every word I had just stated.

"Mmph. Well, it looks as though you have enough to research to get you started in the right direction for now," he said looking at his watch. "Just make sure you run all of this by your chair." He motioned to Ping.

"Here you go, Dr. Sphinx" Ping said laying the check in front of him.

He seems to be in a rush all of a sudden. "Oh, I will. Thank you for all of your help. I don't know what I would have done without you, Tyberius. You don't have to do that, I can pay for mine."

"Marrissa, please," he said withdrawing a money clip from his pocket with a slightly wrinkled brow.

"Well, thank you for dinner. Auh, is everything alright? You seem to be in a rush all of a sudden."

"Oh, yes, yes, everything is fine. It's just that I have become so fascinated by our discussion I didn't realize the time. I have to get home to my children. Thank you, Ms. Ping." Children? I repeated to myself.

"I'll be right back with your change."

"No need, Ms. Ping, keep it."

"Thank you, Dr. Sphinx. I'll see you soon. Bye, Marrissa."

"Thanks, Ping. You have children? How many?"

"I have three sons. Triplets as a matter of fact," he said rising to his feet.

"May I walk you to your car?"

"Triplets?" Tyberius offered me his hand as I slid out of the booth. When I stood before him the entire atmosphere began to slow. I looked around the restaurant and wondered what was happening. Tyberius continued holding my hand as he led me through the restaurant doors.

"What's happening to me?"

"Watch your step, Marrissa." Just as I was about to step off of the curb the atmosphere returned to its normal pace causing me to lose my footing; however, Tyberius caught me in his strong arms before I met with the pavement. "I got you, Girl."

"Oh, my god! It's you! Why did you leave me?! I can't sleep without you! You've always been there! You've always been there!" . . .

"I'm not there anymore, Baby, because I'm here," he said drying her face with a wash cloth. "Ssh, calm down. I'm here, Devina." . . .

"What do I have to do to keep you here? I don't want to go to sleep ever again without you. It was horrible. It's dark and cold and lonely. Tell me. Tell me what to do," Devina pleaded.

"I can't," he said caressing her back. "I can't."

"But you have to. You can't leave me. You've been with me ever since I was a little girl. We've grown up together!" (Dick, 2003, p. 96)

It was in that instance of Tyberius catching me in his arms when I realized who he was. How could I have been so blind? How could I not have recognized his name, his voice, and most of all his touch? I should have known that he would come to help me when I was in dire distress. I was so emotionally distraught

over what my co-chair was saying to me about my proposal that I had actually walked into the street almost losing my life. No wonder I could not find him when I searched my mind for him while I was sitting in my car. I couldn't find him because he had already stepped out of our world into my reality to save me.

"Tyberius?! Oh, my god, Baby! It's really you!" I cried holding my fantasy world husbands face between my trembling hands. "You came for me; you came to help me." Tyberius engulfed me in his arms and held onto me tightly. "You came for me, thank you, Baby, thank you," I cried.

"I love you, Marrison my wife," he said kissing my tears. "You had to know I was coming for you, Girl." I closed my eyes and relished every kiss. "We are going to do this dissertation together," he assured me.

"Yes, Tyberius, together. Oh, I love you."

Finally our lips met reaffirming our commitment toward one another. A commitment made over thirty nine years ago when I dreamed of fast rollercoaster's, cotton candy, chocolate rivers, and caramel candy apples. It was Tyberius's boyish laughter that guided me out of that classroom coat closet into a land filled with joy, comfort, and treats. It was he who emerged as a man to save me whenever my safety was threatened in my marriage. We had pledged a vow to always protect and love one another by any means necessary. It was this pledge that enabled us to bend all rules of time and atmospheric logic.

"Take me home, Tyberius. I want to go home."

"We're almost there. Hold on Baby, we're almost home...."

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

All the works of man have their origin in creative fantasy. What right have we then to depreciate imagination. (Jung, 1955, p. 67)

While writing this dissertation I entered the realm called by some “fantasy,” by others “imagination,” and still others “transcendence.” Personally I believe that fantasy, imagination, and transcendence are members of one holistic family. In this dissertation I pose myself as the researcher and subject which puts me in a unique position to explain my life story as I perceived it. Patton (1985) explains that,

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. . . . What it means for the participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 5)

Smith (1997) also supports narrative research as exceptional when he says that qualitative research is a “special case of life writing” (p. 288) because it permits a life story to be conveyed in the context of theory and praxis from the individual’s perspective.

This dissertation explains my rationale for “fantasy” and how fantasy can act as an unconscious agent or a mediator during perilous times in one’s life. My rationale for “imagination” is that it encompasses action thereby becoming a solving agent for traumatic experiences. My rationale for “transcendence” is that it is a spiritual healing agent helping me to understand my subjectivity; thereby, helping me to meet my creative praxis and my human condition.

I was first introduced to fantasy as the result of authoritarian and oppressive educators who abused their power while inside of the classroom. My fantasies escalated when I found myself in an oppressive marriage. It seems ironic that, at this juncture in my educational career, education has favored and embraced me when prior to my doctoral program I believed She was hiding from me. Initially it felt odd, but in speaking with one of my doctoral professors I was advised to make peace with the past and move forward. She advised me to use my new experience with education to gain an understanding of my former experiences and put them in their respective place—behind me. I believe I received critical advice and while participating in this doctoral program I have made great strides in keeping the past where it belongs—in the past.

To the readers of this dissertation, I would like to offer my rationale for the Preface. I recorded it after one of my dissertation seminar sessions where my proposal was constructively critiqued by my professor and peers. It was during this session when I initially realized that fantasy had indeed been a significant

part of my life. It was during a one-on-one session with my professor when I discovered (a) that fantasy actually benefitted my reality; (b) that fantasy was tied to my purpose; (c) that fantasy affirmed my position in reality; and (d) that fantasy was my unrealized passion.

When I left my professors office that afternoon I was emotional because I actually wanted to explore why women return to school after divorce and I was having difficulty conceiving the notion of fantasy as a research topic. While walking to my car I was attempting to read his notes and I did not realize that I had just stepped into the path of an oncoming car. It was at this perilous moment when my fantasy world engaged, like an Egyptian sphinx rising, with my immediate reality. What follows in my Preface is the fantastical story that aided in my understanding of Fantasy Theory. I would like to offer to the readers that this dissertation is also organized in the chronological order of my life experiences.

In Chapter II, Autoethnography and Fantasy Theory, I discuss autoethnography and fantasy theory as the methodologies used within this qualitative dissertation. I narrate my personal subjectivity as a Black woman who learned to survive traumatic experiences through the lens of a “fantasy world.” In being the researcher and subject I can provide a critical reflection of ethnography while embracing and making sense of my academic and personal life experiences. Poulos (2009) explains that autoethnography,

Does not seek to be work that generates data, tests predictions, controls outcomes, or leads to generalizations or explanations. Rather, it seeks to embrace, and possibly make storied sense of—or at least move through, into, or with—the mystery that animates human life. (p. 47)

In knowing that autoethnography is the “mystery that animates human life” I can place my personal experiences in its respective space within this dissertation.

Finally, I expand on the systematic process of fantasy theory as a new type of qualitative research. In explaining fantasy theory as a qualitative methodology I assert that people can use fantasy theory as a theoretical framework to make sense of their unconscious reality.

In Chapter III, Mis-educative Experiences, I define and discuss mis-educative experiences inside of the classroom and explain how those intentional experiences can threaten a child’s ability for transformational learning. I discuss the un-existential classroom, experiential learning, and explain how fantasizing inside of the classroom can be a healthy tool for discovery. I provide personal testimonies to interpret my experiences with mis-education and how those experiences lead me toward fantasy. Additionally, I explain how hegemonic forces prevent equity inside of the classroom which ultimately disenfranchises students and their community at large.

Dewey (1997) describes the detrimental impact that the un-existential classroom can have on a learner as a mis-educative experience. He says,

Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experiences in the future are restricted. Again, a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction (and yet) tend to land him in a groove or rut. (p. 26)

In order that children are not exposed to mis-educative experiences that are arresting or distracting their growth it is incumbent upon the teacher to provide a safe environment for their students. According to Chapman, McPhee and Proudman (2008), "The teacher's role is to define the boundaries to ensure a safe learning environment (physically, emotionally, intellectually) within which a student can become totally immersed" (p. 9).

It is in this holistic and safe space where Maxine Greene's transformational pedagogy of liberated learning actually takes place. Greene (1978) says, "The classroom is the child's home for many hours each day. It is also his place of work. Therefore, the classroom should reflect happiness, the protection, the loving guidance of the how, as well as, the efficiency of the workshop" (p. 5). It is in this efficiency of the work shop that the child is capable of grappling with their imagination.

In Chapter IV, Two Types of Education: Oppressive and Emancipatory, I define the term microaggression and talk about the significance of educational microaggression. I discuss how microaggression was subtly displayed inside of the classroom by my elementary school teachers and I discuss how I

experienced internal-microaggression during my master's program. This chapter allows me to contrast my pre-educational experiences alongside my master's and doctoral programs. In performing this contrast I clearly shed light on how critical pedagogy is for transformational learning. Pinar (1988) argues that, "Understanding of self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and concomitant condition to the understanding of others" (p. 150). In essence there is nothing wrong with knowing who "you" are in relation to others. This chapter describes how I understood my relationship to others in education.

Chester Pierce, an American psychiatrist, first coined the term microaggression in 1970. Since then other ethnic scholars such as Sue (2010) have defined it as such:

Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of other races. . . . The chief vehicle for pro-racist behaviors. These are subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'put-downs' of blacks by offenders. Microaggressions may also play a role in unfairness in the legal system as they can influence the decisions of juries. (p. 5)

In as much as I have experienced hostile, derogative, negative, physical, and verbal abuse from my teachers inside of the classroom, I have also experienced intercultural micro-aggression which almost prevented me from attaining my master's degree.

In my attempt to establish my self-concept and become a self-directed human being I cut off all of my hair so I could begin growing natural locks. Malcolm Knowles (1984) tells us that as a person matures, "*his self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being*" (p. 31). It is in this mindset that I attempted to move away from society's prescription of beauty (long chemically treated straight hair). It had become obvious to me that my teacher held a binary position to the self-concept ideology and penalized me for actually implementing what he taught me. Freire (2000) maintains that we should play a role in our liberation. He says that the "oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption" (p. 54).

Instead of applauding me for being an example of self-concept he implemented his disapproval for the remaining part of the semester by ignoring my attempts to engage in class. In fact, he made it painfully obvious that he did not want to look at me by overlooking me or closing his eyes tightly and turning his head in the opposite direction when he was forced to acknowledge me because the other students intentionally would not answer any of his questions, forcing him to interact with me. This treatment was emotionally and mentally taxing on me and it forced me to purchase a wig and have it cut and styled to duplicate my chemically treated hair to hide what I had done.

In Chapter V, *Surviving Marriage and Divorce Through Fantasy*, I discuss surviving my marriage and divorce by embracing my imagination through fantasy. I also talk about accidental ethnography and the warning signs I ignored through recurring dreams. According to Poulos (2009), “So, one of my current methodologies for engaging embodied ethnographic research is to seek to read my dreams, writing them into story, weaving, if you will, a dreamstory” (p. 60). I explore the escalation of my childhood fantasies to one’s of intricate scenes of adult intimacy. I share how I worked through self-depreciation after my divorce. Finally, I discuss how writing fantasy romance novels enabled me to regain self-appreciation which propelled me toward transcendence allowing me to meet my human condition.

In my attempt at meeting my human condition I took a critical look at how my cross-sex friendship developed to a marriage by utilizing Rawlins (2008) who explains that it is human nature and social destiny for cross-sex friends to cross the boundaries. Rawlins asserts,

Most cross-sex intimate relationships start off as friendships, but cross-sex friendship will evolve into “something else” sooner or later. It cannot be avoided because of the natural course of close relationships between men and women. (p. 113)

I also consider Scanzoni’s development model of marriage which is based on specific roles for each partner divided strictly along sexual lines. This model marriage includes a husband who is the wage earner and thus the sole

provider for the family and a wife who stays at home, bears children, and is responsible for the care and nurturing of them.

In knowing that Scanzoni's model of marriage was not reflective in my marriage I realized that my marriage was not equitable. Regardless of the fact that my ex-husband was not the primary breadwinner nor was his pay check a constant he still expected to maintain dominance over the funds I brought home. Additionally, he still expected me to maintain the traditional social role of nurturer and caretaker.

Stephanie Coontz (2006) points out that society plays a major role in creating problems within marriages. She writes,

The big problem doesn't lie in differences between what men and women want out of life and love. *The big problem is how hard it is to achieve equal relationships in a society whose work policies, school schedules and social programs were constructed on the assumptions that male breadwinner families would always be the norm.* Tensions between men and women today stem less from different aspirations than from the difficulties they face translating their ideals into practice. (p. 29)

In realizing that I fantasized a great portion of my marriage, in order to deal with my oppression, I created romance novels that depicted what I imagined to be healthy relationships. In what David Beres (1962) describes as the unconscious fantasy, I manifested my unconscious thoughts and brought them to a physical reality. According to Beres (1962) book, *The Unconscious Fantasy* highlights the effects of my fantastical experiences. He writes that,

The unconscious fantasy can only be assumed. We surmise its existence from the effects it produces, as the physicist surmises the existence of the electrical particles of atoms by the effects they produce. We assume the unconscious fantasy from the neurotic symptom, the dream, or other derivatives, but once it is expressed it becomes a conscious manifest. (p 309)

In essence, my African American contemporary Christian romance novels are indeed “a conscious manifestation” that aided in my release from self-depreciation.

In Chapter VI, Heart and Soul: Remaking Myself Through Soul Therapy, I describe my initial introduction to the soul through Catholicism and incorporate my interpretation of purgatory as I learned it as a child in Catholic school. I explain the personal experience I had with the Black church that introduced me to what Cornel West interprets as the Dionysian way of worship. I define pastoral anesthetization and talk about my unique experience with it. I discuss how soul therapy strengthened my sense of purpose, healed the gaping holes in my soul, and helped me to regain a healthy perspective on love and life. Additionally, I provide the definition of Black Grief and contrast it to my subjectivity within the Black church.

In answering the question, “how did fantasizing transition into a form of soul therapy?” my response would be that I submerged myself in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by fasting and praying. In doing so I have been able to endure the social backlash of a divorce as well as endure the academic rigors

of pursuing the doctoral degree. With each new epistemological educational encounter I literally experienced a paradigm shift that aided in my spiritual cleansing and life healing progression.

When I speak about black grief and soul therapy I am coming from the standpoint of emotional, mental, and physical oppressions that have been internalized in the soul. *Black Grief and Soul Therapy* (1999) examines the aspects of Black grief that influences African American families as a process of overcoming multi-generational legacies of oppression which is transmitted and then internalized in the soul. In particular, Cooper-Lewter (1999) addresses how the Black church and societal standards through non-acknowledgement sometimes deepens the pain of marginalization. This pain is then transmitted across generations through the process of hegemonic internalized oppression.

Cooper-Lewter (1999) explains that Black Grief is the driving force behind African Americans congregating at the Black church. He asserts that it is the lack of acknowledgement of our unique and historical past and continued ill treatment that brings forth the grief while Soul Therapy assess' the multigenerational response to that historical grief. He postulates,

While black grief may have roots in utero, soul therapy is about creating comforting wombs and womb-like experiences that nurture rather than denature the entire person throughout her or his lifetime. Why is this so important today? Because we are still stuck in the valley of the shadow of death. (p. 18)

While Cooper-Lewter provides a rationale for Black subjectivity within the Black church and provides ways of healing the soul Moore (1992) provides another approach or different perspectives to caring for the soul. He believes that caring for the soul is a part of “serving the imagination” and “nursing the imagination” (p. xi) which is one of my main concerns in this dissertation.

According to Moore,

It is impossible to define precisely what the soul is. Definition is an intellectual enterprise anyway; the soul prefers to imagine. . . . Soul lies midway between understanding and unconsciousness . . . its instrument is neither the mind nor the body, but imagination. (p. xiii)

He also believes that the soul “is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance” (p. 5).

Chapter VII is my final chapter and it is the space where I summarize the affects that fantasy, imagination, and transcendence has had on my life. I discuss my fantasy romance novels and how I utilized them as a tool for creative praxis. I also discuss my teaching pedagogy and how I have implemented journaling for my students within my curriculum as a form of critical reflection. I discuss avoiding mis-educative experiences both inside and outside of the classroom by acknowledging urban psychosocial behaviors that have the potentiality of arresting my student’s educational potential.

Finally, I discuss how I have aided in building a spiritual community within the Black church through administering a spiritual gifts inventory. This inventory is aimed at building the body of Christ through performing ministry within the local community. Operating in ministry helps Christians feel whole and better about themselves as they aid others in their plight. When Christians operate in ministry they have a tendency to form strong relationships because they are working with others who have the same interests and often share the same testimonies. It is this subjectivity that helps to bridge a deeper spiritual community within the church.

In the next chapter I discuss autoethnography and fantasy theory as the research methodologies used within my dissertation. I explain the importance of autoethnography as a “special case of life writing” and I also talk about the processes of fantasy theory as a new type of qualitative research.

CHAPTER II

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND FANTASY THEORY

Stories are the ways humans make sense of their worlds. Stories are essential to human understanding . . . Given their importance, I argue that stories should both be a subject and a method of social science research. (Ellis, 2004, p. 63)

In this chapter I discuss autoethnography and fantasy theory as the methodologies used within this qualitative dissertation. I expand on the importance of autoethnography as this research is a firsthand account of an experience or story narrated by the subject. I also talk about the processes of fantasy theory as a new type of qualitative research. In explaining fantasy theory as a qualitative method I assert that people can use fantasy theory as a theoretical framework to make sense of their unconscious reality.

In weaving these two overarching categories of qualitative methods together I can provide a unique voice for my experiences on multiple levels of narrative research. Patton (1985) explains that,

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. . . . What it means for the participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting. (Patton, as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 5)

In knowing that narrative research is a “special case of life writing” (Smith, 1997, p. 4). I can convey my life story in the context of theory and praxis from my personal perspective. In being the storyteller I can make sense of my world by critically reflecting and understanding my lived experiences. Merriam (1998) shares this same posture of qualitative research. She says that when people share their stories as they perceive it, it shows “how individuals construct and make sense of their world through their lived experiences” (p. 9).

I have chosen to use autoethnography because it is a qualitative approach that seeks to understand personal and cultural experiences. In qualitative research, autoethnography is

an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe the systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experiences (ethno) (Ellis, 2004, Holman Jones, 2005). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams and Holman Jones, 2008). A researcher uses tents of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method autoethnography is both a process and a product. (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 1)

In being the researcher and subject I can provide a critical reflection of autoethnography while embracing and making sense of my academic and personal life experiences through my writing. While utilizing autoethnography I can draw my readers deeply into my world by calling upon evocative writing to develop my story. In his journal article for *Qualitative Research* (2012) Poulos

describes evocative writing as writings that seek to evoke emotions in the reader.

He explains:

Evocative writing that is writing that seeks to evoke the emotions, feeling, tone, and sense of the scene or of life experiences as felt by the author. The autoethnographer uses evocative writing to develop a story that draws the reader deeply into the lifeworld of the author, with the intent of moving or transforming the reader, and/or transforming the situation being written about. Evocative writing is personal, vivid, engaging, powerful, and moving to read. (p. 40)

Furthermore, Ellis and Bochner (2000) advocate autoethnography as a form of writing that “maintains the autoethnographic researcher is a full ‘insider’ by virtue of being a ‘native’” (p. 733). Ellis and Bochner (2000) also maintain that autoethnography “make[s] the researcher’s own experience a topic of investigation in its own right” (p. 733) rather than seeming “as if they’re written from nowhere by nobody” (p. 734). Autoethnography is “an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p. 739); autoethnographers “ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become coparticipants, engaging the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually” (p. 740).

Within this dissertation I have incorporated my stories (personal experiences) and my voice in order to provide a critical understanding, in particular, of my educational journey and how that journey has shaped my life.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) argue that voice is:

[a] first step on the road to justice [that] provides a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed. Thus, without authentic voices of people of color (as teachers, parents, administrators, students, and community members) it is doubtful that we can say or know anything useful about education in their communities. (p. 58)

As an African American woman it is my desire that my voice be heard in the halls of academia and my story be told as only I can describe it through my lived experiences and subjectivity. Utilizing this framework affords me the opportunity to fully describe my experience to the readers of my dissertation as I actually encountered them.

In sharing my subjectivity I am according to Ellis (2004) “part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture” (p. 31) and “something different from both of them, greater than its parts” (p. 32). In essence, “whether we call a work an *autoethnography* or an *ethnography* depends as much on the claims made by authors as anything else” (Ellingson & Ellis, 2008, p. 449).

Research also describes autoethnography as an animation of human life and it is this animation of human life that allows me to place my personal experiences in its respective space within this dissertation. What makes autoethnography unique is that you can discover interpretation of your lived experience through conversations, reflections, and dreams. Poulos (2009) terms these discoveries as “accidental ethnography.” He says that accidental ethnography

does not seek to be work that generates data, tests predictions, controls outcomes, or leads to generalizations or explanations. Rather, it seeks to embrace, and possibly make storied sense of—or at least move through, into, or with—the mystery that animates human life. (p. 47)

Furthermore, he explains that accidental ethnography does more than satisfy quantitative research; instead accidental ethnography is transformational in that this methodology helps one to make sense of their life and accidental ethnography is a

willingness to surrender to the creative, imaginative, spontaneous, apparently accidental signs and impulses that surge up and, from time to time, really grip us, take hold of us, call us out and throw us down, sweep us away, and carry us to places we may not have even imagined if we had tried to lay out a straight line to our eventual discoveries. (Poulos, 2009, p. 47)

In unlocking the mysteries of my experiences I believe that I have to reference a relational communication course I had taken as a doctoral student that exposed me to autoethnography in multiple and competing ways of investigating and interpreting my lived experiences. During this course I was able to interpret the multiple layers of unconscious acts and connect those occurrences to my consciousness. Without having read *Accidental Ethnography: An Inquiry Into Family Secrets* (Poulos, 2009), I do not believe I would have understood how my mind was processing my experiences. While taking this course I understood that my dreams and imagination could indeed be explained and placed constructively within my life and I also discovered that I had actually

created my fantasy world by engaging my storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually within that fantasy world. By doing this I had indeed implemented words-in-motion by writing fantasy romance novels. Poulos (2008) describes words-in-motion as

words that flow up from a feeling, an intuition, a spark or a breath of fire, welling up from deep within my body—a feeling that I am onto something though I often do not know what until after the writing is done. From somewhere deep inside me—my gut(?), my heart(?), my soul(?)—first images, then sounds and smells and feelings, then words, begin to form at the edges of my consciousness. (p. 50)

When I first read the definition for words-in-motion it immediately resonated within my gut, my heart and my soul. I understood exactly what Dr. Poulos meant when he wrote that the images, sounds, smells, and feelings formed at the edges of his consciousness because I experienced the “ethnographic imagination” of all of those verbs, too—in particular while writing *Angel Fire*. The description of *Angel Fire* reads as thus,

Natasha has a desire to rededicate herself to the Lord. God assigns an angel, Abednego, to assist her while Satan assigns Dathan, a demon from hell, to make sure she remains in a backslidden condition. Along the way, she meets the handsome Reverend Joshua Jones, who has been praying to God for a wife. Joshua and Natasha meet for the first time in her hospital room; however, Natasha is involved with Malique, a man, who secretly hates God because of the childhood he endured. Malique notices the immediate attraction to Joshua. Who will she choose? Joshua, the man of God or Malique, the man who provides her with financial wealth and security? (Dick, 2001, p. 265)

Indeed, I fully believed that I was caught up in a spiritual warfare because I could actually hear the conversations being held between Abendgo, and Dathan. Just as the character, Natasha had experienced, I at times while walking, would duck down swiftly because my body would react to the sounds of the swords clashing together like thunder over my head:

Natasha knew she couldn't out run the dog, but she was going to make the attempt anyway. It was as if Lady had read her mind because before she knew it Lady had leaped into the air. Natasha turned and tried to run, but she stumbled, falling to the ground. Instinctively, she curled her body into a tight fetal position and covered her head with her hands and arms. She closed her eyes tightly and held her breath as she waited in horror to feel Lady's powerful jaws sink deep into her tender flesh. Natasha knew she was about to be mauled to death. Suddenly, Natasha heard the sound of heavy metal clashing rhythmically above her head. She heard Lady bellow out a piercing howl of pain as if she had just been struck by something, a car maybe.

"Didn't I tell you to leave her alone, Dathan? You will not get her this day!" Abednego said, blocking Dathan's sword with his own. "A hound from Hell! Is that all you can come up with?"

"You won't always be around, Abednego!" Dathan said, feeling fatigue coming over him. He was surprised at Abednego's strength.

"Don't you worry about where I'll be, Dathan! Just know I'll always know where you'll be!" Abednego said, delivering a blow to Dathan's knees that knocked him off of his feet.

Natasha curled her body tighter as Lady came crashing down inches beside her. Cautiously, she removed her hands from her face. Natasha could feel Lady's hot panting breath on her face. Natasha looked at the sky because the sounds of the clashing metal came to an abrupt halt.

(Dick, 2001, pp. 69–70)

In knowing that education is transformational I concluded at the end of that semester that taking this relational communication course had been a necessary conduit for me to understand the experiences I have endured in my education as well as my personal life. Yet again education gave me definition and terminology to my lived experiences.

As a result of reading Poulos (2009) that semester I concluded that my “writing, manifested as embodied energy in motion, is something I have learned to trust. I see it as a spirit rising, surging into the world of (meaning) making” (p. 50). Here again education has provided definition to my life.

Since I started writing this dissertation I have been able to align my life experiences in conjunction with the woman I have become at this present day and time. I believe I am at this very moment in the premier position to share my discovery through new language that I have developed since entering this holistic and nurturing doctoral program. In this academic space I have been literally delivered and guided from an allegorical mind set affording me the opportunity to meet my human condition. According to Bochner and Ellis (1992), autoethnography is “ethical practice” and “gifts” that has a care giving function (p. 166). In essence autoethnography is a story that re-enacts an experience by which people find meaning and through that meaning are able to come to terms with that experience.

Fantasy Theory

While researching fantasy theory I reviewed other qualitative dissertations for inclusion of fantasy theory and found none. I believe this places me in a unique position and enables me to be a pioneer on fantastical practices inside of the classroom due to mis-educative practices.

In realizing that there is no box my mind was set free to question and explore the universe on my own terms. I was free to inquire about the unconscious acts the metacognitive frame of being that my mind engaged in. It is inquiring into these mental unconscious acts that caused me to explore fantasy and interpret the relationship I had formed with it over the course of my life.

While researching fantasy theory I have discovered that my unconscious has a unique way of dealing with adversity. In gaining insight into my lived experience I also gained a clearer interpretation of the word, fantasy. Historically, *phantasy* derived from the German word 'phantasie,' meaning imagination, in the sense of "the world of imagination, its contents and the creative activity which animates it" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1974, p. 314). In contemporary America the spelling of the word "fantasy" is much more prevalent and is usually used more commonly in discussions of aesthetics and media, for example.

The different spellings of fantasy also represent diverse social perspectives. Susan Isaacs (1948) explains in *The Nature and Function of Phantasy* that there are even greater applicable distinctions between the two

spellings of “fantasy” and “phantasy.” She writes, “the two alternative spellings fantasy and phantasy should be used to denote ‘conscious daydreams (fantasy), and the primary content of unconscious mental processes’ (phantasy) respectively” (p. 73). So it was then when I understood that *phantasy* was applicable to my (childhood) because I *phantasized* unconsciously as a child while *fantasy* was applicable to my (adulthood) because I penned my romance novels in a conscious state.

On a clinical level, psychologists have referred to fantasy as “a mental apprehension of an object of perception; the faculty by which this is performed” and further as “the fact or habit of deluding oneself by imaginary perceptions or reminiscences” or “a day-dream arising from conscious or unconscious wish or attitudes” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1974, p. 314). More recently some psychologists have classified fantasy as a mediator or as an obstacle that has been caught between reality and desire. I believe whole heartedly that I unconsciously utilized fantasy as a mediator when I was being subjected to physical and/or mental oppression, in particular, while in elementary school. Additionally, fantasy becomes a psychological resource when one’s reality offers little comfort. Kilpatrick, Wolf, and Wolfe (1994) emphasize that, “the value of fantasy over real-life stories is important and sustains a child’s psychological health from real life situations” (p. 44).

According to Bruno Bettelheim (2010) fantasy is primarily the language of the mind. If we consider how children learn to grasp language then we should be able to understand how they can take that language and assign that meaning to a world that they have created in their mind. For example, children learn to distinguish between hot, cold, and warm in comparison to their own body temperature as well as from instruction by an authoritative figure such as a parent. In their language of the mind when a child thinks about “cold” their mind may picture a cube of ice or maybe even see themselves shivering in the cold. Likewise with “hot” their mind may picture a fire burning and see themselves recoiling from it because it is a representation of danger. In contrast when a child thinks about warm their mind may picture a sandy beach with calm winds, the afternoon sun, and cool water foaming onto the sand. All of these scenarios develop in the child’s mind giving credence to the associative placement of their imagination.

In assigning value to fantasy an individual is given the opportunity to create an imaginary world in which they can rehearse and begin to deal with many of the most fundamental psychological problems that come with being human. Harding (1977) says,

In all the forms of fantasy, whether dreams, daydreams, private musings or make-believe play, we give expression to perfectly real preoccupations, fears and desires, however bizarre or impossible the imagined events embodying them. (pp. 61–62, as cited in Egan, n.d., “Fantasy: Pro and Con,” para. 10)

In essence, fantasy becomes important for people when their lives are so grim that they cling to everything that takes them completely away from dysfunctional families, relationships, or experiences for any length of time.

According to Richard Dawkins (2011), an evolutionary psychologist, metacognition is cross-culturally innate for all humans and animals to possess. He believes the characteristic of fight or flight is irrepressible and unconscious and natural survival mechanism when the feelings of hostile forces are prevalent. Other evolutionary psychologists believe that In particular, Cosmides and Tooby (2005) support this theory as a form of metacognition because fight or flight is an instinctive universal reaction while, “avoiding predators and environmental threats” (p. 13). In understanding metacognition I carefully reflected upon where my experiences fit in that scheme. I soon realized that in order for me to mentally escape what I considered life threatening and/or traumatic experiences I escaped these negative acts by fantasizing. In essence I have been able to escape by using fantasy as a portal because I viewed my former educators and ex-husband as predators and viewed my immediate environment as unsafe.

In *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (1974), Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis illustrate fantasy as a defense process. These scholars describe the indigenous people of Mexico, after the Mexican War of 1846, using art fantasy to escape their emotional and mental bondage by painting fantasy worlds.

Laplanche and Pontalis (1974) say that

fantasy is [an] imaginary scene in which the subject is a protagonist, representing the fulfillment of a wish (in the last analysis, an unconscious wish) in a manner that is distorted to a greater or lesser extent by defensive processes. (as cited in Federici, Boldt-Irons, & Virgulti, 2005, p. 314)

Laplanche and Pontalis (1974) also refer to fantasy as operating psychologically on an unconscious level as a mediator for the sole purpose of saving one's immediate reality, in particular, when that immediate reality is being physically and/or mentally threatened. Notwithstanding, Riccardo Steiner's (2003) *Unconscious Phantasy* also agrees that one's unconscious can indeed operate as a mediator. Due to my personal experiences it is my standpoint that fantasy theory is not a cataclysmic mental dysfunction; instead, fantasy actually operates as a saving grace.

Since fantasy has been interpreted by academic scholars as the language of the mind it leads one to wonder if fantasy has a process. For all intents and purposes fantasy follows rules of its own making. I discovered that fantasy actually has overlapping tenets that consist of fantasy lands (mystical lands and creatures) and fantasy worlds (imitates real life). Eureka! Each of these fantasies has their own definition and it was incumbent upon me to determine which constructional framework my life experiences connected with.

Fortunately I discovered that my type of fantasy existed solely within a fantasy "world." A fantasy world closely parallels real life and the fantasizer actually operates as she would normally live. For instance, the fantasizer

actually sees herself going to school or in a healthy marriage or having actual conversations and driving to and from performing daily tasks. Oppressive forces do not exist in this intentionally constructed fantasy world. One could also think of a fantasy world as a utopian mind world because this fantasy world operates as the fantasizer would actually *prefer* to live.

In gaining a clearer perspective of the conscious and the unconscious self, according to Jung (1957), I have been able to weigh my mis-educative experiences, inside of the classroom, as well as evaluate my oppressive marriage on a social scale and understand exactly why my mind swung like a pendulum to my fantasy world. Jung postulates, "All the works of man have their origin in creative fantasy. What rights have we then to depreciate imagination?" (p. 67). I assert that fantasy theory provides evidence of how important and powerful the unconscious mind is to realistic and immediate survival.

Scholars have also discovered that fantasies are also constructed from a learned language and it is this learned language that allows individuals to create a type of mental picture. This mental picture transitions to a composed and unified script in which the subject has a definite role to play in a sequence of events that is organized to some extent and captive of dramatization (Carlson & Coleman, 1997; Crepault & Couture, 1980; Mednick, 1977; Schlesinger & Kutash, 1981). In particular, within these mental scripts the fantasies of men and women differ. Women's fantasies have been shown to contain themes of

passivity (Mednick, 1977; Wilson & Lang, 1981). Wilson and Lang (1981) reported that when fantasies were ranked by descriptive categories such as long-term heterosexual relationships, exploratory, facilitative and impersonal fantasies that various themes for both men and women the overall theme resonating was the preferred intimate heterosexual fantasy. Moreover, a grounded theory emerged where as women were most likely to achieve an overall level of achievement when it came to imagery and developing scenes from an erotic desire. In retrospect my five African American fantasy romance novels give validity to Wilson and Lang's theory because they speak to the erotic desire.

Wilson and Lang (1981) also suggest that women, more often than men, fantasize about tender, romantic, and monogamous themes. Most importantly these themes often arise from a tragic event with a significant other. According to Harlton and Singer (1974) sexual fantasies have reflected the changing relationship of the sexes following the sexual revolution of the 1960s; however, in spite of the sexual revolution, fantasy themes for both men and women surveyed remained traditional. Again, I gained clear revelation as to why my fantasy scripts matured with my real life experiences.

An important issue related to my study is how daydreaming transitions to a "lived" fantasy. Muller and Dyer (as cited in Jay, 1985) identified four functions of daydreaming that consist of (a) daydreaming supports planning for the future, (b) daydreaming supports learning from successes and failures, (c) daydreaming

supports processes of creativity, and (d) daydreaming supports emotion regulation. I have discovered that I have indeed incorporated these functions into my real life and fantastical experiences. First, I have created a fantasy world that I desire my immediate reality to emulate. Second, I have designed my fantasy world by extracting the negative from my daily life and bridging my positive experiences into my fantasy world. Third, I have crafted fantasy romance novels that emulate my fantasy world. Fourth, my unconsciousness utilizes metacognition to regulate my emotional state of being. In this realization I have done what Singer (1970) describes as “[wo]man is capable of change and capable of bringing this change about [her]self” (p. 16).

Without realizing it I created change in my life as well as to qualitative research. For instance by utilizing my imagination I have created a fantastical preface for my dissertation that speaks to a fantastical happening that took me in and out of fantasy. My preface explains how Fantasy Theory first came to me as a dissertation topic. Being afforded the opportunity to write a qualitative dissertation my personal narrative can be included inside the staunch parapets of education. I believe that my dissertation has the possibility of creating change in academic research, inside of the classroom, and aid others while transcending toward their human condition.

Though some may not agree change is a good thing. Change can hurt, but it is within that hurt when we gain experience and grow. This is how I

perceive the methodologies utilized within this dissertation—a change in academic scholarship. In being afforded the opportunity to intermingle my dissertation with multiple methodologies I feel privileged and I further understand that,

I must write. I have been given a sign, and, as often happens these days, I am called to attend to it, to see if I can, as Goodall urges, seek to develop an “ethnographic imagination” to cope with the mysteries that surround me. I am called to read the signs I am given as speaking to the possibilities entailed in the divine presence of spirit in this world. (Poulos, 2009, p. 50)

In this qualitative space I can intentionally position myself inside of the margins of this academic sphere and push the envelope for new scholarship that is inclusive of fantasy theory. In this situated space my personal narrative and experiences are entrenched into a more social academic writing, but is viewed as scholarship because it comes in the form of autoethnography and fantasy theory. All of which encompasses my lived experiences.

In my methodology I can grapple with traditional scholarship which follows an academic order. Though this dissertation has been organized in the order of my life experiences I believe that Fantasy theory allows for the rumination of qualitative scholarship. I believe Poulos (2009) wrote it best. He says,

But my dreams do not follow orders. They break into my consciousness, taking me to places I perhaps could not know any other way. Instead of taking cues from my desires, or my will, my dreams carry me along. And so, as I lay down to sleep, my dreams launch me back to a time and a

place out of my deepest memory, a time when I was free to follow the urgings of my heart. (p. 60)

For me this urging of my heart comes in the form of Fantasy Theory.

Riessman (1993) acknowledges that individuals understand their actions through oral and written accounts of historical episodes. It is in this narrative space that I have a privileged way of knowing and can testify about my unfair treatment in an educational milieu.

In the next chapter I talk about mis-educative experiences through presenting a story of my childhood trauma in elementary school; I follow with rationale of why children are placed in repressive educational environments; and I offer an answer to mis-educative experiences through experiential education and fantasy.

CHAPTER III

MIS-EDUCATIVE EXPERIENCES

Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. (Dewey, 1997, p. 26)

In this chapter I define and discuss mis-educative experiences inside of the classroom and explain how those intentional experiences can threaten a child's ability for transformational learning. I discuss the un-existential classroom, experiential learning, and explain how fantasizing inside of the classroom can be a healthy tool for discovery. I also explain how hegemonic forces prevent equity inside of the classroom which ultimately disenfranchises students and their community at large. Additionally, I provide personal testimonies to interpret my experiences with mis-education and how those experiences lead me toward fantasy.

When attending a private school most parents would expect their children to have a rich and full educational experience. Any parent would naturally expect that learning institution to be holistic and pedagogically sound. Unfortunately, my primary educational school years were held in an un-existential classroom where I experienced mis-educative and engendered callousness experiences on a continuum. I do not believe that anyone would immediately think that a child

would experience emotional, mental, and physical abuse at the hands of Catholic nuns, but it routinely happened to me nonetheless.

In an environment where I experienced mis-educative experiences routinely, I became numb to associating knowledge with praxis; instead, I associated education with the abuse of power, developed mistrust for educational leadership, and held contempt for my religion.

While attending elementary school I was in a constant state of confusion. The problem was that while learning about the Holy Trinity on a daily basis by people who allegedly embodied the Trinity's characteristics, I was simultaneously being emotionally, mentally, and physically abused by these same people who professed Christianity and love. Due to their actions I learned to rely on fantasizing because in my fantasy world I was not positioned in the groove or rut that Dewey (1997) describes; instead, I was nurtured.

Daily I was faced with the conundrum of dying and my soul being sentenced to purgatory or hell because of the silent disdain I felt for my teachers and peers. It did not help matters any that huge statues of Jesus' crucifixion were strategically positioned in every classroom which depressed me because I felt He (Jesus) was constantly looking at me with judgmental and sad eyes. In believing that God was disappointed in me for having inappropriate ill willed thoughts towards my oppressors (my teachers and peers) my nerves were constantly on edge which caused me to become a chronic nail biter. When

Dewey (1997) explains that, “Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 26) I immediately reflected upon an instance in school that engendered callousness and heightened my fear for my academic milieu.

One day while I was gathering my textbooks to go to my next class I heard a piercing scream. This scream silenced the entire classroom and my heart began to pound profusely because I recognized that voice as my sisters. My teacher ordered us to sit back down and warned us to remain silent as she cautiously left the classroom closing the door securely behind her. I remember clearly the tears streaming down my face as I wondered what was happening to my sister. When my teacher returned all eyes were upon her. We all wanted to know what had happened, but she did nothing to suspend our curiosity; however, she looked at me with a slight smirk and lowered her eyes as she ordered us to go to our next class. I exited the classroom with my heart pounding against my chest.

As I walked in a single file, searching frantically with my eyes for my sister because I could still hear her cries I looked down the hallway and saw her leaping upwards trying to grasp something in the air. I followed her movement with my eyes and it was then when I saw my brother and one of his friends literally hanging from the ceiling, like dangling puppets, from a huge hook with their arms and legs flailing in the air. To me it appeared as though they were

being crucified. I dropped my books in horror, ran screaming toward my sister and began imitating her attempts to save him. My brother was looking down at us with fear in his eyes. "You're crucifying my brother!" I screamed uncontrollably. No matter how hard my sister and I tried we could never have reached him.

The priest who actually hung my brother and his friend on the hooks finally had enough of our dramatic attempts to free our brother. He ordered another priest to seize my sister while he grabbed me harshly by the back of my neck. My sister and I attempted to cling to one another, but the priest holding her snatched my sister out of my grasp and literally drug her by the back of her uniform collar toward her classroom. The priest subduing me snatched me with so much force that I became dizzy. The next thing I knew he had grabbed me by the upper arm and pushed me harshly across the threshold of my classroom. Continuing with his vice like grip on my upper arm, he informed me as well as the entire class to the reason why my brother and his friend were hanging on the wall. He said that my brother and his friend had pulled up a girl's uniform to look at her underwear and that type of *sinful* behavior would not be tolerated. After his soliloquy he pushed me in the middle of my back and ordered me to take my seat. I stumbled down the aisle on weak legs crying profusely and sat down at my assigned desk wondering when I was going to hear the priests hammering nails into my brother's hands and feet. This thought caused my bladder to

weaken and I lowered my head on my desk in shame. When I closed my eyes my fantasy world was already there waiting to save me from what Steiner (2003) describes as my “external reality.”

To this very day it is emotionally taxing for my sister and me to watch the scene from *The Color Purple* where Mister is forcing the two sisters, Nettie and Celie, apart because we are able to identify with the engendered callousness of the priest tearing us apart in our attempt to save our brother. That experience affected many children on that day, in particular, my brother, my sister, his friend, and me. I believe I can state with certainty that John Dewey and other progressive educators would have been appalled by this intentional mis-educative practice.

John Dewey, an American philosopher, educational and social reformer was a proponent of progressive education and liberalism. Dewey believed that the entire world was the classroom and when students are repressed in traditionally-styled classrooms a child’s creativity becomes severely disenchanting. Dewey (1997) describes the detrimental impact that the un-existential classroom can have on a learner as a mis-educative experience. He says, Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be such as to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experiences in the future are restricted. Again, a

given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction (and yet) tend to land him in a "groove or rut" (p. 26).

In order for learning to occur a merging of theory and praxis has to take place. The environment has to be ripe for knowledge to be absorbed; the experiential classroom embodies such ripeness. According to the Association for Experiential Education (AEE), "Experiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values" (Association for Experiential Education, 2010). In experiential education the teacher/facilitator plays an active role in the learning process as well as fosters a holistic learning environment; thereby, affording the learner the opportunity to be more reflective about her experience and the meaning of her transformational result(s). Once the teacher/facilitator escorts the learner into the classroom, and then introduces the learner to creative praxis, that learning milieu has then become experiential.

According to Chapman et al. (2008), "The teacher's role is to define the boundaries to ensure a safe learning environment (physically, emotionally, intellectually) within which a student can become totally immersed" (p. 9). It is in this holistic space where the learner discovers the value of liberated and transformational learning. On the contrary when students enter the classroom

where pedagogy is shallow or nonexistent then learning becomes devalued and the learner is less enthused about the possibilities of learning.

When people are placed in an environment where they are less than enthusiastic about learning, fantasy does not have the ability to captivate them because they desire to be someplace else that is stimulating to them. Whether people will admit it or not, all individuals fantasize to some degree about one thing or another. Some people fantasize while at school, at work during meetings, in church, and while running errands. Some fantasize more often than others and some fantasies are likely to be more elaborate than others. Given that some people discourage fantasy or see no value in it where can a person find the freedom to fantasize without censure?

I contend that one location where fantasy can take place would be the classroom because it can be a conduit for experiential learning to take root. For instance, the philosopher Maxine Greene (1978) spends numerous hours reflecting about the natural flowering of intellect, the culture of education and the ramifications of teaching. She explains that children spend a great portion of the day inside of the classroom; therefore, it should be a holistic environment where creative fantasy, play and imagination are welcomed. Greene says, "The classroom is the child's home for many hours each day. It is also his place of work. Therefore, the classroom should reflect happiness, the protection, the loving guidance of the how, as well as, the efficiency of the workshop" (p. 5). It is

in this efficiency of the work shop that the child is capable of grappling with their understanding of the lessons learned.

Contrasting an already constructed curriculum Bettelheim (2010) explains that often children's literature is shallow in substance; therefore, little significance can be gained from them if "what one has learned to read adds nothing of importance to one's life" (p. 4). Additionally, Bettelheim explains,

It is here that fairy tales have unequalled value, because they offer new dimensions to the child's imagination which would be impossible for her to discover as truly on her own. Even more important, the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the child by which she can structure her daydreams and with them give better direction to her life. (p. 7)

In essence, Bettelheim believes that when the child is daydreaming she is essentially fitting unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enables her to deal with her repressed unconsciousness.

Imagine the invigorating force that fantasy and imagination can invoke in the learner when her creative praxis is tangibly realized. The classroom affords the learner a liberated learning environment which contributes to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of the learner. These qualities are enhanced through fantasy and imagination and undergird the concept that these attributes (fantasy and imagination) contribute to optimal child development by not inhibiting the child's natural curiosity for learning in an unobstructed or boxed in learning environment.

In allowing fantasy and imagination inside the classroom, the teacher creates a prime setting for optimal transcendence, discovery and development by not suppressing natural curiosity. In fact, fantasy and imagination “are so important to optimal child development that it has been recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child” (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 182). According to Ginsburg (2007), “every child deserves the opportunity to develop to their *unique* potential . . . [because it affords the learner the opportunity] to fully reap the advantages associated with play” (p. 183). The question I desire to know is since it is every child’s birth right to have an optimum education then why are so many children oppressed and suppressed inside of the classroom?

In this Teacher as Facilitator learning environment students have built a relationship with their teacher and trust them as well as their learning environment. In feeling “safe” students can be reflective and can *discover* that learning can take place outside of the confines of the institutional walls and *discover* that learning actually takes place wherever they are. In this fertile space students learn to reflect upon their experiences through dialogue, discover their strengths and expand on them. This space also affords the student the opportunity to dialogue on their insecurities and weaknesses, discover the root of their shortcomings, and understand that it is perfectly fine to possess these inefficiencies. This liberated learning environment allows the teacher to offer

multiple ways for the student to rectify that weakness and foster hope in strengthening that weakness instead of leaving the student feeling inferior. In having a supportive learning environment students can focus on their dreams of becoming the leaders in their community as well as dream about their contribution to the world at large. Through fantasy, play and imagination these aspirations can come to fruition because their minds are focused on the pleasures of learning instead of their immediate disparity.

Fantasy, play and imagination in the classroom offer enrichment opportunities for children to experience epiphanies and discover who they are in relation to the world around them. In the attempt to make sense of their lives they can ask such questions as, "Who am I in relation to the world?" and "What is the meaning of my life?" In an empowered classroom the possibilities for discovery are endless. Plato once said, "People are like dirt. They can either nourish you or help you grow as a person or they can stunt your growth and make you wilt and die." By providing equity in education all children can have the opportunity to be nourished so they can experience a better quality of life.

I have to acknowledge that I am not the only child who has been oppressed within the classroom of an educational institution. I am fully aware that other repressive learning environment exists due to socioeconomic status. I am of the opinion that children are anchored in repressive educational environments because the elite want to maintain their power, privilege, and

position in society. To embrace a liberated learning milieu would mean to tear the hegemonic fabric from society and dismiss the misoneism – a hatred of new things or change of the privileged society. Embracing this change would mean rewriting the history books to include all ethnic groups in a positive image and detailing their contributions in civilization. It is clear to me that education has been utilized as one of the primary forms for securing the elites social position in society.

If all children are not afforded the opportunity to learn in a holistic environment, then they will not possess the ability to change their social status; instead, they will continue to be disenfranchised through tracking, view themselves through someone else's lens and continue to be disempowered. According to Michael Knapp and Sara Woolverton's (2004) article, *Social Class and Schooling*, "One significant reason is that education is defined by social and cultural capital" (p. 654). Knapp and Woolverton express, "In considering the relationship between social class and schooling, one must make assumptions about the purposes of schooling, and also about the nature of society and the role of schools in preparing individuals for lives in the larger social context" (p. 656).

In relationship to these social contexts, the elite social hierarchy possesses the power to construct its own relationship with the community in a social, educational, and political capacity. Since the elite have social capital and

are able to forge political relationships that benefit their communities their children can glean from their parents' advantages. According to Freire (1970), hegemony supports oppressive ideologies and undergirds the domination of the elite. He contends,

Emphasis on the ways in which state hegemony structured the lives of Brazilian peasants, reflect the role of elite ideology in shaping meanings that support the domination and oppression of the lower social classes. The institution of formal schooling, according to critical theorists, is a societal force that contributes to domination and oppression by mirroring the worldview of the elite, and by instruction that results in differential outcomes that support the elite worldview. (p. 660)

Affluent communities are often privileged to have influential people who are willing to lend the financial, political, and social clout necessary to support private schools that can offer attractive teacher salaries, rewards, incentives, unlimited educational/technological resources and optimum teaching facilities. These amenities are seen as attractive perks for some teachers who believe they are superior; furthermore, they are working and teaching within a community that supports their own ideological practices. Unfortunately, parents in the lower social class cannot financially support their communities' need for an educationally rich and well-rounded curriculum; therefore, these communities often receive inadequate educational resources and less than qualified teachers. Researchers have concluded that there is indeed a cultural congruence between community relationships and social capital when it involves equity in education.

According to Kozol,

The social class of the community translates into other important influences on schools. The first is simply a matter of resources. Higher-social-class communities generally have the wherewithal to provide teachers with ample resources to do their work, whereas chronic shortages of resources and less adequate facilities are common in schools serving communities lower in the social-class hierarchy (Kozol, 1991; Metz, 1990; Persell, 1993). (as cited in Banks & Banks, 2003, p. 665)

If in fact parents and students of lower social and socioeconomic status share a homogeneous opinion that educational institutions are hostile toward them due to their social and economic status, how then can these parents successfully advocate and combat the inequity of educational resources that keeps their children anchored in a repressive learning environment? These parents do not possess the wherewithal or voices to have their issues heard and addressed in a way that will ensure their children receive equal leverage when it comes to modern facilities and quality teachers, both of which will provide a holistic milieu for their children to become creative thinkers through fantasy, play and imagination. These are the children of the parents who have no collective voice in the curriculum and these are the children who do not have the opportunity to achieve optimal child development in their academic experience. Often parents of children who are anchored in repressive educational settings do not possess the knowledge that fantasy, imagination, and play and/or liberated learning are their children's human right while the elite possess an innate

knowledge of this and propel their children toward a liberated learning environment.

When a child is anchored in a disenfranchised classroom, an unsafe educational environment produces mis-educative experiences and insufficient educational resources abound; the ability to have a creative mind and experience epiphanies is minimal. Jonathan Kozol is adamant that when institutions operate under the guise of inequality, the children are actually seen as a commodity when it comes to the “haves” and the “have-nots” in education. He says, “Instead of seeing these children for the blessings that they are, we are measuring them only by the standard of whether they will be future deficits or assets for our nation’s competitive needs” (Kozol, 1969, p. 76).

In truth, the “have-not” children are already seen as deficient because their educational resources are intentionally inadequate. Many of the disenfranchised schools that lower socio-economic children attend lack basic resources such as writing utensils, paper, contemporary books, modern technology (new computers and science laboratories), well-balanced meals, and qualified teachers. Furthermore, Kozol (1969) says, “I think a lot of people don’t have any idea of how deeply segregated our schools have become all over again” (p. 81). It is through hegemonic social capital that funding is supplied to the more affluent neighborhood schools.

Though it is true that many children persevere through impoverished educational institutions and become successful in life, they may well have done so without experiencing liberated learning and do not equate learning with fun and foster a love of learning. Instead, they view their education as a necessary means to an end in order to escape their community environment and increase their socioeconomic position. Educators should find it disappointing that by the time some children reach the sixth grade their love of learning has completely dissipated. Where did the love for learning go?

Knapp and Woolverton (2004) share that Westerners possess the functionalist attitude that, “upper classes comprise the exceptionally capable and motivated while the lower classes comprise the least capable and industrious” (p. 659). They also say that the functionalist perspective also allows room for, “the highly capable and motivated lower class individual to move upward through the class structure by diligence and intelligence” (p. 659). Regardless of race or gender, the Western elite still firmly hold the hegemonic strings that ensure that their children maintain power, privilege, and position in society through educational measures.

In truth White, rich and middle class children can experience alienation too; however, the greater populations of minority students are traditionally the ones who have been shortchanged when it comes to education. According to *The Color of Bureaucracy: The Politics of Equity in Multicultural School*

Communities Lardon and Ovando (2001) agree that “conflict theorists argue that schools transmit unequal power relationships and promote the value system of the dominant, privileged culture” (p. 24). The underrepresented children in the lower social classes would benefit from experiencing a liberated learning environment because they would be exposed to creative avenues and highways of learning such as experiential education methods, instead of learning within the confines of a traditionally-based learning environment.

In his book, *The Three R's Plus: What Today's Schools are Trying to Do and Why*, Beck (2009) supports the fact that traditionally-based learning environments do not possess a sound pedagogical teaching practice. He concludes that,

Historically, the primary educational technique of traditional education was simple oral recitation. In a typical approach, students sat quietly at their places and listened to one individual after another recite his or my lesson, until each had been called upon. The teacher's primary activity was assigning and listening to these recitations; students studied at home. A test might be given at the end of a unit, and the process, which was called “assignment-study-recitation-test”, was repeated.

In addition to its overemphasis on verbal answers, reliance on remote memorization (mindless memorization with no effort at understanding the meaning), and disconnected, unrelated assignments, it was also an extremely inefficient use of students' and teachers' time. It also insisted that all students be taught the same materials at the same point; students that did not learn quickly enough failed, rather than being allowed to succeed at their natural speeds. (pp. 3-6)

This traditional learning environment makes it difficult for children to experience liberated learning because in such a desolate setting, fantasy, play and imagination are luxuries ill afforded. With lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms, the teacher is only capable of offering a traditionally-based “one size fits all” approach to education.

I assert that America has multiple and competing purposes for education whereby the most powerful thrust is towards sorting and selecting individuals for various futures. In having full knowledge that the one size does not fit all concept is not applicable for curriculums or particular teaching styles the political arena continues to treat educational institutions with a hegemonic purse. In as much since education is supposed to be equal and free for all there are still some students who are continuously exposed to repressive environments. Knapp and Woolverton (2004) assert that financially supported environments allow the children of the elite the opportunity to participate in fantasy, play, and imagination because the classroom conditions are conducive for learning. The “have-not” children should also have these opportunities.

In the next chapter I discuss the significance of educational microaggression as well as my experience with internal-microaggression. I also contrast my master’s and doctoral programs, respectively.

CHAPTER IV

TWO KINDS OF EDUCATION: OPPRESSIVE AND EMANCIPATORY

The cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence. (Pierce, 1995, p. 281)

In this chapter I discuss the significance of educational microaggression and how it was subtly displayed inside of the classroom by my elementary school teachers and I discuss how I experienced internal-microaggression during my master's program. This chapter allows me to contrast my pre-educational experiences alongside my master's and doctoral programs. In performing this contrast, I clearly shed light on how important pedagogy is for a transformational education.

I was first introduced to the term, microaggression, while attending my DIVAS (Distinguished Intellectual Virtuous Academic Sisters) meeting. This group is comprised of Black women who are in pursuit of the doctoral degree cross disciplines. In this group we provide emotional, spiritual, and academic support for one another as we are all on different phases in attaining our doctoral degrees. One of the DIVAS had attended a seminar where microaggression was discussed and once I understood its meaning I was able to position its definition

in my life. I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I had indeed been exposed to its forces inside of the classroom while in elementary school.

Chester Pierce, an American psychiatrist, first coined the term, microaggression in 1970. Since then other ethnic scholars such as Sue (2010) have defined it as such,

Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of other races. . . . The chief vehicle for pro-racist behaviors. These are subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'put-downs' of blacks by offenders. Microaggressions may also play a role in unfairness in the legal system as they can influence the decisions of juries. (p. 5)

As I continued my research on microaggression I understood that I had actually been taught by racist nuns who intentionally staged a non-pedagogical learning environment which attempted to thwart my relationship with fantasy, imagination, and transcendence in and outside of the classroom.

My tenure at Immaculate Conception Catholic School was less than stellar as far as my emotional, physical, and psychological well-being was concerned. This institution was located in the heart of Bronx, New York's African and Hispanic American community and it was operated by white nuns. These nuns never once demonstrated a loving attitude toward me nor did they provide a safe environment. Instead they displayed aggressive behavior toward me, assaulted me physically on a routine basis, and verbally abused me. It was while attending

this grey institution that my initial contact was made with fantasy because it was my way of escape.

I always wondered why I was seemingly singled out for abuse while I was in school. As a child I had no control over my family name. My father's name is Mr. Charles Dick and my mother's name is Mrs. Joyce McClure Dick so is there a big wonder that my last name would have been Miss Dick? I remember clearly a nun glaring at me, a seven year old child, with hateful squinted blue eyes and with a venomous tongue tell me, "*I hate having to say your name! It disgusts me!*" Marcus Tullius Cicero, the Roman philosopher, once stated, "The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn." For all intents and purposes, I believe that my experiences in Catholic school were an intentional malicious act meant to thwart my very being for success at life.

Pierce (1995) writes that "the cumulative burden of a lifetime of microaggressions can theoretically contribute to diminished mortality, augmented morbidity, and flattened confidence" (p. 281). Nonetheless, I persevered through it all because there was something greater inside of me that kept me seeking an education even from a child's standpoint. Somehow I felt as though I owed it to my ancestors to hold on and persevere through the oppression. Living with a sense of my African American history provided me with the wherewithal to pursue education even though I believed in my heart that neither education nor her educators wanted me.

One historical perspective that kept me grounded was the constant teachings from my grandfather, Lee Ivory McClure, who lived in our home. Gramps, as he was affectionately called, was a self-educated man. Rarely did I ever see him not reading two books simultaneously—the Bible and the Encyclopedia of Britannica, respectively. It was he who began teaching me at a very early age about Africa, Egypt in particular, because that society was richly advanced in technology and science. He taught me about slavery, the middle passage, religion, and racism so that when I entered school I was well advanced beyond my peers in history and religion in particular. Even though I wanted to run away from school, I would reflect on the thousands of Black people my grandfather told me about who marched and protested in order that the marginalized would have the same quality education as the privileged in America.

I believed that in comparison to what my forefathers and foremothers endured for an education my treatment was insignificant. Their sacrifices were simply inspiring. Due to the fact that I withstood the intentional oppression I now possess the appropriate language and have the cognition to understand why my educational milieu was emotionally, mentally, and physically oppressive. I can connect that oppression to my personal lived experiences in a failed marriage, but most importantly, I have the interpretative tools of self and the embracing

comforts from education herself which afforded me the rights of passage to turn my oppression into a positive work of art.

Unfortunately, my quest for knowledge has been met with non-pedagogical experiences that have clung to me like sore dangling appendages. For the most part my doctoral program has been the consistent and conscious healing conduit that has provided me with the necessary language to interpret my educational and lived experiences both in and outside of the classroom. I have been caught up in the flood and swirl of thought and it is in this critical reflection of my life's events that education has been the laser or the surgical tool if you will to cut off those dangling mis-educative appendages.

Riessman (1993) acknowledges that individuals understand their actions through oral and written accounts of historical episodes. It is in this narrative space that I have a privileged way of knowing and can testify about my unfair treatment in an educational milieu. For example, when I was in the second grade I learned to write in cursive form. From that point on, for reasons I cannot explain, I was never allowed to print which crippled those particular writing skills until this very day. My cursive writing was perfected daily, but the problem I had was that I wrote large and outside of the lines which enraged my writing teacher. I cannot count the number of times my hands were abused with a heavy wooden paddle for writing large and outside of the lines. One particular day I was practicing on writing the letters "r and s." Since I have two connecting letters (r's

and s's) in my name (Marrissa), the nun was determined for them to appear identical in form and size. As hard as I tried, I could not get those connecting r's and s's to be identical; even so, I signed my name and submitted my writing assignment.

Unfortunately for me, I did not work hard enough on making those connecting letters identical. Upon my teacher reviewing my in-class assignment, she called me to the front, picked up the wooden paddle from her wooden desk, and demanded that I hold out my hands. Pierce (1995) would most likely term this microaggressive experience as an institutional and systematic imbalance of power and privilege. I did walk to the front, but I refused to hold out my hands. Without warning I was grabbed from behind by the teaching assistant who forced my hands out.

I remember this scene as though it were happening to me this very moment. While being held captive, I was verbally berated by my teacher. She stated and I quote, "*You're nothing, Miss Dick, and you'll always be nothing!*" The sting of hatred her words carried penetrated my skin as though hundreds of bees were assaulting me. The fear of what I was about to experience caused my bladder to release right there in front of the classroom.

My teacher looked down at the wet wooden floor then looked back at me with disdain in her eyes. She inhaled deeply, raised that paddle and came down heavy upon my hands. I attempted to ready myself for the pain that I knew would

come, but when the paddle hit my hands this time I did not feel a thing. I remember looking at my hands and wiggling my fingers to make certain that I could feel them. She may have thought she missed my hands because I did not cry out as I had done in the past, and she repeated her action. I stood restrained watching this nun exhausting herself while she repeatedly beat my hands waiting for a reaction from me that never came. When she looked into my eyes I don't know what she saw, but whatever it was it caused her to inhale deeply and step away from me. The nun restraining me let go of my arms as though she had just touched something hot. I left the classroom without permission and headed to the bathroom where I stuffed my underwear with toilet tissue in an attempt to clean and dry myself.

Though my master's program was not physically traumatizing it was emotionally taxing, spiritually challenging, and where I came face to face with internal-microaggression. Approximately two years after I received my undergraduate degree in Business Administration at Shaw University, I enrolled at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University where I earned my master's degree in Adult Education with a specialization in Training and Development. For the most part this was a wonderful experience until I registered for a course conducted by my academic advisor who exhibited patriarchal dominance inside of the classroom. Initially I was enthused about studying adult education because prior to this experience my instructors were

passionate about respecting the wealth of knowledge and experiences that adults bring with them to the classroom.

My professor for this particular course was a proponent of Malcolm Knowles who was credited with utilizing the term andragogy in the United States. In this program andragogy was the driving force for learning, as Knowles conceived, that adults learned differently to children and that this is provided for a distinctive field of investigation.

The concept of andragogy for Knowles was based on five crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are different from the assumptions about child learners on which traditional pedagogy is premised. Knowles believes that adults come to the classroom already equipped with self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, already possess an orientation to learning, and are motivated to learn. These were the five concepts that governed my learning principles. These were the concepts that I thought my professor subscribed to wholeheartedly, but I could not have been more wrong.

In my attempt to establish my self-concept and become a self-directed human being I cut off all of my hair so I could begin growing natural locks. Malcolm Knowles (1984) tells us that as a person matures, "*his self concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being*" (p. 31). It is in this mindset that I attempted to move away from society's prescription of beauty (long chemically treated straight hair). It had

become obvious to me that my teacher held a binary position to the self-concept ideology and penalized me for actually implementing what he was teaching me. Freire (2000) maintains that we should play a role in our liberation. He says that the, “oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption” (p. 54).

Instead of applauding me for being an example of self-concept my professor implemented his disapproval for the remaining part of the semester by ignoring my attempts to engage in class. In fact he made it painfully obvious that he did not want to look at me by overlooking me or closing his eyes tightly and turning his head in the opposite direction. The only time he acknowledged my presence was when my classmates supported me by intentionally not engaging in class. During these times he was forced to acknowledge my presence.

One evening while I was gathering my books my professor asked if he could speak to me for a minute and my stomach pulled. I walked to his desk and he stared disapprovingly at my bald head. He then said, “*Why on earth did you cut off all of your hair? You had beautiful hair, Ms. Dick.*” I explained to him that I had always wanted to grow locks, but in order for me to do it I had to cut the straightening chemical out of my hair. Instead of him sympathizing or having compassion and understanding that I was trying to discover myself by implementing my “self-concept” he said, “*You look like a man.*” I was in total shock. Did my professor just judge my physical appearance? After his statement

he picked up his briefcase, and left me standing alone bewildered in the classroom. The following morning I went to the beauty supply store, purchased a wig, had it cut and styled to duplicate my chemically treated hair so by the next class session I could be in my teacher's presence without offending him. Needless to say I wore that wig for the remaining part of the semester.

My attempt at hiding what I had done did not change much throughout the semester because he obviously knew what was underneath the wig, but he seemed to be able to tolerate looking at me a little better. Nonetheless, I continued through my master's program trying to avoid taking his classes at all costs. The day came when I had to complete my graduation application and inform the School of Education of my intent to take the comprehensive exam or write a thesis. It was my desire to write a thesis because I knew I wanted to attend a doctoral program and thought I could continue my research on that level. I received a phone call from him informing me that I should take the comprehensive exam. I tried to remind him of our earlier conversations of my desire to attain the doctoral degree, but he cut me off and told me that he was not reading my thesis and I should do as he instructed then hung up the phone.

That next morning I went to one of my professors and explained what happened and she asked me if this was a battle I wanted to fight and I should consider his position at the University. In that not only was he my academic advisor, he was a tenured full professor and had just been promoted by the

Chancellor as the Director of Summer School and Outreach. She advised me to take the comprehensive exam and told me that I could continue to write whatever my research interest was and she would be happy to guide me. I took her advice and took the comprehensive exam.

When the results were posted I discovered that I had failed and my heart sank. How could that have happened when I was prepared? I went to the chair of the department and spoke with him about my exam scores; I wanted to see them. He had them brought to him and I discovered that two faculty members had passed me, but the other one failed all of my responses and that faculty member was my academic advisor, the chair person's fraternity brother. He closed my file, told me that there was nothing he could do, and actually dismissed me from his office. I walked to my car crying hysterically and was almost hit by a car that one of my class members was driving. I was so disoriented that I could not find my keys and in the midst of looking for them inside of my purse the sky burst open with huge drops of rain. I stood outside of my car drenched with my own tears as well as the rain.

When I finally found my keys I got inside my car and attempted to console myself. I remember thinking this could not be happening to me. Here education was again tearing me apart. It seemed that the harder I cried the harder it rained. I sat in my car not knowing what I should do next. Who could I tell or get to help me? All I really knew at that moment was that I wanted to get off of that

campus. I wanted to go home but I didn't know how I was going to get there because I was shaking uncontrollably and it would not stop. I remember calling Jesus' name repeatedly. I could not pray all I could do was call His name. He answered me. My cell phone rang and the calming voice on the other end was my pastor, the prophet. His first words to me were, "Where are you?" I was crying so hard I could not talk. He began to pray and I started to calm down. Again he asked me my location and I was finally able to tell him where I was as well as what had just happened. He told me not to worry, that I would graduate. He told me the man who failed me was a non-believer and God would handle it. I had to believe him because he is the prophet.

The next day I followed my pastor's instructions and went to the Dean of the School of Education. I explained what happened and told her that I would be willing to retake the exam. She asked me to give her a couple of days to look into the matter and she would call me. A few days later the dean telephoned and asked me to meet her in the chair's office and I did. In that meeting she stated that she had spoken to the two other faculty members who scored my exam and they were at a loss as to why I failed; however, she was unable to reach the third faculty member, my academic advisor. She also stated that she had read my responses to the comprehensive exam questions and believed I had satisfied all of the questions. What she wanted to do was to speak with my academic advisor to find out his rationale for failing me. She asked the chair to locate my advisor

and set an appointment immediately for him to meet with us. The chair was unable to look at me when he asked me for an available date to meet with them again. He knew in his heart that he had mishandled me and had done nothing to aid me.

The appointment was made and I arrived early for it. When I walked toward the conference room I could see through the glass that my advisor was already there sitting in the dark. Suddenly he turned around and looked at me through the glass window. For an instant it appeared as though his eyes were actually glowing and his face appeared to be distorted. I grabbed my stomach and tried to steady my breathing for I believed I was entering that conference room with a demonic presence. At that moment I heard my pastor's voice whisper in my ear 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind." I repeated that verse while I continued walking into the conference room. Upon entering the conference room I turned on the lights then walked to the opposite end of the board room table and sat down wishing I had waited for the dean to arrive before coming upstairs. I continued praying that God would put the words in my mouth so I would sound intelligent should I be asked to explain my responses verbally.

My academic advisor asked why I was sitting so far away from him. I told him it was because I knew my presence disturbed him ever since I had cut my hair. He requested that I occupy the seat beside him. With hesitation, I got up

and sat beside him all the while wondering if I was putting myself in harm's way by sitting this close to a demon. Once I sat down he volunteered his reasoning for failing me. I stated to him that we should wait for the dean so there would be no misinterpretations. He disregarded my statement and continued his soliloquy.

He stated that he failed me because I did not answer the questions utilizing the adult theorists I had been taught, in particular, Malcolm Knowles. Respectfully, I informed him that I did utilize the theorists within all of my responses. He noted that I referenced Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as an adult educator and He was not one of the theorists. It was at this point when he informed me that he was an atheist and took offense to my writing about Jesus. Needless to say I was taken aback and I actually started to retreat to my fantasy world because I felt defeated and unsafe; I wanted to disappear. For some reason I was unable to disengage from my current reality. I recited 2 Timothy in an attempt to regain some spiritual strength. My advisor asked me if I remembered the question he was referring to. I did remember and I recited the question which stated and I quote, "In your opinion, who was the greatest adult educator? Explain why."

He asked where I saw Jesus in any of this. In all fairness, when I wrote my response, I knew I should have written about Malcolm Knowles, the father of andragogy or Eduard Lindeman, whose ideology was such that education was life, the whole of life is learning and therefore education can have no ending or

even Paulo Freire, who fought so that the oppressed and indigenous people of Brazil could regain their humanity and overcome their condition. It was in my thinking about Freire when I thought about Christ's position in freeing the oppressed through salvation which brought a life changing experience. So instead of writing about one of my advisor's favorite theorists I intentionally chose to write about Jesus Christ. Besides, the question stated, "*In your opinion,*" so I decided to write *my opinion* because Freire was a "type" of savior for his people.

In my explanation to him I discussed the similarities of Freire and Christ, respectively. For example, Freire acknowledges that the oppressed have to play a role in their own liberation. He states,

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption. (Freire, 2000, p. 54)

Just like with the people Freire assisted, Christ caused both the oppressors and the oppressed to rethink and examine their way of life in order for true salvation to occur. Likewise,

The oppressors must also be willing to rethink their way of life and to examine their own role in the oppression if true liberation is to occur; those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly. (Freire, 1970, p. 60)

One biblical example of the oppressor re-examining his way of life would be Saul. Originally he was a Pharisee who persecuted Christians. While Saul was on his way to Damascus to further oppress Christians, God blinded him and communicates with him. After Saul's transformational experience with God his name was changed to Paul, he was converted to Christendom, ceased his persecution of Christians, and preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. In his preaching about Jesus a plethora of oppressors and the oppressed were liberated mentally, physically, and spiritually. It is in this space that Saul/Paul realized that if he could be transformed through accepting Christ as his personal lord and savior then all who desired a change could. Just like Freire (1974) believed,

Education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing—of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't. (p. 15)

Once I explained my rationale he stated that he would have preferred that I had just written about Freire. Everything inside of me wanted to scream but the question said "*in your opinion,*" but what came out was as simple, "okay." He looked at me for a few moments then wrote on his legal note pad,

In speaking with Marrison Dick regarding her comprehensive exam she was able to verbally explain her answers which did not seem clearly apparent in her written explanation. I, Dr. Academic Advisor, rescind my previous recording of unsuccessful completion of the comprehensive

exam to successful completion. A change of grade form will be submitted to the Office of Registrar reflecting a grade change from “U” to “P.”

He tore the signed piece of paper off the pad and slid it towards me. When I read it my eyes watered and my nose began to burn. I was trying with everything I had to keep my composure and not break down in front of him. I thanked him for his consideration, but I do not believe he heard me because he was looking at my short locks slowly shaking his head disapprovingly.

I left that conference room holding that piece of paper tightly in my hand all the while praising God in my mind and in my heart for the victorious outcome. As I approached the elevator the doors opened and the Dean of the School of Education stepped out. I showed her the paper; she smiled brightly, and then embraced me. She also apologized for my experience. She instructed me to make a copy of it and to take the original to the Registrar’s Office. She said she would personally see to it that the change of grade form was completed, signed, and submit.

On graduation day I sat in the Greensboro Coliseum with tears streaming down my face, listening to the academy award winning keynote speaker, James Earl Jones, with his distinctive voice, metaphorically equate education to a butterfly and the woman’s vagina. My peers thought I was crying because of the significance of the ceremony, but that was not the reason. I was crying because I came so close to not sitting in that space at all due to my personal convection. I

was crying because I knew that at any other time I would have escaped to my fantasy world, but God would not allow it. He wanted me to be very cognizant of Him operating in my life for my good. God changed the heart of an atheist and made him work for my benefit and I know that was something my academic advisor had absolutely no intentions of doing.

Interestingly enough, one year after I graduated my academic advisor was fired from his appointed position. I am told by a very reliable source that he is extremely humble and works for his wife as her glorified administrative assistant. Oh, did I mention that his wife wears power pants suits and has grown locks? I did not have to harbor ill will towards him nor did I have to pray for him to be paid back for the mental and emotional oppression I had endured at his hand. My God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob rectified everything for me by changing the heart of an atheist toward me by giving me the grade I deserved so I could graduate. In the words of Jeremiah 15,

O LORD, thou knowest: remember me, and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors; take me not away in thy longsuffering: know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke.

In recognizing that my educational experiences have been less than stellar I can immediately recognize when there is a difference in my educational space and when my teacher's posture toward teacher-student interaction is one that is welcomed. Just as clearly as I can recall that hand whipping incident and

my master's program incident I can equally recall my first pedagogical course as a VISIONS student at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Truly, this program was a meal for my body, mind, heart and soul. It was a delicacy where the dessert was served first.

In August 2004, I enrolled in Philosophies of Education which gave me my initial taste of an educational meal. The first evening of class my heart was pounding, and I was sweating profusely. I had arrived almost an hour early making certain that I would not be late and also to have the opportunity to relieve my nervous bladder in the event it betrayed me.

I was anxious and nervous because I had no clue what I was expected to already know or have read. As I walked nervously and impatiently up and down the hallway scenes of my elementary years flashed before my mind, and I prayed hard to clear them. I looked down the hallway at the double exit doors and wanted to abandon the quest for higher education, an education that seemed to never want me in its halls. I could feel the spirit of fear creeping up my spine. I don't know how I summoned the strength, but verbally I commanded Satan to get behind me by the Blood of Jesus. I took a "small" sip of water and entered the classroom behind two other women.

The two women who entered before me began rearranging the desks seemingly without thought while they continued their conversation. I stood back momentarily and observed them. Before I was aware of it, I began emulating

their actions. They introduced themselves and included me in their conversation which was actually about the VISIONS Program. While we spoke, others entered the classroom, introduced themselves and seemed perfectly fine with the arrangement of the desks. I remember thinking that these people are accustomed to this non-traditional style seating arrangement, and I wondered why I had not been exposed to this type of classroom setting in the past. As people sat down I could not help but look in their eyes and acknowledge them. I realized then that this was a part of pedagogy. From elementary school to my master's degree I had sat in desks that first were uncomfortable due to my size and secondly only offered me the view of the back of my classmate's head.

In my constant and reflective state, in particular, when it comes to education I am very aware of my surroundings as well as those who profess to be teachers. When my teacher entered the classroom, he did so with so much joyous energy that it was contagious. Before I realized it, I was actually chuckling to myself as he made his way toward a desk and placed his knapsack on top of it. He introduced himself, and he invited us to do the same. After the introductions, we discussed the syllabus, and he went into the significance of *Plato's Republic* with vigor. As he read various passages of the book he did so with so much passion that my mind created a city and a garden for the philosopher kings to have their conversations. It was in this class that I first learned to think critically without being critical or being criticized.

With his knowledge, my professor came down inside of that allegoric cave, unlocked my chains, took me by the hand, and escorted me slowly out of the cave toward the sun. Because I was interpreting life through a skewed lens, initially the brightness of the sun hurt my eyes, but my eyes are now clear and focused. Now I understand that all phases of knowledge have a connection to one another. For instance I saw flowers for the first time and connected their livelihood to photosynthesis. Without the energy from the sun the beauty of the flowers would cease to exist. Prior to this class I looked and accepted beauty at face value never grappling with the root of that beauty.

Throughout that fall semester we shared lively discussions of each chapter of *Plato's Republic*. As I sat thoroughly engaged I wondered first how creative this professor was to make such a philosophical reading so inclusive and understandable; secondly, I wondered how I could have stopped learning. When did I stop learning? When did I lose the ability to think critically or did I ever possess the ability at all? I do not know when I lost it or if I ever possessed it, but I do know that I regained some semblance of it by the end of the course.

Through my first doctoral course, I understood that pedagogy is at the very core of learning. I now understand that pedagogy encompasses the heart of the teacher, the entire learning experience of self-actualization, the design of the classroom, the inclusion of the curriculum, the mental and physical, safety and

well-being of the student, unlike andragogy which simply encompasses the experiences of the adult learner.

While reflecting upon *Plato's Republic* I asked myself how I entered the cave and become content with watching the shadows. Did the descent begin when I was in Catholic school? Yes, I believe I started the descent then. I went deeper inside of the cave when I married my ex-husband and accepted what the shadows vaguely simulated. Philosophies of Education afforded me the opportunity to critically reflect on my life. This was the initial course that made me feel as though education was no longer running away from me. Instead education welcomed me by *finally* affording me the opportunity to learn in a pedagogical environment and for the first time experience a holistic student-teacher relationship that was mentally, physically, and verbally non-abusive. Since being exposed to professors who possess multiple and alternative ways of teaching in the classroom, I have experienced the genesis of learning and now understand how important curriculum and pedagogy is to teaching. I've also discovered that what we experience in the classroom cannot be measured.

Once I realized that my professors welcomed and appreciated my questions I entered my graduate classes enthusiastic and ready for engaging dialogue. In the past I had routinely been chastised in front of my classroom peers for asking "too many questions." I also endured harsh and abusive comments from my teachers, such as, "What is wrong with you?" and "Are you

really that stupid?” Needless to say, I was immensely embarrassed and it has been such statements that silenced my voice and caused me to accept the banking method for a great portion of my educational years.

In learning that education should be transformational my doctoral experiences have been just that—life changing. My doctoral program has continued to be one of healing. I remember the moment when the roots of all of my microaggressive and mis-educative experiences were uprooted. It was during a fall semester when I was taking a course, ironically enough, entitled Introduction to Critical Pedagogy. At the end of one of my classes my professor touched me on the arm and asked, “Marrissa, did I answer all of your questions satisfactorily? Are you clear?” His concerned demeanor, the pleasant tone of his voice, the gentleness of his touch, and the sincerity in his eyes began to erode all of the ugly comments made to me by his scholarly predecessors. In that moment and in that space, my professor had no idea of the years of pain he had begun to heal.

When I entered my home that evening the memory of my interaction with my professor was still very present with me. It felt like a warm blanket wrapped around me as if I were sitting on my couch holding a cup of hot chocolate with melting marshmallows on a quiet winter morning. Through my tears, I was able to erase those teachers’ faces, their names, their authoritative voices, their physical abuse, and their personal opinions. Due to that pedagogical teacher-

student moment I am no longer haunted or intimidated when I cross the threshold of a classroom; instead, I feel safe and most of all welcomed.

It is true that my prior experiences should have inhibited me from realizing my full humanity; however, the liberatory praxis that my professor extended toward me provided a space for me to re-create my lived experience so that, “through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (Freire, 1970, p. 29). I believe Freire, Greene, hooks, and Dewey would agree with me when I assert, “I experienced a moment of transcendence through one teacher’s pedagogical practice.” This experience allowed me to transcend further toward meeting my human condition.

In the next chapter I discuss surviving my marriage and divorce by embracing my imagination through fantasy. I describe my oppressive marriage and I also talk about the warning signs I ignored through recurring dreams.

CHAPTER V

SURVIVING MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE THROUGH FANTASY

Many husbands are able to use their power as wage earners to abuse their wives or commit infidelity with impunity. Because dissolution of the marriage creates the most significant vulnerability for women, it is often enough for a husband to threaten to leave in order to perpetrate any number of abuses against his wife. (Scanzoni & Scanzoni, 1988, p. 73)

In this chapter I discuss surviving my marriage and divorce by embracing my imagination through fantasy. I incorporate my lived experiences as part of a qualitative study that describes my oppressive marriage. I also talk about accidental ethnography, the warning signs in particular, I ignored through recurring dreams.

According to Poulos (2009), "So, one of my current methodologies for engaging embodied ethnographic research is to seek to read my dreams, writing them into story, weaving, if you will, a dreamstory" (p. 60).

I explore the escalation of my childhood fantasies to one's of intricate scenes of adult intimacy. I share how I worked through self-depreciation after my divorce. Finally, I discuss how writing fantasy romance novels enabled me to regain self-appreciation which propelled me toward transcendence allowing me to meet my human condition.

The Dream . . .

I was walking down the aisle in a beautiful white wedding gown smiling with pride behind a sheer white veil. While I was walking trying to concentrate on my short rehearsed strides to the rhythm of the music, Here Comes The Bride; I was distracted. I could not help but notice that the moaning and groaning was penetrating the harmonious melody. I remember looking to my right and wondered where my father had gone. I could not believe that he was not at my side walking me down the aisle. When I was midway down the aisle I could see water coming from the sides of the pews. I quickened my pace because it seemed as though the water was chasing me. I tried to lift my wedding gown to protect it from getting wet, but it felt like lead. Panic struck me and my pace hastened toward the altar. The closer I got the more the water began to rise and the moaning intensified. Right when I reached the altar, a well groomed hand extended and I grabbed for it right before the water rose above my head . . .

I had this dream every night for two weeks before I actually got married. Additionally, I had two fittings for my wedding gown and each time I put the gown on my body I had to literally take it off in haste and race to the bathroom to empty my stomach and my bowels. I remember clearly the Hispanic seamstress stating to me with a thick rich accent, "Mommy, are chu sure chu need to do this? Que? Every time chu put this on chu get sick. Maybe this is a sign chu no need to do this. Eh, Mommy?"

Five years after I said “I do,” I was in the bathroom combing my hair when I realized that I saw a stranger staring at me in the mirror. I remember leaning forward to inspect the image somewhat hesitantly. That reflection couldn’t be me. The person I was looking at didn’t possess signs of life. There was no smile where one used to be. Instead there was a nervous twitch at the corner of my lips. Where my eyes used to sparkle, I was actually using makeup to hide the minor bruise from where I had been slapped to the hard wood floor the night before for disagreeing with my ex-husband in front of our house guests. I believe the only reason I stopped long enough to even notice this stranger was because I couldn’t do anything with my hair. I was so frustrated because I was running late for work and my hair would not cooperate with me. Where my hair was once shoulder length and thick it was now broken off and thinned. As I combed my hair I could actually see it falling into the bathroom sink with every stroke. “Who is that woman?” I asked myself. “I know that’s not me! It can’t be me!”

I don’t know how long I cried, all I know is that I did. I also know that I asked God to forgive me for being disobedient to God. He told me not to marry my ex-husband. God warned me with the dreams and the wedding dress. I had no clue until I heard myself moaning and groaning on the black and white checkered bathroom tile floor that those disturbing sounds in my dreams actually belonged to me. The water rising above my head drowning me was a

representation of the river of tears that I would cry the greater majority of my marriage.

According to society, a marriage is a union between a man and woman who promise to love and cleave to one another until death do them part. In a physically abusive marriage, it's the "*until death do them part*" that becomes more realistic than they know that leads marriages towards divorce. Initially when a man and woman enter into holy matrimony it is because the relationship is harmonious and love flows fluidly between the individuals. Often, relationships operate at their best before these vows are established. It has been my experience that once the marriage vows were stated in my own marriage and that license came in the mail my marriage took a change for the worst. My ex-husband felt as though he owned me especially once the official marriage license arrived in the mail. My sister and I were in shock when he literally shook the license in my face claiming, "You're mine now!" as though I was his property. I remember feeling the bottom fall out of my stomach as I watched him walk away. My sister held me tightly in her arms as though she were protecting me assuring me that everything would be alright, but that could not have been further from the truth - - everything was not, "alright."

In the beginning of my marriage it was my assumption that I had married my knight in shining armour. I had mistakenly thought that I would live happily ever after in a loving and non-threatening relationship because this is what

society described, this is what my family portrayed, and this is what I wanted to believe. In wanting or needing to believe that I could indeed attain the house with the white picket fence, I subscribed to the social roles that society had subliminally implanted into my thought process. The man was supposed to be the provider and protector and the woman was supposed to be the nurturer and care taker of the home. Though I had a full-time job I was somewhat confused and bewildered why my ex-husband was unable to remain employed or obtain employment on a regular basis. Over the years his inability to maintain employment played a profound role in my mental and physical well-being.

Initially, I took it upon myself to help him find employment, but somehow it became my responsibility to find him employment by combing through the job listing section in the daily newspaper. Whenever I found an advertisement that seemed appropriate for him I would contact the employer, set up the actual interview, and give him the information. As Stephanie Coontz (2006) points out in her book, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy*, achieving equity in marriage is less a problem for couples and more from policies in a society where traditional roles are valued. She writes,

The big problem doesn't lie in differences between what men and women want out of life and love. The big problem is how hard it is to achieve equal relationships in a society whose work policies, school schedules and social programs were constructed on the assumptions that male breadwinner families would always be the norm. Tensions between men and women today stem less from different aspirations than from the difficulties they face translating their ideals into practice. (p. 29)

Society had not hinted to nor prepared me for playing the social triple role of mother slash wife slash provider.

While growing up the ethos in my home was that my father worked and performed the majority of the “household chores” in particular, cooking, while my mother worked and practiced the art of being a professional student. My father never once attempted to oppress any desires she had. In fact, he went out of his way to support her, especially when it came to her education. My mother has three undergraduate degrees and she’s back in school, yet again, because she’s addicted to academia.

I expected my ex-husband to help me around the house especially when he was not working. I also expected him to cook since he was certainly a much better cook than me. I expected him to take control of the kitchen just as my father had. My mother’s step-father even dominated in the kitchen so it was practical for me to assume that my ex-husband would do the same. Additionally, he appeared to enjoy cooking; however, it never once occurred to me that the only time he would lift a finger to cook would be when we had guests so he could receive all of the accolades. I expected him to support me when I wanted to return to school just as I had witnessed my father do so many times for my mother, but my ex-husband refused.

After being married for a few years my ex-husband and I had developed two different ideologies regarding marriage. For him, “Marriage is a

quintessentially gendered institution embodying expectations of male dominance and female subservience” (Hill, 2006, p. 71). For me, “Dear God, please forgive me for being disobedient to You.” It was not until we were arguing one day that out of anger he screamed, “You want to be smarter than me!” did I understand why he would tear my school books apart or toss them down the incinerator. In his opinion we were equally educated because we both had two years of college. For me to surpass him in education would make us inequitable academically.

The inequality in labour was often more than I could handle as I worked long hours. After working nine or ten hours as an engineering secretary at MetLife Insurance Company I would come home and start working all over again. My second job as house keeper, cook, entertainer, and mistress began as soon as I crossed the threshold of our apartment. On many nights I welcomed his yawn because I knew then I would finally be able to lay down and go to sleep.

When pay day came I brought my money home for distribution. After the bills were paid we would split what was left. More often than not I would still have to split my half with him because he would lavish my hard earned money on his friends which left him with no money to go job hunting or to purchase his own habits. I was not allowed to make decisions about purchasing anything for myself such as clothing or our home. I never did understand why I was not allowed to spend the money I earned. All I knew was that doing so was not worth the altercation that followed. Every now and then I would risk buying

myself a new dress or a new pair of shoes only to lie and tell him my mother bought it for me to keep an argument from ensuing.

These role attitudes were so hard for me to subscribe to when I saw my parents share so much in their marriage. There were no designated gender roles in our family; however, my ex-husband had the notion that he was entitled to power simply because of his gender. Scanzoni and Scanzoni (1988) remind us that men often hold power and are valued most often:

Men hold power in the outside world, and women hold power in the home, and are primarily responsible for the home and its work . . . Men, responsible for financial support of the family, develop the more valued resources of earning power and prestige; this power, combined with their traditional patriarchal position of final authority, allow them exemption from many of the responsibilities of the day-to-day maintenance of family and home. (p. 73)

Due to the fact that I mistakenly thought my marriage was constructed on equality I believed that I should have some governing power somewhere. I did not want to feel as though I was merely a legal whore (wife), who brought her money home to her legal pimp (husband),

While deference to the husband on many of the aforementioned issues might seem like just compensation for his financial contribution, it only serves to underscore the injustice women suffer in performing the bulk of unpaid labor in the family. The compromise arrived at means men contribute paid labor and women contribute the bulk of unpaid labor. One gender, by virtue of the social value attached to his contribution, is squarely in charge. Furthermore, in many instances the husband's exercise of power does not end at relatively innocuous decisions such as

whether or not to buy a new television, or where the family will go on vacation.

Many husbands are able to use their power as wage earners to abuse their wives or commit infidelity with impunity. Because dissolution of the marriage creates the most significant vulnerability for women, it is often enough for a husband to threaten to leave in order to perpetrate any number of abuses against his wife. (p. 73)

My father always told me that it took more than a man being born with a penis to qualify as a man. I never understood the significance of that statement until I married. I understood the family structure as I had been raised to see it—as a nurturing balance of power not as a dictatorship and oppressive union.

One might be wondering how I was able to ignore all of these premarital warnings, but I never realized that having a cross-sex friendship would turn into marriage. While taking a Relational Communication course in my doctoral program I learned that a great majority of strong cross-sex friendships develop while in college and my relationship was no different. I met my ex-husband in a public speaking course while attending college. If I had known that my cross-sex friendship would have led to the life altering experiences that I had with him I would have most likely dropped that public speaking course.

Though he was ten years my senior he looked extremely youthful. He was also tall, lean, physically fit, and he was an extremely good listener. We shared information in sort of an open and disclosure way at the initial part of our friendship. I told him something personal and he did the same. Our

conversations for a long time were held at school or across the street from the school in the Spanish diner. We rarely spoke on the telephone, but I do know that I was starting to become anxious to see him every day. Actually, he was my first cross-sex friend and I appreciated the relationship immensely. It wasn't until one day my car broke down and he spotted me trying to start it did I really see him as a captivating man. He did that manly thing and fixed my car. He even followed me home to make sure my car did not knock off along the way. According to Rawlins (2008), "Men and women each have their own strengths that are not available in same-sex friendships" (p. 111). I was out done; he was taking care of me. No man other than my father had done that.

My ex-husband and I had been friends almost a year and had never embraced nor did we ever visit one another's homes. In fact he treated me more like a "buddy." When we parted at school he would tap my shoulder like guys do and go on his way. Well, I should have let that tap be enough on that day, but I didn't. I invited him in and he accepted. We talked intimately and worked on our public speaking presentations. I practiced my persuasive speech, he gave me constructive criticism and I did likewise for him. After we finished our homework we walked up the block, ordered some Chinese food, purchased a bottle of wine for me and some beer for him. Again, he enacted the social manly role and paid for everything.

Oh my goodness I remember thinking that this was the best Chinese food I had ever eaten. Euphoria was dominating the air. I was gaining insight into how men operated. I was excited to know that he was confirming the talks that my father had shared with me about the ways of men: “A member of the opposite sex provides an ‘insider’s perspective’ on the other sex. . . . Cross-sex friends trade information concerning each gender’s point of view” (Rawlins, 2008, p. 112). The conversation was stimulating and we talked well into the night. We even washed the dishes together and he actually took out the trash. When we both realized the time he gathered his books and I walked him toward the door. He hugged me for the first time and I embraced him back with a “church” hug. He looked down at me, pulled me into his body, kissed me on the forehead, and left. My father warned me about the forehead kiss. He told me that it was deadly. My father told me that the forehead kiss was safe yet had just enough sex appeal to make a woman weak. I don’t know, maybe I didn’t believe that a simple kiss on the forehead could be so sensual, or it could have been the wine. All I knew was that I was discombobulated afterward. Rawlins (2008) explains that it is human nature and social destiny for cross-sex friends to cross the boundaries,

They assert that what happens between cross-sex friends is not merely a matter of will; it is human nature. Since people are supposed to reproduce, basic primal attraction can get in the way of friendship. It is natural to express cross-sex closeness sexually. Meanwhile, the social pressures for cross-sex friends to recognize “the true nature” of

their relationship are also too compelling to be resisted. Most cross-sex intimate relationships start off as friendships, but cross-sex friendship will evolve into “something else” sooner or later. It cannot be avoided because of the natural course of close relationships between men and women. (p. 113)

The “something else” for me was that forehead kiss. Simultaneously, his dominance consumed, excited, and stimulated me at that very moment. I should have known that he was going to come back.

While I was on my way to my bedroom my doorbell rang; I knew it was him. My heart was pounding against my chest as I looked through the peep hole—it was him! When I opened the door I took his hand and guided him across the threshold. Our first kiss was unbelievable. He literally engulfed me in his arms and picked me up effortlessly. There was no strain on his face. His arms did not quiver. His knees did not buckle. You see, not many men can lift a big woman. At the time, I weighed close to 280 pounds. Trust to believe, it is every big woman’s dream to have a man, her man, literally pick her up off of her feet. I wrapped my legs around his waist and well you can use your imagination about what happened next.

When I awoke the following morning he was looking down at me with a smile speaking wonderful Words of Affirmation and literally asked me to marry him. Marry him?! My eyes were now wide open. I had merely thought we were just hooking up for the evening; “hooking up” refers to “when two people agree to engage in sexual behavior for which there is no future commitment” (Rawlins,

2008, p. 117). Never did I expect that one night of lust and passion would turn into a marriage proposal. In truth, what I was hoping for, as shallow as it may seem, was to be friends that had regular sex or in today's terms become friends with benefits. I was actually following the cardinal rule which states that one is not supposed to expect a relationship to develop just because sex came into play. He had thrown me completely off guard by asking me to marry him. I mean he was the man. I would have thought that he would have appreciated personal gratification without commitment.

The cross-sex friendship gives validity to my relationship with my ex-husband. What happened between us that one fateful evening lead to a twelve year marriage that was actually based on sex. He became everything to me because my friendships fell by the wayside after I married, "once married, spouses embrace the "couple companionate ideal" in which each person is expected to meet all of the other's needs, including those for close friendship" (Rawlins, 2008, p. 131). The relationship that I had with my ex-husband has made me more suspicious of cross-sex relationships. After reading Rawlins, I believe I'm too afraid that I will lose focus, literally get swept off my feet, and fall all over again.

My pastor tells us that "falling" in love *is* a mistake. He says that people should *walk* into love; thereby, being conscious of what they are doing. Actually he could have a point. The actions my ex-husband exhibited (fixing the car,

paying for dinner, and taking out the trash) were enacted social roles. In actuality he was not this equitable man who believed in equality around the house especially when it came to duties he firmly believed that a woman should be performing.

It is my belief that the equitable distribution of household work and paid labor between men and women in a marriage should be shared. The institution of marriage is a sacred trust that should not be violated with traditions, social norms, or even perceived beliefs. The institution of marriage should operate according to the people who are living together in that marriage and not on the auspices of myths. As long as marriage is operating in a mythical perception, then some couples will continue to be delusional about its intent. For instance, in my opinion, Teddy Pendergrass's popular song, *50/50 Love* made society think that love can be broken down and dished out in equal portions. It may happen in some marriages, but it did not happen in mine. It has been my experience that there is always one person who gives more in a relationship and there is always one person who willingly receives that nurturing. Most often than not the nurturer is the woman.

Obviously my marriage was one of oppression as I was emotionally thwarted, mentally handicapped, and sometimes physically abused. The dominant presence of my ex-husband sometimes made me forget what I was even intending to say in a social setting. His presence was so debilitating that

while he was communicating grossly exaggerated stories he looked toward me to support him. In being the answerable wife, I played the role and supported his truth with a little “t” merely to avoid going home and receiving correction behind closed doors. Freire (1970) tells us that the, “oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires” (p. 29).

Clearly I remember the “first” time my ex-husband slapped me to the floor with one stroke of his huge hand. Though I was in a daze, I attempted to pick myself up from the hard wood floor, but due to the pounding and spinning in my head, I fell back down. The right side of my face was burning, stinging as though hundreds of bees were assaulting me. My ex-husband stooped down and tried to assist me, but I snatched away from him and backed into the foyer wall trembling and whimpering like a puppy that had been chastised by its master for wetting the floor or for chewing an expensive shoe.

Through my tears, I could hear him apologizing, emphatically swearing that he would “never put his hands on me again.” I looked toward the locked door wondering if I could summon enough strength to get up and run. My eyes scanned the multiple locks and I knew I would never be able to get them all unlocked before he would stop me. It was then that I saw it forming right before my eyes. I saw the clouds, first, and my breathing began to relax. My ex-

husband's voice faded as I watched this tropical island emerge boldly from the ocean. I could hear and see the foaming waves softly caressing the white sand. The hint of honeysuckle and the smell of the fresh salt air penetrating my nostrils replaced the taste of blood in my mouth. I looked closer because I saw myself lying on the crystal white sand. I watched as a tall, dark-skinned man emerged from the ocean and made his way toward me. When he reached my unconscious body he bent down, caressed my face, and picked me up effortlessly in his arms. He carried me up the beach toward a thick forest and laid me at the base of a huge oak tree. He sat down and placed my upper torso in his arms and caressed my face until I began to stir. When I opened my eyes I looked into his warm, light-brown eyes and I began to cry because his eyes were so full of compassion and love. "I got you, Woman. No one will hurt you here," he assured me with a deep, thick Caribbean accent. "No one will ever hurt you here. Sleep now."

I remember being jolted back to reality as I watched my fantasy world fade away from me. I must have reached for it because before I realized it my ex-husband was grabbing my flailing hands, trying to calm me down. I was so confused because it all seemed so real. My head hurt severely and I collapsed against his chest crying. He picked me up, carried me to our bedroom and laid me on the bed. The next thing I knew, a wave of ecstasy was cascading over me. I didn't know what was happening to me. All I knew was that the man on

top of me was not my husband. Those were not his dark and warm full lips pressed against mine. Those were not his hands cupping my behind pulling me closer to him so he could penetrate me deeper. That was not his rhythm stroking me to ecstasy. That was not his voice telling me that he loved me.

Though I certainly experienced an unhealthy marital relationship, fantasizing afforded me the opportunity to immediately escape the volatile experiences threatening me and offered me a place of solace until the violation was over. Most often I had no recollection of what actually happened until days later when my unconsciousness awakened slowly to provide my consciousness with glimpses of the altercation. I was able to endure even those scenes of reality because I quickly submerged myself into another fantasy to avoid having to deal with my reality. David Beres's (1962) book, *The Unconscious Fantasy* highlights the effects of my fantastical experiences. He writes that

the unconscious fantasy can only be assumed. We surmise its existence from the effects it produces, as the physicist surmises the existence of the electrical particles of atoms by the effects they produce. We assume the unconscious fantasy from the neurotic symptom, the dream, or other derivatives, but once it is expressed it becomes a conscious manifest. (p 309)

Throughout my marriage I utilized fantasy as a metacognitive tool and in doing so I have been able to let these creative fantasies consciously manifest into five African American contemporary Christian romance novels that depict healthy relationships where the man is the provider, the lover, and the hero

instead of the oppressor. It is due to this conscious manifestation that I have been able to journey down the road of self-discovery and be healed through writing romance novels that allowed me to recognize my unfulfilled potential. Through publishing these novels, my potential has been realized, my self-efficacy has been affirmed, and my transcendence has elevated to new heights which Sartre (1956) refers to as transcending-transcendence because I have completed a personal journey. I was now on the road to regaining my authentic being.

Freire (1974) explains that the oppressed often lose sight of their authentic selves. He says,

They suffer from a duality that is implanted in the “inside” of their being. They discover that, not being free, they cannot become authentic beings. They want this being but are afraid to be. They are themselves and at the same time they are the other, projected on them as oppressed consciousness. Their struggle becomes a dilemma between being themselves or being divided. (p. 26)

My defining moment of realizing that divorce would be imminent was when I discovered that my ex-husband was having yet another affair. For some reason discovering her identity awakened my consciousness. Though she was not his first adulterous indiscretion she was someone who embraced me with a kiss on the cheek and regularly ate at my dinner table. I truly considered her a friend; therefore the sisterly betrayal was more devastating. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) explains how Freire examines the oppressed consciousness,

The oppressed consciousness is created, maintained, and ultimately transformed into critical consciousness. This transformation signals genuine inner liberation, which must accompany outer liberation (the fall of dictators and oppressive situations. (Freire, 1970, p. 10)

In working on my outer liberation I soon found myself at an attorney's office filing for divorce. While initiating this process I felt liberation slowly creeping up my spine. My solemn face regained some semblance of a smile and the constant nervous feeling in the pit of my stomach was replaced with the anticipation of freedom and hope for a future void of fear and oppression.

Initially, when my community of married friends read about the divorce in the newspaper they were astonished. I should not have been surprised when their actions of support leaned toward my ex-husband. I had done an excellent job in displaying a united front publicly that no one wanted to believe that he was actually the culprit in our marriage. In hindsight, I now realize that I should not have been so secretive about my oppression because when it was all said and done no one believed me because I never "sported" a broken nose, a blackened eye, or a busted lip.

My friends had no clue that most mornings I found it difficult to raise out of bed because he would have handled me as though I was a Raggedy Ann doll the previous night simply because I did not desire to watch a television program with him or desired to go to bed before him. No one understood that at two o'clock in the morning I was literally being drug out of bed and down the hallway into the

kitchen and forced to prepare him a full course meal simply because he was hungry. I learned to sleep lightly because I knew he would make such requests of me at any given hour. It did not take long before I stopped complaining and fighting for my sleep. I learned it was just easier to meet his requests no matter the hour of the morning because the confrontations that ensued when I protested were more than I could emotionally or physically bear.

With the exception of my maternal grandmother, no one knew what I was enduring. It was my maternal grandmother who advised me on ways of protecting myself since I chose to remain in my marriage. I was not ready to physically leave my husband; therefore, I thought it best to keep my unhealthy experiences to myself least I forgive him for his ill treatment of me while my family and friends harbored ill will towards him. It seemed as though the divorce process was over before I batted an eye. I had survived it; the divorce. After twelve years of marriage I was physically free!

Being labeled a “divorced” woman wreaked havoc on my social identity and lowered my self-efficacy for a season. Society had been unforgiving and I had been even harsher on myself. At the constant behest of my married friends for an instant, I entertained the idea of reconciliation and allowed them to convince me to be present at a couple’s barbeque which to this day I wish I had never attended.

When I arrived at the barbeque I was apprehensive because most of my marital friends had abandoned me so seeing them for the first time after the divorce was nerve racking. Instead of entering the house from the back yard I rang the front door bell as though I was a first time guest. My friend welcomed me with opened arms and asked, "Why was I ringing the doorbell?" Usually, I would have just knocked then entered her house. My behavior had changed because I had been made to feel as though I was an outsider. When I entered her house and walked into the kitchen, where a heavy spades game was ensuing, the conversation halted. I tried breaking the silence by saying hello to everyone with a nervous smile, but instead of a verbal response I was literally met by couples leaving the kitchen as though I was contagious.

My feelings were so hurt that I turned to leave, but my friend held my arm and asked me to stay. She assured me that once my ex-husband arrived we could talk, I would see where "I went wrong," we would reconcile as husband and wife, and we could all get back to being a family again. Excuse me, but did she say, "I would see where I went wrong?" Before I realized it I was being verbally assaulted by others at the barbeque for leaving my husband. One woman actually shouted in my face, "You should be ashamed of yourself! He's a good man!" That was followed by my friend's husband telling me how much my ex-husband missed me. And I should be *glad* that, "He still loved and wanted me back!" That was more than I could bear and before I knew it I had screamed

back, “He’s going to love me to *death!* *He’s beating me!*” The kitchen went silent for a second time while I volunteered all of the abuse and infidelity I endured just to keep his reputation intact. Afterward I told them all if they thought he was so great then one of them could marry him! I left their house espousing a few choice words and have never attempted to rekindle my relationship with any of them. I believe I acted appropriately because Freire (2000) says that “one basic assumption . . . man’s ontological vocation (as he calls it) is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively” (p. 32).

What’s actually ironic is that almost one year later I was in the mall shopping when I saw the woman who had berated me in the kitchen. I made an attempt to act as though I did not see her and walk in the opposite direction, but she stepped directly in my path. In that space she apologized for her behavior and asked me to forgive her. I was so taken aback that I was at a loss for words. She told me that she was angry with me because I was leaving her alone. She admitted that she knew I was being abused even before I filed for divorce because she recognized the nervous twitches I unconsciously displayed; the soft hanging up of the telephone as soon as I heard his key hit the lock; and the way I constantly checked my wrist watch for the time when we were out. According to Freire (2000),

almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors the very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressor. This is their model of humanity. (p. 45)

I embraced her tightly and prayed for her in my heart right there in the mall not caring who was watching. Afterward she said that she wished she had the courage to leave her husband, but he was all she ever knew. As far as I know she's still being oppressed today. I cannot tell you how glad I was that I was able to regain my physical freedom; however, being free in my mind took much more than signing a piece of paper. It was another awakening and process all together.

Yes, I had been able to move my physical body from an oppressive environment; however, my mind was still enslaved. In my attempt to navigate through this new life style as *Ms. Dick*, I had to relearn how to perform the most basic tasks in life. For example, the task of grocery shopping and cooking dinner was the most difficult. For well over five or six months after I divorced, I routinely purchased food as though I was shopping for my ex-husband. I continued to purchase his favorite foods, snacks, and beverages while I remained reserved in purchasing foods that satisfied my own taste buds.

After preparing dinner I would often call my family or friends over to eat because I had cooked more than I would ever consume in one setting or even

the next day. It was a dear friend who gently brought this to my attention after she watched me clean, season, and batter eight pork chops. She asked,

Who are you cooking all those pork chops for, Marrison and why did you make such a big pot of apple sauce? And why do you have beer in the refrigerator when you don't drink it and why did you buy a strawberry cake when you know you like devil's food? You do realize that you're not married anymore, don't you?

I just stood right there in my kitchen staring at the food. Freire (1970) explains that "though the oppressor may be gone his scars are long lasting" (p. 63).

Even though I was newly divorced and living alone I was still operating out of habit in my marital routine when it came to most circumstances in my life. I constantly second-guessed myself which made it difficult for me to make on-the-spot decisions for the most simplistic things like what wattage should I purchase for a light bulb. Freire explains that self-depreciation is real. I wondered when I completely surrendered my independence. Prior to marrying my ex-husband I would have simply taken the light bulb out of the lamp looked at it for wattage and gone to the store and purchased one. What was so difficult about that simple task? According to Freire (1970),

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything - that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive—that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (p. 63)

Truthfully, I was ashamed to tell people that I was divorced or even mark it on an application when applying for credit. I did not know which one was worst having people think that I was over thirty and never been married or listen to the tone of their voice when they said, "you're divorced, hum?" while reviewing my application for credit. Fortunately, times have changed as society has become more aware of volatile relationships and various forms of mental and physical oppressions forced upon women. Fortunately, divorce has been the saving grace as well as a life line for many women to enter back into social existence.

Increasingly within our society, it is incumbent upon all members to desire to constantly improve and better themselves educationally, emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually without it being egotistically beneficial. Self-transcendence encompasses all of society's personal expectations and it is one that I can personally equate with a personal journey that ultimately leads to self-discovery. In his book, *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1956) utilizes transcendence to describe self-progression. He talks about moving beyond the negative experiences as well as the perpetrators. In being able to get beyond the past we are transcending to more holistic beings. He says,

When I make who I am the object of my reflection, I can take that which now lies in my past as my object, while I have actually moved beyond this. I am therefore no longer who I am. (p. 107)

Inasmuch, Dr. Leland R. Kaiser writes that

self-transcendence is growing into your unfulfilled potential. Self-transcendence is moving beyond the orbit of your ego into your soul. Self-transcendence is gaining a new concept of self that is much expanded and includes more of the universe. Your little self disappears and is replaced by a vast self as old lines of separation disappear and former distinctions no longer bind you. You are part of much more than you know or imagine. The universe is interconnected. You are part of All That Is. The universe is non-local. You are everywhere. Only in the third dimension do you occupy such a small place in the scheme of things. (Kaiser, 2010, "The Search for Meaning," para. 4)

When we understand that we are responsible for the quality of our own lives, we gain access to the power in our lives, on a continuous basis. In order for self-transcendence to evolve, we have to be willing participants and see the personal need for change. Those embarking on self-transcendence soon begin to understand that the heart of self-transcendence is an illuminating process that shines a prospective light on our soul regardless of what society dictates for our lives.

In my oppressive marriage, through fantasy, I was able to actually "move beyond" the abuse and the oppression and be successful on my own terms—transcending-transcendence. In transcending-transcendence, I have been able to ground myself and be just as Sartre (1956) describes, "I am therefore no longer who I am" (p. 107).

Let me be clear, when I first started writing romance novels I did not do so to make money. It has been my experience that the process of writing is

transformative as it became a purging tool for me; it was a way of reshaping me. At the time, writing kept my thoughts occupied during the process of my divorce and afterward. When I completed my first novel after nine months of constant writing it was as though I had given birth. I felt a release of pain exit my body and it was instantly replaced with a sweet feeling of reprieve. And it was in that reprieve when I realized that I was cradling empowerment in my hands. And I named my new born baby, my initial transcending force—*Déjà vu Desires* (1999). In utilizing my fantasies to write out my pain, I have been able to author four other African American contemporary Christian romance novels entitled, *Angel Fire* (2003), *Cousins* (2000), *Letters* (2001) and *Them's Eve's Daughters* (2000).

Creating a work of art from fantasy enabled me to actually transcend oppression. Consciously, I was remaking myself, my lived experiences, through my romance novels. Whenever I was being physically oppressed during my marriage, my mind would seek refuge in a fantasy world where my fantastical husband was my protector, my lover, and my provider. In reflection one book in particular, *Letters* (2001) does depict an abusive marital situation. It is described below:

“Get away from me, Ken. Just leave me alone. You promised,” she cried as she crawled away from him and rested against the opposite wall . . .

“Baby please, you know I love you.”

“You’re going to love me to *death*, Kenneth.”

"I don't know what came over me, Shelly, please. Come on, let me put some ice on your face before it swells."

"Don't touch me, Ken. Get away from me."

"Okay, okay, here, you do it," Ken said, offering her a towel filled with ice.

Reluctantly, Shelly took the towel and placed it on her bruised face. Where did I go wrong? What did I do to deserve this? she asked, herself. Lord knows I should have listened to my sister.

"Shelly, are you alright" he asked as he squatted in front of her. As Kenneth looked at Shelly, he noticed the splattered blood in her short thick black hair. He reached out to touch her.

"I'm fine, Kenneth. Just leave me alone," she said, moving her head out of his reach.

"I'm sorry, baby, I swear I never meant . . ."

"Never meant to what, Kenneth? Slap me in the face and punch me in my stomach? Is that what you never mean to do over and over and over again? What did I do this time? Can you tell me that? What did I do?" (Dick, 2001, p. 5).

Grumet (1987) reminds us that, "Our stories are the masks through which we can be seen" (p. 319) for it is from behind the mask that we give a true account of our lived experiences and it is in this lived experience that we reflect and find our true selves. Validation must first come from self-actualization—others will follow. In *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*, Norman Denzin (1997) believes that people often find ways of representing themselves. In reflecting upon my novels I realized that I had

indeed written about myself in my romance novels. Denzin explains that writers and readers conspire to create the lives they write and read about,

When a writer writes a biography, he or she writes him[self] or herself into the life of the subject written about. When the reader reads a biographical text, that text is read through the life of the reader. Hence, writers and readers conspire to create the lives they write and read about. Along the way, the produced text is cluttered by the traces of the life of the “real” person being written about. (p. 26)

I did not write the aforementioned scene intentionally in an attempt to tell my story publicly, but now I realize that Denzin’s theory does show a direct correlation from my personal life to my romance novels. For instance, Linda Kauffman (1993) has warned that, “Because we can never suppress ourselves in the texts we write (or read), we in fact create the persons we write about” (p. 132). Furthermore, Eisner (1997) says, “There is a related phenomenon between narrative that tells about a person’s life and the written text that represents that life” (p. 5).

In an attempt to explore an alternative way of representing myself I now believe that my romance novels are a defining moment in my historical narrative. Through my novels I have circumvented narrative and ethnographic problems that, “separate the researcher from the researched” (Eisner, 1997, p. 5) and I have also discovered an alternate way of representing myself and my fantasies through creative writing.

In the past, divorce was considered a stigma and often left women feeling disenfranchised. Today women can view it as a liberating experience, in particular, if the immediate milieu is oppressive. With oppression come subversive forces that are designed to drown and overwhelm you. As Freire states it is the “objectifying reality, by emerging, he finds the unity of his ego, as a subject encountering an object. Indeed, at this moment, likewise he breaks the false unity of his divided being and genuinely becomes a person” (p. 168).

I believe that divorce can be a positive experience in a woman’s life—a rebirthing if you will. It can be her opportunity to recreate herself and it can also be her defining moment. What saved me during this time was submerging myself in my fantasy world and writing romance. It is my desire that my lived experiences inspire and motivate other divorced women to have a voice through their own constructed vehicle of choice.

As the readers of this dissertation learn my personal narrative and possibly identify with it one could mistakenly think that I would have adopted a more feminist ideology and the truth of matter is that I have not. One might also think that my novels would show more independent women; instead, they speak more to traditional gender and social roles. I would like to take this opportunity to tell the readers of this dissertation that I do in fact subscribe to some feminist thinking but I do not completely agree with every aspect of it. In light of this I do believe that patriarchy does exist and aids in the oppression of women by not

acknowledging equity in relationships, jobs, and education. However, there is a side of me that thoroughly enjoys the “traditional roles” that men demonstrate as being the protector, provider and displaying social etiquettes such as opening doors, repairing and washing the car, mowing the lawn, and carrying heavy objects. I welcome and look for these attributes in a man because they allow me to be “feminine” as it is defined for me.

Within my marriage I was the major breadwinner, the wife, the lover, the best friend, the confidant, as well as step-mother to my ex-husbands two children. I was not opposed to holding any of these positions. What I had issue with was the fact that while I was willingly performing all of these roles I was still being oppressed. Feminist scholars such as bell hooks choose to not be completely defined by feminist ideology and nor do I. Just as I know that there are multiple and competing ways of learning and understanding knowledge; there are multiple and competing ways of being a feminist. Employing fantasy throughout my romance novels is simply my way of discovering my agency within relationship to my world.

In the next chapter I describe my initial introduction to the soul and purgatory through Catholicism. I explain the personal experience I had with the Black church which introduced me to the Dionysian way of worship; I define my unique experience with pastoral anesthetization, and I discuss how soul therapy strengthened my sense of purpose.

CHAPTER VI

HEART AND SOUL: REMAKING MYSELF THROUGH SOUL THERAPY

Soul therapy is about creating comforting wombs and womb-like experiences that nurture rather than denature the entire person throughout her or his lifetime. Why is this so important today? Because we are still stuck in the valley of the shadow of death. (Cooper-Lewter, 1999, p. 18)

In this chapter I describe my initial introduction to the soul through Catholicism and incorporate my interpretation of purgatory as I learned it as a child in Catholic school. I explain the personal experience I had with the Black church that introduced me to what Cornel West interprets as the Dionysian way of worship. I define pastoral anesthetization and talk about my unique experience with it. I discuss how soul therapy strengthened my sense of purpose, healed the gaping holes in my soul, and helped me to regain a healthy perspective on love and life. Additionally, I provide the definition of Black Grief and contrast it to my subjectivity within the Black church.

My first introduction to the soul was derived from Catholicism as I was reared and educated as a Catholic. I was taught by my religion teacher, who was a priest, first, that all good Catholics believe that God is the maker of heaven and earth, all that is visible and invisible, and that when God breathed inside of Adam's body the soul was formed. We were taught that the soul is the greatest

value of a person because the soul is that spiritual part of man that keeps us connected to God. We were taught that all souls living and dead would be Judged by Jesus Christ when He comes back to earth to reclaim His followers, but until that time if we by chance committed a venial sin prior to dying our souls would be sentenced to purgatory. Catholicism defines purgatory as

a third state before being admitted to heaven. According to Catholic doctrine, some souls are not sufficiently free from the temporal effects of sin and its consequences to enter the state of heaven immediately, nor are they so sinful as to be destined for hell either. Such souls, ultimately destined to be united with God in heaven, must first endure purgatory—a state of purification. In purgatory, souls “achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.” (Wikipedia, 2012, “Role,” para. 1)

From the time I was introduced to purgatory in elementary school I was taught to adopt a daily prayer regiment so that these souls could be purified and then released to heaven. In order that I not feel convicted I habitually prayed for the release of these souls for over thirty years. The rationale for purgatory is that

it is the traditional faith of Catholics that the souls in purgatory are not separated from the Church, and that the love which is the bond of union between the Church’s members should embrace those who have departed this life in God’s grace. Hence, since our prayers and our sacrifices can help those who are still waiting in purgatory, the saints have not hesitated to warn us that we have a real duty toward those who are still in purgatorial expiation. Holy Church through the Congregation of Indulgences, 18 December 1885, has bestowed a special blessing on the so-called “heroic act” in virtue of which “a member of the Church militant offers to God for the souls in purgatory all the satisfactory works which he will perform during his lifetime, and also all the suffrages which may accrue to him after his death” (Heroic Act, vol. VII, p. 292). The practice of devotion to the dead is also consoling to humanity and eminently worthy

of a religion which seconds all the purest feelings of the human heart. "Sweet", says Cardinal Wiseman (lecture XI), "is the consolation of the dying man, who, conscious of imperfection, believes that there are others to make intercession for him, when his own time for merit has expired; soothing to the afflicted survivors the thought that they possess powerful means of relieving their friend. (Hanna, 1911, "Utility of prayer for the departed," para. 1)

Imagine the confusion and disillusionment I felt in 1999 when Pope John Paul II declared that the term "purgatory" did not indicate a physical place, rather "a condition of existence" whatever that means. Excuse me but did he say, "a condition of existence?" The pessimistic feelings that engulfed me when hearing this news on television is indescribable. The disdain I thought I had released for Catholicism returned in a mighty way. Not only did I endure mis-educative and microaggressive experiences, was physically abused by the teachers within their educational system, but now I discovered years later that I had been intentionally lied to. Cooper-Lewter (1999) refers to this emotional bondage as paradigm of perpetration,

Let us talk again about perpetrators, starting once more with the slave master, who is the paradigmatic model. And let us keep in mind that the hardest abuse to heal is the kind that leaves no open wound, visible scar tissue, or bruises; and that the invisible but real abuse is usually the most damaging form of trauma a person or a people can experience. The fact is, too, that in such cases the perpetrator can more easily deny any attack, the victim can find such attack harder to prove, and the witness can justify doing nothing because of the lack of firm evidence. (p. 98)

The power and control associated with Catholicism is subliminally strong and long lasting. Yes, I will admit that the belief in purgatory strengthened my prayer life because for over thirty years, even when I denounced Catholicism, I still ritualistically prayed for the release of souls occupying this “physical space” between heaven and earth. In my mind I pictured an assembly line of souls coming and going as my prayers were sent up releasing the old souls while new souls took their place. My heart was heavy as a child because for years I lived in constant fear of my own soul being sentenced to purgatory. I wondered what “good” Catholic would be praying for me in the event that I died before I was absolved for my sins.

Today, I wonder what happened to my thirty years’ worth of purgatorial prayers. Where did they go? Did they ever help anyone? Should I still continue to pray for the souls—souls that were actually sitting nowhere? In 1999 I realized that I had to take personal responsibility for the condition of my own soul and not rely upon others to possibly pray me out of purgatory. I knew then that I had to strengthen my personal relationship with God by keeping His commandments to the best of my ability and by treating others better than I would want to be treated myself.

I was taught in my religion class that in order for the soul to remain untainted with any minor or major sin we had to have control of our minds, bodies, and actions. Furthermore, living a pure life would enable us to devote a

life of servitude to God. Our religion teacher was enamored with Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Augustine of Hippo. In particular, their doctrine on celibacy and their belief that the human soul was superior to the body in that the soul was not corporeal. Often we were taught about the sin of living with material goods and indulging in life's earthly treasures. We were constantly given Bible verses that spoke of individuals being asked by Jesus to give up their earthly possessions and donate them to the poor, in particular, Matthew 19:21: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasures in heaven: and come and follow me." The earthly treasures were really considered money and anything that made our flesh feel good.

In this class we were taught about the major four books in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), memorized prayers, refraining from ill wants, and how to recognize the call on our lives to give ourselves over to the priesthood or nunnery. As an aside, we were commanded to refrain from the Book of Revelations because we were not old enough to understand its teaching; therefore, an inaccurate interpretation would lead us to eternal damnation. To this very day I shudder when I near Revelations.

As an adult I can now see that my Religion class was used as a form of emotional manipulation. Nonetheless celibacy was a constant focus as well as the call to serve God at all cost. The whole pretext of these stories regarding both Aquinas and Augustine was to ensure a life of abstinence until marriage.

Our teacher told us stories of Aquinas running off prostitutes with a fiery stick to keep his celibacy and had us memorize and recite Augustine's fantastically long account of hearing his calling to the priesthood. I remember clearly the outrage my grandfather espoused and displayed regarding this particular homework assignment. Memorizing prayers was one thing, but this account of conversion was something altogether different. He believed it to be as Beck (2009) describes as "mindless memorization" (p. 6).

Regardless of his disdain for my religion teachers request he memorized it first, in order that he may help me do the same. In order for me to memorize this account I wrote it constantly for hours, days, and weekends at a time. I was finally able to recite it verbatim with my grandfather which made me very happy. The day finally came when each student was called to the front of the class alphabetically to recite Augustine's conversion to Christendom:

. . . I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig-tree, giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to Thee. And, not indeed in these words, yet to this purpose, spake I much unto Thee: and Thou, O Lord, how long? how long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry forever? Remember not our former iniquities, for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up these sorrowful words: How long, how long, "to-morrow, and tomorrow?" Why not now? why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?

So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighboring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take up and read; Take up and read." Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So checking the torrent of

my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me: and by such oracle he was forthwith converted unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. I seized, opened, and in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence. No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away. (St. Augustine of Hippo, 2009, pp. 135–136)

I know what you're thinking. You have got to be kidding. Surely I didn't have to memorize all of this. My response to you, the person reading this dissertation: "surely I did." What helped all of us immensely while reciting any memorized prayer or Biblical verse was the fact that those who knew it best would recite it silently while moving our lips in an exaggerated fashion. Operating in this manner created a classroom community which provided everyone with the opportunity to be successful in our audacious and ridiculous task.

A great part of being Catholic is learning to be humble and submissive at all cost no matter how much degradation one is exposed to. Regardless of my treatment by my teachers for some reason after learning about these conversions I wanted to become a nun. Truly as I memorized the account of Augustine's conversion I believed that I was being called to the nunnery. Instead of hearing children's voices I heard bells all around me while studying Aquinas

and Augustine. I was convinced that I was being called to the nunnery until one day I shared my experience with one of the nuns who I thought favored me. After I shared my experience with her she laughed heartily and told me that I would most likely get married, have children, and live happily ever after. After that conversation I never heard the bells again. I guess that was all for the best. I do not believe the nuns could have tolerated referring to me as Sister Dick.

In knowing that there are numerous rationale of the soul, Thomas Moore (1992) provides a different perspectives to caring for the soul. He believes that caring for the soul is a part of “serving the imagination” and “nursing the imagination” (p. xi) which is one of my main concerns in this dissertation.

According to Moore,

It is impossible to define precisely what the soul is. Definition is an intellectual enterprise anyway; the soul prefers to imagine. . . . Soul lies midway between understanding and unconsciousness . . . its instrument is neither the mind nor the body, but imagination. (p. xiii)

He also believes that the soul “is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and ourselves. It has to do with depth, value, relatedness, heart, and personal substance” (p. 5). All of which makes up the essence of the soul. But if indeed the soul possesses dimensions of experiences of our lives then does it have gaping holes if you will from those painful experiences? Cooper-Lewter (1999) would argue that it does.

It is considering if the soul has gaping holes from our lived painful experiences that I speak about Nicholas Cooper-Lewter's book, *Black Grief and Soul Therapy* (1999). When I speak about black grief and soul therapy I am coming from the standpoint of emotional, mental, and physical oppressions that have been internalized in the soul. *Black Grief and Soul Therapy* (1999) examines the aspects of Black grief that influences African American families as a process of overcoming multi-generational legacies of oppression which is transmitted and then internalized in the soul. In particular, Cooper-Lewter (1999) addresses how the Black church and societal standards through non-acknowledgement sometimes deepens the pain of marginalization. This pain is then transmitted across generations through the process of hegemonic internalized oppression.

Cooper-Lewter (1999) explains that Black Grief is the driving force behind African Americans congregating at the Black church. He asserts that it is the lack of acknowledgement of our unique and historical past and continued ill treatment that brings forth the grief while Soul Therapy assesses the multigenerational response to that historical grief. He postulates,

While black grief may have roots in utero, soul therapy is about creating comforting wombs and womb-like experiences that nurture rather than denature the entire person throughout her or his lifetime. Why is this so important today? Because we are still stuck in the valley of the shadow of death. (p. 18)

The negative grieving cycles of African Americans have evolved from their unique historical background. For African Americans, traditional practices from African cultures changed as they were brought to America as slaves; which in turn continues to serve as a function of internalized multi-generational oppression in African American communities.

Cooper-Lewter (1999) concludes that cycles of Black grief may depend on ancestral backgrounds, religious denominations, social status, and role expectations; however, spiritual abuse and soul drive-bys imposed by the hands of one's own culturally connected brother or sister are major influential factors. It has often been said for generations within the African American community that we (African Americans) can be our own worst enemies. A plethora of discussions have been held for generations attempting to answer this age old statement and the most recurring answer within our community is that it comes from slavery. It's the hegemonic internalized color caste system that has been reinforced within the Black community. You know the light skinned slaves (house Negroes) against the dark skinned slaves (field Negroes) which equates to internalized colorism. It is that "*thing*" inside of us that crab in the barrel mentality that kills my people.

Cooper-Lewter (1999) refers to this "*thing*" as soul drive-bys. He says that

in our willingness to do soul drive-bys on each other, a behavior that may also meet dominant-culture approval, decent, hard-working, and caring black souls are being shot to pieces for any number of personal reasons,

such as black folks hating to see others in the community do well. Some of us take little responsibility for decisions, yet want the world, including other struggling black folk, to pay for our unhappiness.

Some of us who do not work or go to school, and yet demand to be taken care of feel justified in raging against those who do get an education and who do work. In fact, the energy some of our soul gangsters put into destroying the hearts of others truly amazes: such energy and commitment is absent when it comes to personal growth and community-building. (pp. 31–32)

There is no crystal-clear way that African Americans experience Black grief; nonetheless, factors in the oppression of African Americans continue to plague us generations after generation. With generations of pain woven into our DNA the shame, guilt, and pain associated with Black grief remains hidden by masks of grief. Aware of the extensive grief in the Black church, leadership and laity are generally unprepared to analyze and provide “Soul Therapy” which at one point was the churches “Saving Grace”; hence, soul therapy is an answer and antidote that we once proudly and openly practiced.

Grief spreads like an epidemic throughout the Black community, and those who depend on churches and the pastor often get worse; therefore Cooper-Lewter (1999) argues that in order for recovery, appreciation, love, and forgiveness to take place one must return to being Soul Therapist in the face of experiences that say we are still unwanted, ugly, and untouchable. Soul Therapists represent a good, loving, caring God, not from a religious standpoint, but by embracing the world view of our ancestors which is spiritual. God is a just

God, and in the eyes of the Creator, we are wanted, beautiful, touchable, and should be treated as equals.

I know that anyone reading my dissertation will raise an eyebrow when I write that God warned me not to marry my ex-husband, but I intentionally chose to ignore the dreams and signs He clearly sent me because my ex-husband satisfied my flesh in ways I had never experienced. It is in this vein where I grappled with my soul's discourse because I knew I had intentionally been spiritually disobedient. Thomas Moore, in *Care of The Soul* (1992) writes, "One of the central difficulties involved in embarking on the care of the soul is grasping the nature of the soul's discourse" (p. 122).

In order for me to accept the nature of my soul's discourse I had to accept the role I played in my marriage. Could I have been more submissive to my ex-husband? Could I have been less argumentative and combative when I believed I was being violated verbally or physically abused? Could I have met his oppressive forces with compassion and love possibly causing his aggression to dissipate instead of escalating? I probably could have done all of the aforementioned; however, my spirit would not allow it. Instead, with every physical and verbal assault I fought back with every fiber of my being until I was unable to sustain the violation any longer at which point my fantasy world would take over. Unfortunately my stance had become "an eye for an eye." In

retrospect this was surely not a healthy attitude as it only lead to more aggression and oppression on my behalf.

In today's society African Americans seeking to be healed from emotional, psychological, and physical abuse often flock to the Black church for a spiritual cleansing and emotional healing and I was no different. According to Cooper-Lewter (1999) the Black church is the principal place where Black people end up when suffering from Black grief. Fortunately I found a sanctuary that would help me understand my willingness to remain in a marriage that afforded me no emotional or mental comfort and no environmental or financial security. How could I have remained in a relationship where my abuse was maliciously served to me by the hands and mouth of the man that I slept beside nightly for twelve years? To a great extent after my divorce I needed to be surrounded by people needing a cleansing and healing just like me and I found it at the Black church God lead me to.

The moment my feet touched the church parking lot I could feel roots being planted. Quite honestly I do not have the words to explain my experience. One would need the type of mustard seed faith that Matthew 17:20 describes, "And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of *mustard seed*, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall be removed; and nothing shall be

impossible unto you” in order to believe the super natural event that I am about to describe.

As I walked towards the church doors my heart beat quickened and I literally felt as though a warm hand was at my back gently ushering me toward the church. When I entered the threshold and took a few steps inside I looked toward the ceiling because I heard what sounded like a blanket blowing in a heavy brisk wind swooshing or popping above my head. Before I knew anything I felt that blanket completely cover my body and the weight of it literally took me down to the ground. The greeters rushed toward me offering their assistance because they assumed that I had tripped, but I did not trip. My body could not support the weight of the spiritual covering that had just been placed upon me.

I was escorted to the sanctuary on shaky legs and given a seat. I will admit that I was slightly embarrassed and confused. What was this *thing* that I could *feel* but could not see wrapped securely around me? In my seat I began to pray as the praise and worship team sang harmoniously. Right there in that seat I felt a cracking in my emotions. I had been divorced for almost six years and for the first time I actually cried for the loss of my marriage and shamefully admitted to myself that regardless of what I endured in my marriage I still loved my ex-husband. Cooper-Lewter (1999) describes this shame:

Once shame is internalized, it is characterized by a psychic numbness that becomes the foundation for a soul murder which conditioned every single relationship in our lives. To compensate for the powerful

pervasiveness of shame, people develop false selves, such as the falsity of always being cool. While false selves shelter people from the pain of their inner lonely selves, they diminish or destroy our human ability to grieve and get through the grief process. (p. 39)

In that space I tried to understand why my relationship with my ex-husband had been so volatile. Yes, I loved him, but I could no longer stomach the oppression. I wondered if I had not held tightly to the African American commandment of “keeping silent” if I could have somehow saved my marriage. Rarely did I divulge what was actually taking place within my marriage to anyone. In an attempt to hide my shame, I wore a superficial mask which created a false sense of security for my societal onlookers. In that sanctuary, in that collective space, I was able to finally rid myself of that mask of shame along with others seeking answers attempting to fill the gaping holes in our souls. The sound of weeping touched the core of my soul and it was there in that small Black church when I realized my collective subjectivity.

The Black church introduced me to a Dionysian way of purging and self-healing through worshiping and it has been a welcomed way of worshipping for me to this very day. According to Cornel West (2000), Black people have a Dionysian way of worshiping. West (1999) says:

The tension and anxiety produced by the harsh conditions of oppression accentuates this Dionysian aspect. Rhythmic singing, swaying, dancing, preaching, talking and walking—all features of black life—are weapons of struggle and survival. They not only release pressures and desperation,

they also constitute bonds of solidarity and sources for individuality. (p. 436)

In that holy space, collectively, we were all seeking some type of divine intervention from God. A spiritual healing that would penetrate the natural atmosphere affording us the strength to endure and forgive our oppressive realities and provide us with clear direction for our lives. Cooper-Lewter (1999) agrees that the Dionysian way of worshiping is a form of self-healing for African Americans. He says,

The activation of self-healing in the soul is helped by music, especially when music is synergistically connected to movement. The music that makes us feel best, as it rebuilds our requisite core beliefs amid fatiguing battles, can be stored up to ready us for upcoming bouts; and dance, with its persistent power and positiveness, can bring forth this “memory,” even amidst our most traumatic states of mind. (p. 104)

Had it not been for my relationship with God, an increasingly strong faith, and fantasy coupled with imagination and education, I would have surely gone asunder.

In seeking to cleanse and fill the gaping holes in our souls, Cooper-Lewter (1999) warns that “the black church is where black folks go when grief ridden” (p. 8). He also professes that the Black church is not as necessarily as healthy as we might expect it to be. He writes,

As a consequence of this lack of awareness and preparation, Black folk experiencing grief, particularly those emotionally dependent on churches

and pastors, often get worse rather than better; and the grief spreads like an epidemic throughout our communities. So, while the Black church has been viewed as the main way-station for Black folks needing healing, the deep hurt in our souls is often made deeper because we are really joining others who are not only stuck in grief-ruts but who are theologically and pastorally anesthetized. (p. 9)

The pastoral anesthetization that Cooper-Lewter (1999) refers to is when “pastors demand demigod-worship from their congregants and allow addictive relationships to develop with people trying to fill the holes in their souls through this kind of devotion” (p. 9). He also warns,

Some pastors may not be willing to admit it, but many know that this sort of attachment to the charisma of the clerical office can degenerate into abusive situations for women in particular, especially those for whom a favorite risk is the man of the cloth. Such women are able to go to church to get abused. (pp. 9–10)

For the purpose of this dissertation I would like to present my personal experience with pastoral anesthetization which differs greatly from Cooper-Lewter’s aforementioned description and I would also like to share my near death experience which resurfaced during a Bible study session. According to Marsh (2010) who researches out-of-body and near-death experiences,

Near-Death experiences are not vague, ill-defined journeys to a somewhere or elsewhere, consequent upon mind, soul or consciousness escaping a moribund or even dead, brain. . . . On the contrary, near-death experiences reflect brains recovering from their antecedent metabolic insults, manifested by subjects regaining their full conscious-awareness with memory of the event in its rightful, proper place. (p. 39)

It is from this standpoint of the near-death experience that I am referring to in this dissertation.

One night I attended a Monday evening Bible study session where my Pastor was discussing David and his personal relationship with God. He spoke of how David was God's favorite because no matter what David did he constantly chased after God. He followed that statement by saying, "Some of you don't even realize it, but God literally breathed His own breath inside of your body and brought you back to life. It was Him who was cradling you in His arms!" I cannot explain the emotion I felt. At that very moment my mind shifted to the last physical altercation that my ex-husband and I had.

The evening I attempted to leave my ex-husband is one I will never forget. We were in the heat of a physical altercation when he verbalized, "If I can't have you, nobody will!" It was at that moment that I was knocked onto our bed and a pillow soon covered my face. As I fought with all of my being for survival I could not remove him from atop my body nor could I remove the pillow that he was forcing upon my face. All I remember thinking was this is an awful way to die and I was extremely saddened that my parents would have to discover that I had died at the hands of my husband. I asked God to forgive us both as I felt life ebbing away from me. Suddenly I was hovering above my body watching the scene unfold before me. I could see my ex-husband sitting on top of me shaking me

attempting to revive me. I could hear him screaming my name repeatedly stating how “sorry” he was. He was begging me to “wake up.”

I felt a peacefulness overtake me that circumvented my fantasy world by leaps and bounds. The smell of sweet flowers entered my nostrils and my spirit was penetrated with an indescribable joy. There was also an iridescent light surrounding me. I no longer cared about what was happening beneath me. All I wanted was to be in the place where that smell was, where that joy was abounding. I heard a voice tell me that I couldn't go there that it wasn't my time. I protested adamantly I wanted to be where the Peace was. I remember feeling an indescribable love penetrating me. I remember reaching upward begging God to keep me. Marsh (2010) would describe my desire to remain in this transcendent space as reluctance to return to earth. He says,

During the recovery phase from each category of assault, subjects experienced transcendent episodes of beautiful, vividly coloured surroundings, saw deceased relatives, were deliriously happy, and underwent such highly emotive feelings that they were reluctant to return to earth. (p. 39)

When I looked down I saw my ex-husband's body fly off of me and it appeared as though he was pinned to the wall. I saw the fear and panic in his eyes. I looked back at my body and I was being cradled, as if in a parent's arms, but I could not see a physical person. What I did see was white smoke coming

from the ceiling and encapsulating my face. It was at that moment when I could feel my spirit or soul, if you will, being pulled back inside of my lifeless body.

When I awoke hours later and sat on the side of the bed, I felt rejuvenated in my body, mind, heart, and spirit. Normally after a physical altercation I felt sore, stiff, and disoriented; but this feeling was different. I felt as though my life was about to change for the better. I showered and tried to piece together what happened. For a moment I was not sure that anything had happened at all. I wondered if I had dreamed that horrible altercation. Did my husband really place a pillow over my face in an attempt to suffocate me to death? Was I really hovering above my own body? Did God really speak to me? Did I really see that light? Did I really smell the sweet scent of flowers penetrating my nostrils? Did I really feel that indescribable Peace that I didn't want to leave? Did any of this really happen or was it all a dream? I wondered if the fight had been so traumatic that my fantasy world had indeed taken me to a deeper level of unconsciousness so I could never remember.

Not fully sure of how to answer my own questions I finished my shower, dressed, and then headed toward the kitchen to prepare dinner all the while believing in my heart that my life was getting ready to turn around for the better. I didn't know how it was going to happen; I just knew that it was. When I entered the kitchen I saw my ex-husband sitting in the living room on the sofa, nursing a can of beer in his hands, and staring at the wall. I walked toward him and called

his name. He didn't move, he didn't blink; he just stared at the wall. Because we have never discussed that incident, in particular, I was never quite sure what he actually experienced. I know what I saw, but his account could be different than mine. In *The Undiscovered Self*, Jung (1957) claims that "There is thus an indefinite number of unknown factors in every experience, in addition to which the object of cognition is always unknown in certain respects since we cannot know the ultimate nature of the matter itself" (p. 66).

No one understood why I was crying so profusely during that Bible study. How did my Pastor know? I had not told one single person about that evening. As a matter of fact no one in that church even knew that I had been married. Do you mean to tell me that It was God's breath that literally covered my face and brought me back to life? Are you telling me that It was actually God cradling me in His arms like a new born baby? It was Him; It was God! Jung (1955) reveals,

The unconscious part of a psychic event reaches consciousness only indirectly, if at all. The event reveals the existence of its unconscious aspect inasmuch as it is characterized either by emotionality or by a vital importance that has not been realized consciously. The unconscious part is a sort of afterthought, which may become conscious in the course of time by means of intuition or by deeper reflection. (p. 66)

Before I knew it I had left my seat and found myself prostrated at the altar thanking God for saving my life. All those years of being uncertain of what happened to me came to an immediate halt. To know that God loved me enough to literally breathe *His* breath back inside of *me* was overwhelming and more

than my mind and emotions could fathom. Years of being afraid to tell anyone about what happened because I was afraid that whomever I told would think me mentally unstable seemed insignificant from that point on. The fact of the matter is that it did happen to me and my Pastor confirmed it.

This was a defining and pivotal moment in my life, one that caused me to become a member at New Jerusalem Cathedral. Joining my church has been a spiritual cleansing. I felt relieved that I was learning “spiritual terminology” for my experiences in life. After that Bible study, it seemed that through his messages my Pastor, who walks in the office of a prophet, clarified most of the incidents that happened during my marriage and told me why it happened through the Word of God.

After that Bible study I became fascinated with my pastor and my *almost* “demi-god” worship began. I was stimulated by him in multiple and competing ways, and I was fearful of him, too. How could this man know anything about me when we had never even shared a personal conversation? In fact I knew he was talking directly to me at points in his sermons because he would turn and look directly at me with piercing eyes which sent shivers up my spine. Sometimes he would even point at me or literally call my name during the deliverance of his messages. It was during these times when I realized that he was truly a prophet of God. I felt so blessed that God would take the time to send His prophet messages to help me interpret my experiences on a spiritual level.

I found myself in an emotional conundrum; I didn't know what I was feeling. I was being healed by the Word of God and sexually aroused simultaneously. Cooper-Lewter (1999) says that often, women in particular, become infatuated with their pastors when they are in the healing process and forgo their healing because their attention is now cast on the needs of the pastor instead of themselves.

My Catholic upbringing resurfaced and I began believing that I was going to hell at any moment because of the emotions and thoughts I was having for my pastor. I forced myself to sit down and grapple with my emotions. I realized that I was "caught up" in his ability to hear directly from God, the dynamic deliverance of his sermons, his intellect, his generosity and kindness, his strange personality, and his speaking aptitude to break a sermon down from scholarly terminology to Ebonics. His deliverance of the Message was full of dramatic and physical overtures as he would put every fiber of his being into preaching until his clothes were soaked with sweat. I had never seen or been exposed to this type of preaching before and I was captivated by it. I was thankful that my education afforded me the wherewithal to sit down and make sense of my emotions and thoughts.

I finally felt better when I reconciled that I was not in love with my pastor. Instead what drew me to him was the fact that I was amazed by his spiritual connection to God as a prophet; I was captivated with his ability to arouse an

entire congregation; and I was in awe of his ability to bring definition to my spiritual life without me informing him of my personal story. Once I was able to place all of this in perspective my worship turned back toward God and I was back to leaning on Him for my spiritual healing instead of my pastor. I believe for an instant that I did view my pastor as a demigod; a god that I could physically see, touch, and serve. I am sure my pastor knew that I was enamored with him but his integrity was such that he recognized that I was a soul in deep emotional anguish, and instead of him capitalizing upon my weakness and adoration of him, he took me under his spiritual care and protected me from myself.

I am thankful that I have a pastor who kept his integrity and allowed me to serve as his personal hand-maiden without perversion associated with it. I am blessed to have been chosen to serve the prophet a glass of water and know that through serving him I am performing my reasonable service unto the Lord. Matthew 10:41 says, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward." I count it an honor and have received many blessing while serving my pastor—the prophet.

In interpreting the Word of God, a prophet's reward can actually come in multiple forms such as the prophet personally interpreting the Scriptures, personally preaching the Gospel, personally leading one to truths, and personally guiding one to a true and clearer distinct sense of the Gospel. These are just

minor rewards that God has promised for those who receive His prophets in kindness. I am one such person who has been exposed to these rewards.

The gaping holes in my soul have been closed. As I continue with my spiritual journey I am still learning and growing. I am learning how to forgive myself and those whom I believe have intentionally harmed me. Believe it or not I have come to terms with my ex-husband and I have forgiven him of every type of abuse he burdened me with. Prior to my being able to forgive him it was my continued prayer that he would die a miserable death. Now, due to my spiritual growth, my prayer has been that he finds Jesus Christ and accepts him as his personal Lord and Savior so he can finally close his own gaping holes and most of all find inner Peace.

A few years ago I heard from one of my cousins that my ex-husband has been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and is not faring well most days. Honestly, my initial reaction was, "Good for him! He finally got his pay back!" however, that did not sit well with my spirit. A strong feeling of conviction overwhelmed me and I asked God to forgive me. To this day I pray for his physical and spiritual recovery.

My tensions with academia have taken me on journeys that sometimes shook the very core of my being. At this stage in my life I am acquiring knowledge while at the same time being held accountable for my understanding of that knowledge. Education forced me to make one of two choices: (a) either I

was going to utilize my new relationship with education for my good and for the good of others or (b) I was going to acquire the knowledge and use it to oppress others just as I had been oppressed. I chose to embrace and continue to seek education as she began opening her halls to me. In embracing her I had to endure a gambit of emotions while attempting to comprehend all she was sharing with me. Though oftentimes this sharing seemed painful, I learned that pain can sometime be a good thing. I realized that it is through experiencing pain that I was made stronger.

My educational journey has forced me to lean even more of the multiple facets of God. I learned to reach out to Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord God our healer, when I was reflecting upon my past educational experiences as well as my marriage. I prayed that He would take away the pain so I could heal emotionally and relinquish the ill will I have harbored for my initial educators for so many years. I called on Jehovah-Shalom, the Lord God of peace, so my mind could let go of the oppressing thoughts that followed me into my dreams. Hence, I constantly prayed for peace of mind. I prayed to Jehova-Jireh, the Lord God will provide, so he could bestow upon me the necessary language to write this qualitative dissertation. I prayed to Jehova-Shammah, the Lord God who is present, so He could walk before me and behind me to protect me from the weapons that had been formed to stop my educational success. I prayed to Jehovah-Gmolah, the Lord God of Recompense, because He has rewarded me

for my steadfastness in my education, to my church, to my family and most of all I fully believe that He rewarded me with the doctorate degree for continuing to seek out the best in me.

This is the God that I serve; the God of multiplicity. He changed as I needed for Him to change for me. I believe He has the best for me. All I have to do is seek the best out. In order for me to seek out the best I have to indeed believe that I deserve the best. I am not speaking of materialistic things such as the best car or the best house, or the best clothes. The best I'm talking about is continuously discovering who I am in relation to this world so I can continue to grow and in doing so repair my soul. Through education I have come to realize that I can make a difference. Through education I realized that continual transcendence is something that I have to strive for so I can indeed contribute a healthy and holistic me to the world.

The next chapter is my final chapter and it is the space where I summarize the affects that fantasy, imagination, and transcendence have had on my life. I discuss my fantasy romance novels and how I utilized them as a tool for creative praxis. I share ways of avoiding mis-educative experiences both inside and outside of the classroom and I also explain how I have aided in building a spiritual community within the Black church through administering a spiritual gifts inventory.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Fantastical Pedagogy

Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly. Education is a constant process for the liberation of human beings. (Freire, 1970, p. 60)

This chapter is my final chapter and it is the space where I summarize the affects that fantasy, imagination, and transcendence has had on my life. I discuss my fantasy romance novels and how I utilized them as a tool for creative praxis. I talk about my teaching pedagogy and how I have implemented journaling for my students within my curriculum as a form of critical reflection. I share ways of avoiding mis-educative experiences both inside and outside of the classroom by acknowledging psychosocial behaviors that have the potentiality of arresting my student's educational potential. Finally, I explain how I have aided in building a spiritual community within the Black church through administering a spiritual gifts inventory.

I am sure you, the reader, are wondering if any of the experiences that I have written about in the aforementioned chapters actually happened. My response to you is yes, I did have all of these experiences, and they did happen

the way I described and it is because it is my truth that I can value myself and experiences in relation to others. The fact that Pinar (1988) tells us that we should understand ourselves in relation to others gave me strength and encourages me toward my human condition. For it is in the understanding of my space that my equilibrium maintains balance. Bettelheim (2010) supports understanding one's place in this world when he espouses, "Becoming oneself, is a process begun by sorting out what is involved in one's relations to the world" (p. 222).

You may also wonder why I thought to journal the preface of my dissertation. I did so because my co-chairs Drs. Kathleen Casey and Svi Shapiro advised me to journal my emotions, thoughts, and critical reflections while attending my dissertation seminar. In particular, Dr. Casey explained that sometimes doctoral students initiate one topic but then redirect their focus by the completion of the dissertation seminar and she was right. I went into that seminar course with a made-up mind of researching "Why African American women return to school after divorce." I had also been granted approval by the Internal Review Board (IRB) to begin my qualitative narrative research, but none of this came to fruition once I presented my proposal. Instead, what became clear to me was that my fantasy world was seeking legitimacy in that fantasy theory is indeed worthy of being classified as scholarship.

As far as my education was concerned, in the past, I entered my fantasy world due to mis-educative experiences. I now understand that I was able to record my preface because I inaccurately believed that I was indeed having, yet another, mis-educative experience at the hands of my professor. It did not make matters any better that there were ten other people in the room, too. In reflection my professor, Dr. Svi Shapiro “gently” advised me of what he gleaned from my original dissertation proposal and my class mates were equally supportive of his decision. I was the one who became overwhelmed and confused because at that moment I thought he was forcing me to change the direction of my research when all along what he was asking for was clarity when what I presented was contrary to my research topic.

I continue to maintain that this doctoral program has been an educational source of healing for me. Here I was sitting with my professor and peers gaining support and definition instead of experiencing verbal assaults and unconstructive criticism. What I experienced during the course of my dissertation seminar was a pedagogy that embodies transformational transcendence through education. I am now a firm believer that journaling can be a form of intimacy for the self because it is through reflecting on one's daily experiences that we continue to reshape ourselves allowing for realization and actualization of our human condition.

Since I have become a teacher I have adopted an old mantra of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University—"The Tassel Is Worth The Hassle!" I wholeheartedly believe in this because students come to college with their delusions of grandeur of their young adulthood; then they want to revert to childhood status when their decisions have betrayed them. This is why I have incorporated weekly journaling into my course curriculum so they can process their decisions, thoughts, behaviors and positive and/or negative experiences of the week. In reading their journals I often find that some are acting out of emotion, are overwhelmed with their classes, and even indulging in sexual life styles that they have always been curious about.

When I comment on their journals I do not give my opinion of what they have written, instead, I ask them to think critically how their decisions would impact their lives down the road. I remind them that every decision they make has a domino effect associated with it. Something is going to happen, good or bad, but whatever the outcome is, they were the ones who made the conscious decision to participate and it is in this consciousness that I want them to have full knowledge of what it is they are doing. Also while reading their journals I'm given the opportunity to remind them that they come to college to gain an education not just to have a social life.

I do not want my students to end up as the "crazed madmen" that Pinar (1976) says are created in schools. He says that schools create "The one-

dimensional man, the anomic man hollow men, obedient automatons programmed to make the correct computations, strangers to themselves and to others, but madmen to the few who escaped, half-crazed, to search for what has been stolen from them” (p. 375). It is through journaling and forming student-teacher relationships that I aim to keep this from happening.

I also believe that weekly journaling allows students to think about and incorporate lessons learned into their academic and personal lives. I have to admit that I did incorporate journaling into my curriculum after reading Poulos (2009) because he places writing exercises after each chapter in his book. Completing these exercises allowed me to reflect on my own stories and helped me connect to his *dreams*. After reading Poulos’s (2009) *Accidental Ethnography* for a second time I felt compelled to examine my personal experiences with a higher level of cognition. Through journaling I believe I have given my students a tool that will help them be reflective on their lives for the rest of their lives. It is my hope that journaling will offer them what Greene (1995) considers as ‘wide awakesness,’ which she describes as a heightened sense of agency in those we teach, empowering them “to pursue their freedom and perhaps, transform to some degree their lived worlds” (p. 48).

A Pedagogy of Cuffing

In making sure that my students are hypersensitive to mis-educative experiences outside of the classroom I urge them to reflect upon the

psychosocial pressures that they experience on a college campus. I believe it is my duty as a teacher to alert them to the seasonal trappings that are incorporated into the social curriculum of campus life. One psychosocial event students participate in, unbeknown to new freshmen women in particular is an urban term called Cuffing Season. The Urban Dictionary (2010) describes cuffing season:

During the Fall and Winter months people who would normally rather be single or promiscuous find themselves along with the rest of the world desiring to be “Cuffed” or tied down by a serious relationship. The cold weather and prolonged indoor activity causes singles to become lonely and desperate to be cuffed. (“1. Cuffing Season,” para. 1)

This season is so prevalent that first-time cuffer, Niles Paul, an American football tight end and wide receiver for the Washington Redskins of the National Football League (NFL), talks to Washington Post reporter Sarah Kogod about looking forward to participating in his first cuffing season. Paul says, “This is my first year, I think I’m going to partake in cuffing season. That’s why I’m excited, it’s my first year. I’ve been a single, and I haven’t really partaked in the whole cuffing season, so I said, ‘Let me give it a shot’” (as cited in Kogod, 2012, para. 10). Paul says, “In the summer, you go out a lot, have your fun. But it’s winter; you’ll be stuck in the house a lot. You need that. You need the Christmas gifts, the Thanksgiving dinners. You need that in cuffing season” (as cited in Kogod, 2012, para. 7). It is important to note that cuffing season has a start and end

date. Traditionally, the season begins mid-September and concludes one week prior to Valentine's Day. Jordan Crawford, a starting guard for the Washington Wizards, says that he gets rid of his ladies by Valentine's Day.

In understanding Paulo Freire's desire for teachers to teach truth I am compelled to be the best ethical teacher I can be. He says that "I cannot be a teacher if I do not perceive with greater clarity that my practice demands of me a definition about where I stand. A break with what is not ethically right" (Freire, 1998, p. 93). As an educator, I would be remiss if I had the knowledge of cuffing season and did not share it with my students. When I discuss cuffing season with my students and show them video clips of other students talking about it on Youtube.com they are struck with disbelief that such a season actually exists. I explain to them that I am calling attention to this cultural season because I do not want them to have a mis-educative experience while they are on campus. It has been my experience that when women have been exposed to cuffing season they have a tendency to behave poorly (by fighting the new girlfriend), having to leave school due to pregnancy or because they are now embarrassed. I inform my students that none of these have to be a part of their story.

I also request that the men govern themselves accordingly because they too can fall prey to cuffing season. When men fall into this season they do so without thinking about the potential problems associated with this season—the "Oops Baby." By social definition the Oops Baby is a child that has been

conceived by accident. Often the men deny sleeping with the young lady and even lie by making false allegations that they “heard” she was cuffing with other males. Expensive paternity tests are demanded, but when it boils down to it the Oops Baby winds up being their son or daughter. Now child support comes into play. Being a student most often these young men do not have the financial means of providing for this oops baby.

More often than not the young lady, due to embarrassment and anger, has the young man arrested for lack of interest in the child and lack of financial payment for a child he never intended to father. An unsuccessful cuffing season can leave both participants emotionally thwarted, academically dismissed, and welfare dependant. According to Freire (2000), “Welfare programs as instruments of manipulation ultimately serve the end of conquest. They act as an anesthetic, distracting the oppressed from the true causes of their problems and from the concrete solutions of these problems” (p. 56).

This takes me to a reflective place when I was assigned a first time teacher to observe me inside of the classroom. Fortunately for her she came on the day that we were discussing cuffing season. During the class I noticed that she seemed emotional and her body posture tightened. Naturally, I thought she assumed my course content was inappropriate for the class. After class was over I went back to my office and mentally formulated a conversation that I wanted to share with her. While I was sitting at my desk she knocked on my

office door. She came in and sat down. I told her I was glad she came because I wanted to speak with her. I asked her what she thought of the class and she explained that she realized that she had experienced cuffing season as an undergraduate student. She had no idea that there was actual terminology to her experience. Though she attended a private white institution (PWI) she had been cuffed! She went on to describe how she had remained faithful to this young man for four years by not dating anyone other than him. She had no idea that during the spring he was literally dating a plethora of other women. When it came to winter he would come back to her faithfully and endow her with gifts and physical affirmation. Once he graduated she never heard from him again.

So here I am with this adult woman, my colleague, explaining what happened to her over twenty years ago. Already knowing that andragogy is specific to the adult learner in that adults come to the classroom already equipped with self-concept and experience I had to find a way to make her understand that she had been a “victim” and is not “dumb” which is the label she used to describe her actions. Though she was able to transition through school and receive her degree she did so in the shadow of cuffing season. Now she has vowed to share her testimony with her students, too. Freire (1998) shares:

The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a ‘circle of certainty’ within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it.

This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. (p. 86)

She now understands that she was a victim and she did not want other innocent students to fall “victim” to this urban experience. This is what the platform of education is all about critical reflection and transformation.

In transitioning through the seven years it has taken me to earn this doctoral degree I have grown tremendously in my body, mind, heart, and spirit. I have learned more about myself sometimes than I care to know. I learned that I functioned robotically under oppressive forces academically and personally just to please others or out of genuine fear. Today, I have been refashioned, remolded if you will into a woman who has a voice and faces oppression head on now because I can recognize it when I see it and I can call it out with terminology and definition. Aesthetically I have become more like plastic in that I have reshaped my way of thinking and responding. I have acknowledged that I have value and that I also add value to my family and community.

The idea of reshaping myself through writing my romance novels has strengthened my self-efficacy and has made me feel as though I have added value to the genre of romance and fantasy. Authoring these novels has afforded me the opportunity to write out the pain, read it and critically reflect upon the

experiences. I did not write my novels to make money, instead, I wrote them to design a world where fantasy, love and romance could dwell the way I needed for it to be. Writing became a purging experience for me. At the time, my writing kept my thoughts occupied during the process of my divorce and afterward.

When I completed my first novel, *Déjà vu Desires*, it was though I had given birth and was looking at and cradling my new born baby in my hands. I felt a release of pain exit my body and it was replaced with a sweet feeling of reprieve.

In being able to reflect upon my experiences I am able to discover my space in that experience, acknowledge my partaking, and transcend to the next level of my life. In being able to acknowledge the negative and leave it behind I can now refashion my actions and bring those positive thoughts and actions into my new future.

In focusing on refashioning my actions so I can have a more productive future I looked for something I could connect it to. Realizing what I had endured and seeing how far I had come I recognized that my life had been recycled for the better much like “plastic.” If you really look at plastic you would see that it does endure recycling but it comes out on top. According to Webster’s Dictionary (1998) the word plastic refers to “being able to be bent, stretched, squeezed, or pulled out so that the resulting change of shape is permanent ... Being capable of adapting to conditions during growth or development.” In essence plastic can endure hardship and yet develop into something that has

sustaining value and usefulness. Being plastic for me resulted in a permanent change of mind and an increased self-efficacy.

Through my experiences I have been stretched and reshaped for the better. I have reflected upon my past and have come away with growth and forgiveness for myself and those whom I believe had attempted to assassinate my walk through education and life itself. In allowing my experiences to reshape my mind and my heart, I am yet one step closer to transcendence and meeting my human condition.

Utilizing autobiographical narrative affords me the opportunity to get one step closer to transcending. This methodology allows me to be my own primary source within this dissertation. In being the subject I have been able to provide rich and specific classroom incidents that speak to John Dewey's mis-educative experiences, Chester Pierce's microaggression theory, and Maxine Greene's theory of fantasy and imagination being incorporated inside of the classroom as it is the efficient workshop for children. Specifically, I have utilized Paulo Friere's critical pedagogy theory of educational banking to show how the banking method actually strips a child's ability to think critically; instead, it fosters an allegorical mind set toward education and life. I incorporate Christopher Poulos's theory of accidental ethnography because it provides for me transformational narrative. Within this method of autoethnography lies multiple ways of discovering who I am in relation to my experiences as well as my dreams.

Certain scholars may challenge fantasy as a qualitative methodology and theory; however, it is my assertion that fantasy actually propels and transforms one to a positive state of being, in particular, when one's conscious state of reality is threatening and volatile. Fantasy allows for positive and reflective change through the re-telling of stories from one's lived experiences and through stretching and grappling with the unconscious stories to create a permanent change.

This qualitative dissertation is also the result of my personal transcendence both inside and outside of the classroom. This method of research forces me to grapple with my own agency and the part I continue to play in my own transcendence through education. In this fertile soil I can now take root as a philosopher queen and strategically expound on and employ learned theories into my life. This dissertation affords me the opportunity to critically reflect on my fantasies inside of the classroom and throughout my adult life through a new lens and with new language and terminology. As an educator it is important for me to be whole so I can consciously invite my students inside of a healthy classroom in every sense of the word. I believe it is incumbent upon me to provide a classroom where discoveries are made, epiphanies are experienced, and praxis abounds. Unmistakably, my fantasies have been a defense to veil my castration and a mechanism to cover my perceived inadequacies as a student and a wife.

A Pedagogy of Spiritual Gifts

The educational ideologies of Freire and Greene have taught me that as I transcend it is incumbent upon me to be my sister's keeper; therefore, I am compelled to share my knowledge inside and outside of the classroom. One place I share my transcendence experience and meet my spiritual human condition is within my church community. At my church I administer a spiritual gifts inventory that I designed as a graduate student to fulfill the practicum requirements in my master's program. This assessment tool has 125 questions that speak to the 25 spiritual gifts that the Bible speaks of in Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians. The gifts are as follows: administration, apostle, discerning of spirits, evangelism, exorcism, exhortation, faith, giving, healing, helps hospitality, intercession, interpretation of tongues, knowledge, leadership, mercy, miracles missionary, pastor, prophecy, service, teaching, tongues, voluntary poverty, and wisdom.

During my practicum I administered over 100 spiritual gifts inventories and was able to assist ministry leaders in increasing their individual ministry areas. It was clear to me that these new converts were eager to work within the body of Christ as they were in a new church without friends. Working in ministry not only helps to build a spiritual community, it also helps the newly converted soul to heal and begin feeling whole as they offer their gifts to those in need of a helping hand. After the inventories were completed, I would pray for spiritual guidance

prior to delivering their results as I wanted to make sure I was placing them in the proper ministries.

When speaking with them I was always amazed how the scores were reflective of their desires. Once we spoke I would introduce them to the ministry leader and check on them from time to time just to see how they were adjusting. Sometimes I would just stand back and observe their behavior and smile as they connected with other people within their ministries. I have discovered that those individuals who work in the same ministry area form strong bonds because they have similar testimonies and it is that testimony, the subjectivity that bridges the gap for them and affords them the opportunity to feel a part of a community within the house of God.

Twice a month I administer the spiritual gifts inventory to new converts as well as the “seasoned saints” who desire to try their hand in a new ministry area. Often these “seasoned saints” are actually leaving one ministry due to a petty disagreement or they have become complacent in offering their gift(s). When the seasoned saints come to me, prior to administering them the inventory, I speak with them in order to determine why they are leaving their current ministry area. Most often they stammer because they do not really want to divulge that Sister or Brother So and So hurt their feelings so they just say that they have been working in that particular ministry since they were born and they want to try

something different. By this point they want to know what the actual gifts are so I direct them to I Corinthian 12:1-14 and I begin reading,

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. (King James Version)

I also explain to them that the Bible teaches us that each of us has received a gift and we should use it to serve one another as good stewards. It is within this context that I administer the Spiritual gifts inventory to help build community within the body of Christ. The Bible also teaches us in Philippians 2:12-16 that every Christian is endowed with at least one spiritual gift and it is incumbent upon us to

work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain (King James Version).

It is in working out their soul salvation that new converts in particular are overzealous in helping to edify the body of Christ while strengthening their faith and strengthening the church's outreach ministry. Spiritual gifts are meant to be shared amongst believers and in particular the unbeliever as the unbeliever can see God at work through Christians operating in their spiritual gifts.

When the body of Christ is operating within their spiritual gifts it alleviates a lot stress for the Pastor. Though a great portion of pastors would prefer to be hands on with all of their members it is physically impossible and physically taxing; therefore, those who operate in ministry become the tentacles of sorts for the pastor. In performing ministry congregants are able to continue to motivate themselves and transform and heal while performing Gods work. Greene (2001) tells us that, "It is a matter of living in the world and creating communities and collectivities, caring for each other, making each other feel worthwhile" (p. 159). It is while performing ministry that we love others and at the same time know that we are also deserving of that same love.

I thoroughly enjoy administering the spiritual gifts inventory and I have done so for the past nine years. Over time I have found some new

methodologies, but I have gone back to the original because when it all boils down to it all of the inventories are designed to do one thing: to lead people to ministry so they can become whole people while working out their soul salvation.

It has become very apparent to me that education was not as elusive as I thought She was. I wholeheartedly believe She was merely playing a game of hide and seek with me. Once I discovered her She has opened her secret corridors to me so I can read, interpret and apply her knowledge.

So what do I want anyone reading my dissertation to come away with? I would hope that those who read my dissertation will glean a better understanding of the operation of it within our unconsciousness. I want people to understand that it was fantasy that saved my immediate reality. I want teachers to understand how their unhealthy interactions inside of the classroom cause students to retreat instead of branch out to discover and explore all of the possibilities and then some. I want teachers to understand that they have the power to create a healthy learning environment so students can come to school and actually feel safe and wanted.

I would argue that fantasy is a holistic teaching tool and if allowed to operate inside the classroom it can promote imagination and classroom engagement while at the same time becoming a resource for transcendence. I would hope that future and/or current teachers learn that they should enter the classroom genuine and whole and not as disembodied spirits so they can

connect and meet each of their students on their individual unique levels. I pray that education continues to provide liberation for the mind. I have discovered when the mind is whole the rest of the body begins to heal.

In fostering a holistic learning environment children and/or students can begin to journey toward and look forward to receiving a healthy education where testing does not determine who they are. I would assert that the art of critical reflection and journaling begins at an earlier stage in education rather than being initiated at the college level. Since I have incorporated journaling into my classroom curriculum I have discovered that a great majority of students do not know how to express themselves; however, once they get the hang of it they become prolific writers and poets. My students have actually asserted that “writing helps them understand themselves.” When I heard this I knew that I was indeed, teaching.

In an environment that is void of mis-educative experiences (oppression and violence) a love of learning can flourish. It is also comforting to know that one’s unconsciousness is there ready and waiting to provide protection inside or outside of the classroom; however it is more comforting to believe that it would never be needed in the first place.

I used my mis-educative classroom experiences to create a student-teacher relationship so strong that my students forget it’s time to leave for their next class. I used my failed marriage to create Nubian Romance Novels where

passions soar and dreams come true. I want individuals to come away with truly understanding what Maxine Greene so eloquently says, "I am not yet what I am." It is in understanding that we are ever evolving; forever changing that our soul is replenished with new experiences and our minds can discover new adventures. Finally, it is my desire that fantasy theory exists in the classroom because the environment is ripe for it. I want all students to recognize that learning is an opportunity to explore every avenue afforded to them. I do not want children to leap to a fantasy world because they are being oppressed inside of the classroom. I want them to construct their fantasy world because they have attained the appropriate language through education to fulfill their lives.

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